

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 19 September 2022

Greetings,

I do not need to tell you that today is the day of the state funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

You may not know, however, that the Lambeth Conference 2022 (an international meeting of Anglican bishops from over 165 countries) took place here in the UK from 26th July to 8th August.

Her Majesty sent a message to the Conference on 3rd August, just five weeks and one day before she died.

Towards the close of that message, she wrote:

'Throughout my life, the message and teachings of Christ have been my guide and in them I find hope.

'It is my heartfelt prayer that you will continue to be sustained by your faith in times of trial and encouraged by hope at times of despair'.

(My emphasis. For your possible interest, I append below the full text of the late Queen's message.)

Separately, last Monday, I shared with you numerous quotations from the writings of Professor F. F. Bruce which focused particularly on the person and the work of our Lord Jesus.

I promised then that, God willing, I would follow this up today with quotations from F. F. Bruce on other biblical themes.

The 'Musings' below include those quotations.

For now, here are eight 'tasters':

(i) The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning.

(ii) He who chose the writers of the Holy Scriptures, many men scattered over many ages, used them each in his surroundings and in his character, yet so as to harmonize them all in the Book which, while many, is one.

(iii) The Holy Spirit is also the supreme "Interpreter" of the Scriptures, doing for us today what Christ did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus when He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

(iv) A church which by its faith could create the Christ of the gospels would be a greater and more inexplicable miracle than that which our earliest Christian records set before us—a church brought into being by the Christ whom the gospels portray.

(v) His people were ... being tempted in their turn to be disloyal to God and give up their Christian profession. What a source of strength it was to them to be assured that in the presence of God they had as their champion and intercessor one who had known similar and even sorer temptations, and had withstood them victoriously.

(vi) To Damascus Paul went, and it was as he approached its ancient walls that the revolution took place which changed him from an implacable opponent of the new movement into its most ardent champion'.

(vii) If the raising of Christ from death to sit at his own right hand is the supreme demonstration of God's power, the raising of the people of Christ from spiritual death to share Christ's place of exaltation is the supreme demonstration of his grace.

(viii) The best way to destroy an enemy is to turn him into a friend.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

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(i) Scripture

As I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who were journeying with me.

And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads'.

And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?'

And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you, rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me'.

For that reason, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Acts 16. 12-19 (New American Standard Version)

(ii) Food for thought.

Selected quotations from the writings of F. F. Bruce: (2) miscellaneous

SCRIPTURE

'This is the disciple who bears witness ... and we know that his witness is true' (John 21. 24).

"The evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning.

'And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt. It is a curious fact that historians have often been much readier to trust the New Testament records than have many theologians'

(*'The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?'*, page 15).

'God spoke of old ... but in these last days He has spoken ...' (Heb. 1. 1-2).

'The New Testament stands to the Old Testament in the relation of fulfilment to promise. If the Old Testament records what "God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets", the New Testament records that final word which He spoke "in His Son", in which all the earlier revelation was summed up, confirmed, and transcended.

'The mighty works of the Old Testament revelation culminate in the redemptive work of Christ; the words of the Old Testament prophets receive their fulfilment in Him ... if the Old Testament records the witness of those who saw the day of Christ before it dawned, the New Testament records the witness of those who saw and heard Him in the days of His flesh.

'The Bible's central message is the story of salvation and, throughout both Testaments, three strands in this unfolding story can be distinguished: (i) the bringer of salvation, (ii) the way of salvation, and (iii) the heirs of salvation'.

(*'The Origin of the Bible'*, edited by Philip W. Comfort, page 8.)

Scripture: (i) 'inspired' not 'dictated', and (ii) 'interpreted'.

(i) 'Dictation leaves no room for the writer's individuality of thought and diction, but this individuality gets the fullest scope in the Bible.

"He who chose the writers of the Holy Scriptures, many men scattered over many ages, used them each in his surroundings and in his character, yet so as to harmonize them all in the Book which, while many, is one. He used them with the sovereign skill of Deity. And that skilful use meant that He used their whole being, which He had made, and their whole circumstances, which He had ordered ...

"He can take a human personality, made in His own image, pregnant, formative, causative, in all its living thought, sensibility, and will, and can throw it freely upon its task of thinking and expression—and behold, the product will be His; His matter, His thought, His exposition, His Word, 'living and abiding for ever'" (H. C. G. Moule, *'The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (Expositor's Bible)'*, pages 7-8).

'The Biblical writers were not secretaries or penmen; they were authors in the full sense of the word, yet authors under the overruling guidance of God the Holy Spirit ...

(ii) 'The Holy Spirit is also the supreme "Interpreter" of the Scriptures, doing for us today what Christ did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus when He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Thus we receive the fulfilment of our Lord's promises about the Spirit "He shall testify of me" (John 15. 26); "He shall glorify me; for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16. 14)'.

