

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 9 September 2024

(i) Scripture.

They came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to Him a blind man and begged Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when He had spit on his eyes and laid His hands on him, He asked him, 'Do you see anything?'

And he looked up and said, 'I see men, but they look like trees, walking'.

Then Jesus laid His hands on his eyes again; and he opened his eyes, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village'.

And Jesus went on with His disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?'

And they told Him, 'John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets'.

And He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ'. And He strictly charged them to tell no one about Him.

And He began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And He said this plainly.

And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man'.

Mark 8. 22-33 (English Standard Version)

(ii) Food for thought.

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida.

Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ (Mark 8. 29) is immediately followed by his failure to grasp that Jesus must go to the cross to achieve His mission, earning him the most severe rebuke from Jesus (Mark 8. 31–33). So, at first, Peter only half "gets it".

'Just before Peter's confession, Mark narrates a healing of a blind man which happens in two stages. This is ... unique in the Gospels. After the first stage, the man can partially see but to him people look like "trees walking" (Mark 8. 24). Jesus touches him again and this time "he saw everything clearly" (Mark 8. 25).

'There are many things that Mark has not chosen to include in his Gospel, but he has included this account just before Peter's confession to help us understand what is happening with Peter.

'To recognize that Jesus is the Christ, Peter needs his eyes to be opened (cf. Matt. 16. 17). However, at this point, just like the blind man after the first touch by Jesus, his spiritual sight is not fully restored. Peter only partially sees who Jesus is—he recognizes Him as the Christ but not as the Christ who has to suffer and die. For him to fully understand who Jesus is, he needs to have his eyes fully opened'.

(P. Orr, 'What is Distinct about the Theology of Mark', accessed at ...

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-distinct-about-the-theology-of-mark/>).

'That I may gain Christ' (Phil. 3. 8).

'I know not a thing worth the buying, but heaven; and my own mind is, if comparison were made betwixt Christ and heaven, I would sell heaven with my blessing, and buy Christ'.

(Samuel Rutherford, 'Mr Rutherford's Letters', 1675, page 347; his letter to William Gordon of Robertown, dated 1636.)

'That good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God' (Rom. 12. 2).

'A good thing is not always God's will for you, but God's will for you will always be a good thing'.

(J. B. Nicolson Jr., 'David's Big Idea', Uplook Ministries: Taste and See, 5 September 2024.)

Four rhetorical 'How?' questions asked by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.

(i) 'You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?' (Matt. 5. 13).

(ii) 'If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?' (Matt. 12. 26).

(iii) 'You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of Gehenna?' (Matt. 23. 33).

(iv) 'How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' (Matt. 26. 54).

'Pilate said to them, Behold the man!' (John 19. 5).

'Pilate presents Jesus to the people with the words, 'Behold the man' ('*ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*'). This is most likely an allusion to 1 Sam. 9. 17, where the Lord presents Saul to Samuel with the same words, 'Behold the man' ('*ἰδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος*': the Greek Old Testament).

'Note, however, the element of irony in this allusion: Saul is the king whom Israel should not have sought out yet did (1 Sam. 8. 4-9), while Jesus is the king whom Israel should have sought out yet didn't ('abhorred by the nation', Isa. 49. 7)'.
(James Bejon, '*John 18–21 and Atonement Theory*', page 10.)

'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it' (Prov. 22. 6).

Note the following comments:

1. 'We have no right to hold God hostage to a promise that we have misunderstood ... One has to understand the nature of the book of Proverbs. Most proverbs are principles, not promises.

'They are general insights and truisms based on observation and experience, but they are not meant to be universal guarantees that will come to pass 100 percent of the time. The goal of this proverb is to admonish us to train our children, especially in the "way of wisdom", which is the proper "way he should go". This is none other than "God's" path, the way of righteousness. Therefore, the proverb suggests that as a matter of historical observation, when this kind of training is consistently done, it usually brings positive results, especially when the child grows older and comes of age'.

(E. J. Bargerhuff, '*The Most Misused Verses in the Bible*', pages 41, 105-106.)

2. 'It sounds like a promise, but a proverb does not give a promise. The book of Proverbs advises its hearers in ways that are most likely to lead them to desired consequences if all things are equal.

