

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1472

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The Resurrection of Lazarus – page 14



Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

123rd Year

A07

1472

A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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A New Start

If it was you that had reached a vantage point where you could look across a new vista, full of opportunity and challenge, would it excite or frighten you?

There are many times in life when change comes, and it is not always welcome. Perhaps the family moves home and you have to leave all your friends behind; instead you move to a new area where everything and everybody is new. Or you leave school and start work – where you are new and everybody else has been there a long time.

It's a process that keeps happening all through life. For, at the other end of the age spectrum, you could be retiring and leaving work, or leaving your own house and being cared for by somebody else. Change comes whether we want it or not and we can either see it as an opportunity or as a problem.

Starting Again

Our pathway through life is not usually full of surprises day by day. True, there are some people, like explorers, who relish the unexpected and who go off in search of the unknown. That's what gives them job satisfaction. But most of us prefer a measure of routine, even if we don't want things to be exactly the same every day.

People even talk about being “on

auto-pilot”; they get up, have breakfast and go to work – without really thinking about what they're doing. It's automatic for them, because they have done it every day for as long as they can remember. And that may be why it's hard for most people to change their habits and try something new. We get naturally resistant to change and become ‘set in our ways’.

Another New Start

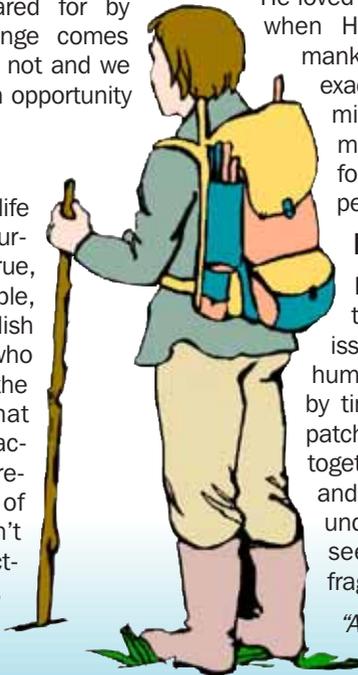
This New Year marks the 123rd year in which the “*Glad Tidings*” magazine has appeared, for it was first published in 1884. In all that time the message of the magazine has not changed at all, for some things are unchanging and unchangeable.

God loves us in the same way now that He loved people thousands of years ago, when He sent His Son to redeem mankind. And His intentions remain exactly the same, for He is determined to rescue our world and make it beautiful, as a habitation for those who will live for ever in a perfect environment.

Everything Beautiful

Long ago a wise man who was thinking through the deepest issues of life worked out that human existence is wholly governed by time. Our lives are rather like a patchwork quilt – bits of cloth sewn together to make a pattern of ‘this and that’. For Solomon, who wrote under Divine inspiration, he could see that life was a set of fragments:

“A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a



time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:2-4).

Fortunately, Solomon could also discern something else – a state of being that was timeless and eternal. Lifting his gaze, he could reason that God’s existence is above and beyond the human dimension. For Scripture says that God is without beginning and without end; He is the Eternal One. And the wise man said this about that realm of existence:

“He has made everything beautiful in its time ... I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before him” (3:11-14).

Finding Wisdom

This may be the time of year when you think about trying something new, stretching yourself a little and giving yourself a challenge. Perhaps, if you were the hiker photographed on the cover, you couldn’t wait to tackle those mountains or find out what was over the next horizon.

This issue invites you to take such a journey. It includes a Bible Reading chart, in the centre pages, that would guide you through the whole Bible during the course of the year. And two articles in this issue explain how important it is to listen to God’s Word and to come to understand it. It’s the journey of a life-

time and there is no better route to take if you want to find a happy and fulfilled life. That’s what is on offer from God – a new life and a new start.

But you need to make a decision if you want to be part of that Divine purpose.

You will have to put some effort in before you can reap the promised reward. That’s how God has always worked with people whom He invites to share eternity with Him.

He asks us to take the trouble to find out about Him, and we can only do that by reading the Bible for ourselves.

It is a wonderful challenge and the process of reading and understanding is all part of the designed way in which we change the direction of our lives and walk in harmony with God. Change is never easy, but if you make this change you will never regret it.

New World Coming

God has a plan and purpose which will result in a new world order, to be established when the Lord Jesus Christ returns as King. He is going to remake the world and establish it on sound principles of truth and love and peace. If you had been reading all through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, you would come at last to a description of that new society to be established.

All sadness and sorrow will cease. All bad things will be destroyed and the world will become once more a beautiful place for people to inhabit. Then come these gracious words:

*“Behold, I make all things new”
(Revelation 21:5).*



There is a new world coming in which everything will be made beautiful

Making Bible Reading Meaningful

How often have you heard someone say: “I would read my Bible more often and more diligently if I could understand it.”?

Or “I read my Bible every day but often I don’t get anything out of the chapter.” Or “I would like to read the Bible, but I don’t know where to start – it is such a big and daunting book.”

A Book for Everybody

There is no secret to being able to benefit from reading the Bible and you don’t need any special skills. Really! Those people who tell you that you can only understand God’s Word if you have a theological degree are completely wrong. Why would God communicate to mankind in such a way that only certain of us could understand what He was saying? He certainly wouldn’t do that.

It is true, of course, that some people would like you to think that they are the only ones who understand its message. That way they can control and even manipulate you, by getting you to do what they say.

