

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 12 June 2023.

(i) Scripture.

The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

I will say unto God my rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.

Psalm 42. 8-11 (King James Version)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love ... and offer him ... as a burnt offering' (Gen. 22. 2).

'Luther's wife once said that she didn't believe the Abraham story because God would never treat a son like that.

'Luther replied: "But Katie, He did treat His Son like that".

(D. E. Roberts, 'Existentialism and Religious Belief', page 71.)

'A virgin shall be with child' (Matt. 1. 23); 'made of a woman' (Gal. 4. 4).

'It is thoroughly consistent that, as the sin of man and our condemnation had its origin in a woman [see 1 Tim. 2. 14], so the Remedy for sin and the cause of salvation should be born of a woman ...

'Since it was a virgin [see Gen. 4. 1] who was the cause of all *the evil* to the human race, much more is it right that it should be a virgin who would be the occasion of all *the good* ...

'If woman, whom God made from man, was made a virgin, it is very suitable that the Man who is made of a woman should be made of a virgin'.

(Anselm of Canterbury (AD 1033-1109), 'Cur Deus Homo', Book II, Chapter VIII.)

'We are witnesses of all things which He did' (Acts 10. 39).

'The picture of Jesus we have in the Gospels is of a most extraordinary person.

'If you think just of Jesus' teaching—His parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son; and the Sermon on the Mount (widely recognised as supremely important teaching)—where did all this amazing teaching come from? Are we going to say that people after the time of Jesus invented all this?

'It is less convincing in my view to say that various geniuses in later times invented this figure of Jesus and His teaching than it is to say that what created this extraordinary Christian movement was the person of Jesus Himself.

(David Wenham, in an interview about his 2002 book, 'Jesus in Context'; the transcript can be accessed at <https://www.solas-cpc.org/jesus-in-context-in-conversation-with-dr-david-wenham/>.)

'They would come and take Him by force, to make Him a king' (John 6. 15).

'They wished to make Him their leader because He had given them (material) bread [John 6. 26], but really He had come to give them better bread than that.

Just as He had offered the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well better water than that in the well, the eternally satisfying water of life [John 4. 13-14], so now He offers these Galileans better bread than the loaves with which the five thousand had been fed, better bread even than the manna which their forefathers had eaten, 'the food which endures to eternal life' [John 6. 27] ...

As the Samaritan woman, hearing of the water of life, said, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty" [John 4. 15], so now Jesus' present hearers say, "Sir, give us this bread always [John 6. 34]".

(F. F. Bruce, 'The Hard sayings of Jesus', pages 22-23.)

The 'rich man' and the 'poor man' in Jesus' story (Luke 16. 19-24).

Most certainly, it is better to beg bread with Lazarus than to beg water with the rich man.

'And come, follow me' (Luke 18. 22).

The Lord Jesus 'demands a response that hitherto had been the prerogative of God alone: "And come, follow me".

'No prophet had ever presumed to say this. Even the great Samuel, unshakeable in his integrity (1 Sam. 12. 3) did not suggest personal discipleship, but said: "Turn not aside from following Jehovah" (1 Sam. 12. 20)'.

(F. F. Bruce and W. J. Martin, *'The Deity of Christ'*, page 23.)

'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance' (Luke 5. 32).

'The philosopher Celsus [a 2nd-century Greek philosopher and opponent of early Christianity] contrasts the respectable "mysteries" with Christianity:

"The former say, 'Come all you of clean hands and prudent tongue', but Christianity says, 'Everyone who ... is a sinner, a fool, a child ... everyone who is in misfortune, him will the kingdom of God receive'".

'Such criticism, of course, is the boast of the true missionary, just as the complaint that Jesus Himself welcomed outrageous sinners and sat at table with them was freely admitted by Himself and acclaimed as His proper purpose in life: "it was sinners and not righteous people that I came to call".

'But though the gospel invitation is distinctively for sinners, the purpose of the invitation is that they should be delivered from their sins'.