('What Do We Mean By Biblical Inspiration?' Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute 78 (1946), pages 125-127.)

THE LORD JESUS

'Christ and the church' (Eph. 5. 32).

'The Christ of the faith of the early Church was not created by that faith ... a church which by its faith could create the Christ of the gospels would be a greater and more inexplicable miracle than that which our earliest Christian records set before us—a church brought into being by the Christ whom the gospels portray'.

('The Spreading Flame', page 35.)

'The water that was made wine' (John 2. 9).

'Jesus action was, in C. S. Lewis's terminology, a "miracle of the old creation": the Creator who, year by year, turns water into wine, so to speak, by a natural process, on this occasion speeds up the process and attains the same end ("Miracles", page 163).

But if it is a miracle of the old creation, it is a parable of the new creation. Christ has come into the world to fulfil and terminate the old order, and to replace it by a new worship "in spirit and truth" which surpasses the old as much as wine surpasses water'.

('The Gospel of John: A Verse-by-Verse Exposition', page 72.)

The cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11. 12-14, 20-21).

'As recorded by Mark, it is an acted parable with the same lesson as the spoken parable of the fruitless fig tree (Luke 13. 6-9). In that spoken parable a landowner came three years in succession expecting fruit from a fig tree on his property, and when year by year it proved to be fruitless, he told the man in charge of his vineyard to cut it down because it was using up the ground to no good purpose.

'In both the acted parable and the spoken parable, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the fig tree represents the city of Jerusalem, unresponsive to Jesus as He came to it with the message of God, and thereby incurring destruction. Elsewhere Luke records how Jesus wept over the city's blindness to its true well-being and foretold its ruin "because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19. 41-44)'.

('The Hard Sayings of Jesus', page 209.)

'Because He Himself has suffered and been tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted' (Heb. 2. 18).

'He endured keen trials and temptations Himself, not only the trials incidental to our human lot, but those subtle temptations which attended His messianic calling. Time and again, the temptation came to Him from many directions to choose some less costly way of fulfilling that calling than the way of suffering and death, but He resisted it to the end and set His face steadfastly to accomplish the purpose for which He had come into the world.

'Now His people were not only enduring those trials which are common to mankind, but were being tempted in their turn to be disloyal to God and give up their Christian profession. What a source of strength it was to them to be assured that in the presence of God they had as their champion and intercessor one who had known similar and even sorer temptations, and had withstood them victoriously'.

('The Epistle to the Hebrews: The New London Commentary', page 53.)

'Jesus standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7. 56).

'The language resembles that of Jesus Himself before the same body ['the council', 'the Sanhedrin', 'τὸ συνέδριον', Luke 22. 66; Acts 6. 12]: in the Lucan form of His reply to the high priest, Jesus says, "But from now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22. 69).

'The change from "seated" to "standing" arrests the attentive reader, and points to the meaning of Stephen's words. The Son of man is Stephen's advocate in the presence of God, and 'standing' is the posture proper for an advocate.

'Stephen, so to speak, appeals from the judgment of the earthly court to the arbitrament of the heavenly court, where the Son of man stands as his prevailing advocate'.

(‘*The Background to the Son of Man Sayings*’, in ‘Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology presented to Donald Guthrie’, pages 59-60.)

THE APOSTLE PAUL: HIS LIFE

‘Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven’ (Acts 9. 3).

Paul ‘was specially selected and commissioned by the risen Christ to be His apostle to the Gentiles. This might seem surprising, for Paul in his earlier days was a more dyed-in-the-wool Jew than any of the original apostles of Jesus. Unlike them, he was trained to be a doctor of the law of Israel, and he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the study, practice and defence of that law ...

‘According to his own account and the account given by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, he was confronted, arrested, stopped dead in his tracks by the risen Christ when he was furiously engaged in hot pursuit and persecution of Christians. ‘I saw Jesus our Lord,’ he says; ‘God was pleased to reveal his Son to me’ (1 Cor. 9. 1; Gal. 1. 16).

‘In one lightning flash he learned two things: one, that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Messiah, Lord, and Son of God, as His followers claimed Him to be; and the other, that he himself was being conscripted there and then by this Lord to be His servant, to carry the knowledge of Him to the Gentile world’.

(‘*Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ*’, pages 51-52.)

‘He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy’ (Gal. 1. 23).

‘To Damascus Paul went, and it was as he approached its ancient walls that the revolution took place which changed him from an implacable opponent of the new movement into its most ardent champion’.

(‘*The Spreading Flame*’, page 85.)

‘We came to Rome ... he lived there two whole years ... preaching the kingdom of God’ (Acts 28. 30-31).