'It is much more likely that a child will be a responsible adult if trained in the right path ... The point is that this proverb encourages parents to train their children, but does not guarantee that if they do so their children will never stray. This insight into the form of the proverb is particularly important for parents to grasp when their adult children have not turned out well; otherwise, the verse becomes a sledgehammer of guilt—a purpose that it was not intended to carry. On the other side, the proverb should not become a reason for pride if one's children turn out well either. The proverb is simply an encouragement to do the right thing when it comes to raising one's children'.

(Temper Longman III, '*Proverbs: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms*', page 405.)

'No one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12. 3).

'One may say the words without any special work of the Spirit in him, and so may a parrot. But to say, "Christ is Lord", believingly, with thoughts and affections comporting with the greatness and sweetness thereof, requires the Spirit of God to be in his heart'.

(William Gurnall, '*The Christian in Complete Armour*', 1679, page 453.)

'Hereby we know that we are of the truth ...' (1 John 3. 19).

'How do you know a Christian? Is there a way to tell who is and who isn't? Do you quiz them on their beliefs to see how well they line up with the Nicene Creed? Do you ask them if they've invited Jesus into their hearts?

'One answer is to check their behaviour ['the tree is known by its fruit', Matt. 12. 33.]. If becoming united to Christ changes us, then one should expect to see those changes lived out in everyday life. A number of the Church Fathers suggested a test like this, though the specific change they were looking for may come as a surprise.

'In the second century, in response to charges of cannibalism from non-Christians [charges brought because the loaf and cup of the Lord's Supper were associated with the body and blood of Christ], Athenagoras pointed out that in order to eat human flesh, Christians would first have to be willing to kill. However, even their worst enemies knew that Christians rejected violence. ('A Plea for the Christians', chapter 35)

'Christians "cannot endure even to see a man put to death", he reflected, even if the condemned person deserved to die. Christians refused to witness the gladiatorial spectacles, argued that abortion was tantamount to murder, and stood out from the morality of the day by making the audacious claim that "those who expose infants [expose, that is, unwanted new-born infants to die from dehydration or attack by wild animals, as was common practice in ancient Rome] are chargeable with child-murder"'.
(C. Cook, '*How Do You Know a Christian?: A Quick Test From the Early Church*', accessed at ...

‘As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him’ (Col. 2. 6).

‘Though the work of Christ is finished for the sinner, it is not yet finished in the sinner ...

‘Salvation includes not only deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin secured by the mediatorial work of Christ; it also consists in deliverance from the power and presence of sin effected by the operation of the Holy Spirit’.

(D. G. Bleosch, ‘*Essentials of Evangelical Theology*’, page 163.)

‘Having a desire to depart and to be with Christ’ (Phil. 1. 23).

‘Paul does not say, “I desire to depart, and to be *in heaven*”, but “I desire to depart, and to be *with Christ*”. It is Christ’s presence makes heaven ... It is not the cherubim or seraphim which make paradise; “*the Lamb* is the light thereof” (Rev. 21. 23)’.

(Thomas Watson, ‘*The Saint’s Desire to be with Christ*’, page 3.)

Scripture does not teach that God chooses people to be destroyed (the doctrine of ‘reprobation’).

Consider carefully the distinctions drawn in the following biblical texts.

(i) The Lord Jesus teaches that ‘*the kingdom*’ is divinely ‘*prepared*’ for the ‘*sheep*’ (Matt. 25. 34) but ‘*eternal fire*’ is ‘*prepared*’ for ‘*the devil and his angels*’ (Matt. 25. 41) and not for the ‘*goats*’, although they can, of course, sin themselves into it.

(ii) Paul teaches that God ‘*prepares*’ (‘fits’) ‘*vessels of mercy*’ for ‘*glory*’ (Rom. 9. 23) but not that He ‘*prepares*’ (‘fits’) ‘*vessels of wrath*’ for ‘*destruction*’ (Rom. 9. 22). Note these comments:

(a) ‘The “fitting” is not imputed to God, as if God had prepared these vessels for wrath in contrast to those He had prepared for mercy. God has not created men with a view to their destruction ...

‘The form of the word rendered “fitted” may be regarded as in the middle voice, which implies action done by oneself with a view to one’s own aims and interests. There is a suggestion, therefore, that the persons referred to as “vessels of wrath” have fitted themselves for destruction, and this was actually the case with Pharaoh ...