(F. F. Bruce, *'The Spreading Flame'*, page 119.)

[Further *'Selected quotations from the writings of F. F. Bruce'* can be found in the Monday Musings dated 12 and 19 September 2022.

These can be accessed at <https://voicesforchrist.org/writings/251> and <https://voicesforchrist.org/writings/252>.]

The Old Testament.

'Its unfulfilled prophecies, its unexplained rituals, and its unsatisfied desires all point ahead to the coming of God's Son'.

(David Newell, *'Job (What the Bible Teaches)'*, page 46.)

Decline in the Book of Judges.

The book of Judges opens with God's people asking, 'Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?' to which the Lord replies, 'Judah shall go up' (Judg. 1. 1-2).

The book closes with a sad episode in which God's people ask, 'Who shall go up first for us to fight against the children of Benjamin?' to which the Lord replies, 'Judah shall go up' (Judg. 20. 18).

What a sad reflection upon the men of ancient Israel: once fighting against their real enemies, they had sunk to fighting with their brethren. But, sadly, such decline has not been confined to ancient Israel!

'The Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God' (Exod. 34. 14).

'He who is not jealous does not love'.

(Augustine of Hippo, *'Against Adimantus'*, chapter 13. 2)

'Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail' (Lam. 3. 22).

'(Israel's) sins merit more judgment than they are facing. They might have been wiped out. Only the Lord's mercy prevented that from happening.

'However great their sufferings, the fact that they still exist testifies to the Lord's graciousness toward them. God's mercies renew themselves in our experience every day (Lam. 3. 23).

Besides, the faithful will surely insist that what they want the most is not the Lord's blessings but the Lord Himself. "I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him'" (Lam 3. 24)'.

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God'*, Volume 1, meditation for 26 August.)

'Until the day'

(i) 'Wait upon me, says the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey' (Zeph. 3. 8);

(ii) 'Until the day break, and the shadows flee away' (Song of Songs 2. 17; 4. 6);

(iii) 'He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ' (Phil. 1. 6);

(iv) 'We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts' (2 Pet. 1. 19).

'The promise of the eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9. 15).

'Let this encourage thee, O Christian, in thy conflict with Satan—the skirmish may be sharp, but it cannot be long ... Bid faith look through the key-hole of the promise, and tell thee what it sees there laid up for him that overcomes'.

(William Gurnall, *'The Christian in Complete Armour'*, 1862, page 104.)

'Since all these things are to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be' (2 Pet. 3. 11.)

We may well pity (i) the bird which builds its nest in the branches of a tree that is soon to be felled and (ii) the foolish passenger who expends great effort tidying his cabin on board a ship doomed to sink. But you and I do well to remind ourselves that 'the fashion of this world passes away' (1 Cor. 7. 31).

'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God' (1 Pet. 5. 6).

'God must have the upper hand in the end; and it is the path of true wisdom to give Him the upper hand now'.

(C. H. Mackintosh, *'Job and His Friends'*, Lessons from the Old Testament, Miscellaneous Writings, page 358.)

'The word of the Lord ... "Go to Nineveh" ... But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish' (Jonah 1. 1-3).

I suppose we could say that Jonah is the only known missionary who planned to take his first furlough before he even reached his field of service!

'All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out' (John 6. 37).

"The double reference to the Father's will suggests that the second statement explains the first. The emphasis in the first is on the Father's giving, and in the second on human responsibility to believe ('him who comes').

'That is, those whom the Father has given Him are precisely those who have looked to the Son and believed in Him. The giving is not an arbitrary act of divine determination. God is determining that those who come, look, and believe will never be lost'.

(John C. Lennox, *'Determined to Believe?'* page 174.)

'Do you not remember?' (Mark 8. 14).

'Surely you have some precious milestone along the road of life that is not quite overgrown with moss, on which you can read some happy inscription of God's mercy towards you ...

'Were you never in straits before, and did He not deliver you? ...