‘Luke has reached the objective of his history by bringing Paul to Rome, where (albeit in custody) he enjoys complete liberty to preach the gospel, under the eyes of the imperial guard. The program mapped out in Acts 1. 8 (‘you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth’) has been carried through.

‘How Paul’s presence and activity in Rome encouraged gospel witness by other Christians in the city may be learned in his own words (Phil. 1. 12-18)’.

(‘*The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*’, page 543.)

THE APOSTLE PAUL: HIS WRITINGS

‘The gospel of Christ’ (Gal. 1. 7).

‘Paul’s claim [was] that the message he preached was the authentic gospel of Christ.

‘It is this: two things on which Paul pre-eminently insisted—(i) that salvation was provided by God’s grace and (ii) that faith was the means by which men appropriated it.’

(‘*Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*’, page 102.)

‘Justified by His grace ... through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an mercy-seat’ (Rom. 3. 24-25).

‘Paul ... pressed into service the language of the law-court (“justified”), the slave-market (“redemption”), and the temple (“mercy-seat”) to do some justice to the fulness of God’s gracious act in Christ’.

(‘*Romans: The Tyndale New Testament Commentary*’, page 107.)

Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Cor. 12. 7-10).

‘[Paul’s] thrice-repeated prayer for the removal of the ailment was answered, not by his deliverance from it, but by his receiving the necessary grace to bear it – not simply to live with it but to be thankful for it.

‘If his ministry was so effective despite this physical weakness, then the transcendent power was manifestly God’s, not his own. Infirmities like this were welcomed, together with the other hardships ... if they were the condition on which the power of the risen Christ operated through him.

‘They constantly reminded him not so much of his own inadequacy as of the total adequacy of Christ, in whom, when he was personally most weak, he knew himself to be most strong’.

(‘*Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*’, page 136.)

'That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2. 7).

'In the limitless future, as age succeeds age, the crowning display of God's grace will ever be His kindness to His redeemed people, not simply in pardoning their sins, but in raising them up to share the place which Christ occupies by right in the heavenly sphere.

'The superlative term ('exceeding' [*ὑπερβάλλω*]), used here to describe the riches of God's grace, ... describes (also) the greatness of His power ['the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe', Eph. 1. 19].

'If the raising of Christ from death to sit at his own right hand is the supreme demonstration of God's power, the raising of the people of Christ from spiritual death to share Christ's place of exaltation is the supreme demonstration of his grace'.

(*'The Epistle to the Ephesians'*, page 51.)

The Epistle to Philemon: slavery.

'The epistle throws little light on Paul's attitude to the institution of slavery ... What this epistle does is to bring us into an atmosphere in which the institution could only wilt It die.

'When Onesimus is sent to his master "no longer as a slave, but as a dear brother" (Philemon 16), formal emancipation would be but a matter of expediency, the technical confirmation of the new relationship that had already come into being'.

(*'The Epistle to Philemon'*, notes of a lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 10th of February 1965.)

'Anyone who eats ... without discerning the body eats ... judgment upon himself' (1 Cor. 11. 29).

'When they broke the bread which was the token of the body of Christ, they not only recalled His self-oblation on the cross but proclaimed their joint participation in His corporate body (1 Cor. 10. 16).

'If, then, they denied in practice the unity which they professed sacramentally in the eucharist, they ate and drank unworthily (1 Cor. 11. 27) and so profaned the body and blood of the Lord. If they ate and drank "without discerning the body" they ate and drank judgment upon themselves. To eat and drink "without discerning the body" meant quite simply to take the bread and cup at the same time as they were treating their fellow-Christians uncharitably in thought or behaviour.

So realistically does Paul regard such "unworthy" participation that he warns those who are guilty of it that sickness or death may befall them by way of self-incurred judgment (1 Cor. 11. 29-30)'.
(*'Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free'*, page 285.)

MISCELLANEOUS

'The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 28. 19).

'The word "Trinity" itself never appears in the New Testament. To see in its absence a possible objection to the doctrine, would be as illogical as to deny that theological knowledge is to be found in the New Testament since the word "theology" is nowhere used'.

(F.F. Bruce and W.J. Martin, *'The Deity of Christ'*, page 4.)

'Many deceivers ... do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh' (2 John 7).

So essential, indeed, is Jesus' true manhood to the authentic gospel that in John's first epistle the confession of this is a criterion of membership in the family of God (1 John 4. 2; 5. 1), while its denial is a mark of the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4. 3).

(*'The Humanity of Christ'*, page 13.)

'I say to you, Love your enemies' (Matt. 5. 44).

'The best way to destroy an enemy is to turn him into a friend'.

(*'The Hard Sayings of Jesus'*, page 73.)

Teaching about God in the Book of Proverbs.

'The teaching of the book about the being and character of God:

(i) God has created all things (Prov. 3. 19):

(ii) The Creator of all is also the Disposer supreme (Prov. 16. 33).