‘The apostle could have used a form of expression stating clearly that they had been fitted by an outward agency unto destruction. That form, however, is set aside in order to use one which throws the responsibility upon man for the hardness of his heart. God, then, has restrained His merited wrath ... God has endured with much long-suffering vessels of wrath who have fitted themselves unto destruction’.

(W. E. Vine, ‘*Commentary on Romans*’, page 147.)

(b) ‘Although Paul describes the objects of God’s mercy as those whom he prepared in advance for glory, he describes the objects of God’s wrath simply as prepared for destruction, ready and ripe for it, without indicating the agency responsible for this preparation. Certainly, God has never ‘prepared’ anybody for destruction; is it not that by their own evildoing they prepare themselves for it? ...

‘It is because He is who He is that He does what He does. And although this does not solve the ultimate mystery why *He* prepares some people in advance for glory and allows others to prepare themselves for destruction, yet both are revelations of God, (1) of His patience and wrath in judgment and above all (2) of His glory and mercy in salvation’.

(J. R. W. Stott, ‘*The Message of Romans*’, pages 272-273.)

(c) ‘The verb in verse 23 is active and has the prefix “*pro*”, and clearly means that God Himself prepared in advance the vessels of mercy for glory. But in verse 22 the verb seems to be deliberately different. It is either passive voice: “they were prepared” or (more likely) middle voice: “they prepared themselves”. That is, they are responsible for their own destruction; by their sin and unbelief and refusal to repent, they sealed their own doom’.

(J. Cottrell, ‘*Romans: The College Press NIV Commentary*’, Volume 2, page 126.)

(iii) Paul ‘drew a firm contrast between the disciples and the world ... the wicked refuse to believe in the truth, and God has further confirmed them in their love for a lie (2 Thess. 2. 10-11). In the case of the Thessalonians, however, God has chosen them to be the firstfruits of those who would receive the gospel and enter salvation (2 Thess. 2. 13)’.

(G. S. Smogren, ‘*1 and 2 Thessalonians: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*’, page 525.)

‘Therefore ... we faint not ... Therefore we faint not’ (2 Cor. 4. 1, 16).

The greater part of this chapter (2 Cor. 4) is designed by Paul to support his statement at the beginning and at the close that, come what may, he would not give up.

‘Paul gave three reasons for his refusal to become discouraged as he served the Lord:

(i) 'In the past he had received a divine commission to proclaim a new and better covenant (2 Cor. 4. 1).

(ii) 'In the future he looked forward to sharing Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead (2 Cor. 4. 14).

(iii) 'In the present he had the opportunity to promote the Corinthians' spiritual welfare and the glory of God (2 Cor. 4. 16)'.
(T.E. Constable, 'Expository Notes', comment on 2 Cor. 4. 15.)

'All the people said, Amen' (1 Chron. 16. 36).

'Amen' is the word we use to add our 'verbal signature' to an audible 'petition' presented to God by somebody else.

'He was cut off ... He shall prolong His days' (Isa. 53. 8, 10).

'The Jews regarded length of days as among the highest of man's blessings. It is hardly surprising that Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would "prolong his days". But however could this be? For Isaiah had declared that 'he was cut off out of the land of the living'—a point reinforced centuries later by another prophet: 'Messiah shall be cut off and shall have nothing' (Dan. 9. 26 lit.). To be "cut off" was to die a sudden and violent death.

'But how then were the Messiah's days to be prolonged? It took the resurrection of Christ to solve the riddle ... Having once "abolished death" (2 Tim. 1. 10), our Lord's days have been prolonged—and that without end. He now lives in the 'power of an endless ("an indestructible", "an indissoluble") life' (Heb. 7. 16).

'And who, we do well to remind ourselves, was "cut off out of the land of the living"? It was none other than "the Prince ("the Author", "the Originator") of life" Himself (Acts 3. 15). Think of it! The Life-giver was cut off out of the land of the living!

'Again, it was the self-same One who introduced Himself to John on Patmos with the words, "I am the Living One, and I became dead; and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rev. 1. 18 lit.). Think of it! "The Living One" was cut off out of the land of the living!

'Yes, the Living One Himself "became dead", entering what was to Him the altogether alien territory of death—a realm He had never entered before, and which He will never need to enter again, for "Christ being raised from the dead dies no more" (Rom. 6. 9). And He did it for us!

('Day by Day: Christ Foreshadowed', Precious Seed Publication, page 307; reproduced with kind permission.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

'Consider the lilies' (Matt. 6. 28).