'What! Have you buried your diary? I beseech you, man; turn over the book of your remembrance'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, *'Songs in the Night'*, a sermon preached at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, London on Lord's Day, 27 February 1898.)

With my eye on the title of Mr Spurgeon's sermon, *'Songs in the Night'* (quoted from Job 35. 10), I repeat below two verses of a poem written by Horatio Spafford twenty years before Mr Spurgeon's sermon, following the death of Mr Spafford's then only child, his much-loved two-year-old son.

Little Horatio Goertner Spafford died of scarlet fever only a few years after Mr Spafford and his wife, Anna, lost their four daughters in the sinking of the French liner, 'Ville du Havre', halfway across the Atlantic Ocean.

(I say, *'repeat below'*, because I had occasion to quote the same words in the accompanying email to the Monday Musings for 25 October 2021, which can be accessed at <https://voicesforchrist.org/writings/214>.)

A Song in the Night.

*There's darkness all round in my earthly affairs;
Wave following wave—tribulation and cares.
My way is shut up on the left and the right;
And, yet, I've a mind for a song in the night!
A song in the night—a song in the night—
My heart, canst thou give Him a song in the night?*

*No incense which rises to God on our part,
So grateful as songs from a pain-stricken heart.
So sorrow itself shall be clad with delight.
For sorrow alone can give songs in the night.
A song in the night—a song in the night—
Let all that is in me, give songs in the night!*

The words, both of Mr Spurgeon and Mr Spafford, link well with a moving article which I read recently, written by a Jewish Rabbi. I quote:

'I have experienced tremendous tragedy in my life. When I was 38 years old, my 36-year-old wife passed away suddenly and unexpectedly, leaving me a widower with many children to raise on my own. Along with being a married couple and parents of 11 children, my wife and I were also partners in teaching and directing our local Jewish day-school ...

'Each of us will be bruised by life's bitter challenges at one time or another. God wants to be at our side, helping to steer us through life's traumas and storms without keeling. But if we are the centre of our universe, and believe that stopping evil and heartbreak is above God's pay grade, then a life well-lived means nothing more than that the one who ends up with the most toys, wins ...

'When I made my relationship with God a more personal one, I was no longer relating to the "To-Whom-it-may-Concern-God" but to the God who knows me and cares for me; I'm no longer alone in my travail ...

'Struggling with God and trusting in God are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can be complementary ... If a person can cry out to God about their enormous problems, a person can also tell their problems how great God is.

'We may be incapable of embracing Him in all His greatness, but that doesn't stop Him from embracing us [in all our smallness].

(Accessed at <https://aish.com/when-bad-things-happen-to-good-people-2/>.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Two true 'backside' stories.

1. Quoted from D. R. Davis, '*1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*', page 233 (an account based on '*Civil War Blunders*' by Clint Johnson, pages 202-203 – which source I have checked):

'The Army of the Cumberland [one of the Union armies in the American Civil War] surprised Confederate defenders (and their own officers!) by ... overrunning the enemy's strong position.

'When Major General Phil Sheridan arrived at the top, he leaped onto one of the just-captured Confederate cannons, twirled his cap, and 'rode' the gun like a horse.

'One of Sheridan's brigadier generals, Charles Harker, noted Sheridan's antics and decided he could 'horse around' too.

'Harker leaped astride another cannon ... and felt instant regret.

'Apparently, his cannon had been fired more frequently and recently than Sheridan's, and it burned Harker's backside so badly *he couldn't sit in the saddle of his horse for two weeks*'.

2. Quoted from Stephen Pile, '*The Book of Heroic Failures*', page 36:

'In the course of his duties in August 1977, a Dutch veterinary surgeon was required to treat an ailing cow.

'To investigate its internal gases, he inserted a tube into that end of the animal not capable of facial expression and struck a match.

'The jet of flame set fire first to some bales of hay and then to the whole farm causing damage estimated at £45,000.

'The vet was later fined £140 for *starting a fire in a manner surprising to the magistrates. The cow escaped with shock*'.