(iii) His purpose cannot be thwarted, whatever the plans of men may be (Prov. 19. 21).

(iv) He is omniscient, and nothing escapes His attention, especially in all that affects mankind (Prov. 15. 3).

(v) He is righteous and merciful; He delights in righteousness and mercy on the part of men (Prov. 8. 8).

(vi) God takes care of His people (Prov. 10. 3).

(vii) In particular, the destitute and underprivileged have a special place in His interest (Prov. 22. 22-23).

(viii) He is the true defence of men (Prov. 2. 7; 18. 10).

(ix) He is the Hearer of prayer (Prov. 15. 29).

(x) He is the Rewarder of righteousness and mercy (Prov. 19. 17).

(xi) He is the One whose blessing is enrichment in itself (Prov. 10. 22).

(xii) Men ought therefore to render Him grateful worship and show their appreciation of His goodness (Prov. 3. 9).

'Thus all that the Book of Proverbs teaches about God is not only in complete agreement with the teaching of the Law and the Prophets, but is also seen to be in harmony with the teaching of the Gospels'.

(*The Wisdom Literature of the Bible: The Book of Proverbs*, The Bible Student 22.3 (July 1951), pages 116-118.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Plane rides.

1. Ethel Davies was on a British Airways night flight to Dubai to visit her children and grandchildren.

During the flight she kept peering out the window.

Since it was totally dark, all she could see was the blinking light on the wing-tip.

After watching the light for over an hour, Ethel pressed the button to call a flight attendant.

'I don't want to trouble you', Ethel said, 'but I think you should tell the pilot that he has forgotten to turn off *his left-turn indicator*'.

2. Gilbert had always wanted to go up on a sightseeing flight in a vintage aeroplane.

But every time he mentioned it to his wife, Joan, she would reply, 'I know, Gilbert, but that hour-long flight costs three hundred pounds ... and three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds'.

This went on for several years, until one year Gilbert took Joan to the local airport. When standing there looking out at the vintage aircraft, he said, 'Look, Joan, I'm 75 years old. Frankly, if I don't get that flight this year, I may never get another chance'.

'I am sorry, dear', Joan replied, 'but three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds'.

As it happened, the owner and pilot of one of the vintage planes was standing nearby and overheard their conversation.

'Excuse me', he said, 'but I couldn't help overhearing what you were saying. I'll tell you what. I am willing to take both of you up in my plane for an hour. If you are able to be quiet for the entire ride and not say one word, I won't charge you anything. But, if either of you says one word, it'll be three hundred pounds. How's that for a deal?'

After discussing the offer for a few minutes, Gilbert and Joan agreed.

Twenty minutes later, the plane took off with Joan and a very happy Gilbert seated behind the pilot.

The pilot performed many wonderful – and hair-raising – twists and turns, rolls and dives, but not a word came from behind. He even did a full nose dive, pulling up and soaring again when the plane was only about 30 feet from the ground ... but still not a word.

After a full hour, the pilot landed the plane successfully. Calling back to Gilbert, he said, 'Well, sir, you win; there'll be no charge. I tried everything I could to get one of you to yell out, but you didn't'.

'I have to admit', Gilbert replied, 'that I was going to say something when Joan began to fall out ...but *three hundred pounds is three hundred pounds!*'

The full text of the Queen's message to the Lambeth Conference 2022.

It is with great pleasure that I send my warm greetings as you continue your meeting in the fifteenth Lambeth Conference. As we all emerge from the pandemic, I know that the Conference is taking place at a time of great need for the love of God – both in word and deed.

I am reminded that this gathering was necessarily postponed two years ago, when you had hoped to mark the centenary of the Lambeth Conference that took place in 1920, in the aftermath of the First World War. Then, the bishops of the Anglican Communion set out a path for an ongoing commitment towards Christian unity in a changing world; a task that is, perhaps, even more important today, as together you look to the future and explore the role of the church in responding to the needs of the present age.

Now, as so often in the past, you have convened during a period of immense challenge for bishops, clergy and lay people around the world, with many of you serving in places of suffering, conflict and trauma. It is of comfort to me that you do so in the strength of God.

We also live in a time when the effects of climate change are threatening the lives and livelihoods of many people and communities, not least the poorest and those less able to adapt and adjust. I was interested to learn that the focus of your programme at Lambeth Palace today is reflection and dialogue on the theme of the environment, a cause close to the heart of my late husband, and carried on by The Prince of Wales and The Duke of Cambridge.

Throughout my life, the message and teachings of Christ have been my guide and in them I find hope.

It is my heartfelt prayer that you will continue to be sustained by your faith in times of trial and encouraged by hope at times of despair.

I send my warmest good wishes to you all for a successful Conference and may God bless you in your ministry and service in his world.

ELIZABETH R.

3rd August, 2022