It was once a very serious matter to step out of line and try to read the Bible for yourself. William Tyndale, who was the first person to publish a printed New Testament in English, back in 1526, made it his ambition in life that Scripture should be available even to ‘a boy that driveth

the plough’. But he was executed for making the attempt.

Enjoyable Bible reading is available to anyone and everyone. But how is it done? This article will discuss some of the basic skills you need to develop. But Beware! As a keen Bible reader once said to me “It is not possible to skim-read the Bible.” By saying that he wanted to emphasise that if you wish to understand the Bible you have to spend some time reading it. Just glancing over the pages to ‘get the general message’ will not do.

Preparation

Probably, when you read the paper or a novel you just sit in a chair and read. However with the Bible things are a little different. It is God’s Word and you have an opportunity to speak to the author at any time. King David did. He said “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from your law” (Psalm 119:18). We might copy his example and ask for God’s blessing on our reading before we start.

It is always valuable to have paper and pen available when we read. You will then be able to note down any questions or discoveries. You might even

wish to make notes in your Bible if you feel so inclined.

Personally I find it better to sit at a table when I read the Bible. This way I have somewhere to rest my note pad.



But that is a personal matter. The important thing is that you should approach your Bible reading seriously. After all we are reading the words of the Creator of the universe!

Context

We would never start reading a novel part way through the book. If we did we would struggle to understand the plot. The same is true of the books of the Bible. This does not mean that one should start reading the Bible at Genesis and simply work through to Revelation.

The Bible is, in fact, 66 separate books; so each of the separate books can be read individually. Of course, there are many links between the different books of the Bible but each separate book is complete in itself. So if you decide to, for example, read Genesis start reading at Chapter 1 and work through the book chapter by chapter. Do not be tempted to skip parts of it because you think there are more interesting bits later in the book. Everything in the Bible is important.

Questions Questions

Children have a wonderful way of learning. They continually ask questions. We tend to train them to stop questioning so that by the time they are adults the questioning skill is somewhat diminished. If you doubt this ask yourself: *“Do you ask as many questions when you do not understand as children ask?”* Of course, as we grow older we learn things and need to ask fewer questions.

However, the adult mind is generally far less inquisitive than the child’s. If we wish to benefit from meaningful Bible reading this has to change. We have to re-learn the skill of asking questions. For if we do not ask questions we will never

find answers! It’s not possible to tell you what questions you should ask; they will be individual to you. However, there are guidelines.

-  Who is speaking?
-  To whom is he speaking?
-  When was this written?
-  How do these words apply to me?
-  If a place is named, where is that place?
-  What does the passage mean?

And so on. You doubtless will come up with many more questions. However there is no need to devise a list. Rather, you should be alert in your reading and question what you read as you work through the text.

Seeing Structure



Each book of the Bible, except for the very short ones, is broken up into separate chapters. The translators did this for us. The chapter divisions are not part of the original Bible. However they can be very helpful in providing structure to the

Bible. Chapter divisions normally mark a change in the subject being considered. However, these divisions are not always helpful; sometimes they break up the narrative in unhelpful ways.

Whenever we read a novel or newspaper we look for some sort of structure. This is usually helped by new paragraphs. Unless you are using a modern translation which is laid out as prose, you will not see paragraph division. However the translators have provided a clue as to where new paragraphs begin. The “¶” marks the beginning of a new paragraph.

Peter Forbes

Part Ten

God's New Society

In this series Tom Barling has explained what sort of qualities people should develop as members of God's family. In this final article he explores the way in which believers should live in relation to today's world, given that the demands of this world could be contrary to the law of God.

There is in the western world a surprising degree of tolerance. Thus, in Great Britain and the USA, one can worship God according to one's conscience, a freedom which should be appreciated. It is also a reason why every member of God's new society should live in conformity with the laws of the land.

Peace Not War

However, in time of war there is the possibility of being called upon to take up arms and in battle to kill the enemy. This is in violation of the Sermon on the Mount and we should take careful note of what the Lord said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane when he wildly acted, as he thought, in defence of his Lord:

"Put your sword away!", Jesus said, "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (John 18:11). Matthew records that on the same occasion Jesus said: "Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (26:52).

On reflection, one can see that military service is incompatible with the basic character of God's new society where the followers of Jesus are drawn from all nations. Differences of skin colour, national origin or social status do not matter, for all members of

the new society share one fundamental conviction: they are sinners in need of God's forgiveness and this they recognize by being baptised into the saving name of the Lord Jesus and following his commandments.

However, they can make their own contribution to the good of society by being kind and helpful to neighbours, by being honest and honourable in the way they earn their living, by scrupulously paying their taxes and doing good to all men. There are many national and international charities to which one can contribute, thus acting in obedience to the commandments of the Sermon on the Mount

Do Good to All

There is a lesson we can learn from the Apostle Paul. Acts chapter 27 describes a violent storm in the Mediterranean. Paul was travelling on the vessel, in the company of his friend Luke. The gale lasted so long that all hope of survival was abandoned. But the apostle did not despair: he rallied the spirits of his fellow passengers, saying to them that he had been reassured that Luke and he

would survive. Then follow some remarkable words:

"God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you" (v.24).



From this it can be inferred the Apostle had prayed not merely that he and Luke would survive, but that so would all on board! The total number of passengers was 276 (v. 37), and Paul had prayed for them all, and his prayer was granted. They were all safely delivered.

Governed by Principle

A member of God's new society may appear negative if he refuses to become involved in local or national politics but the policies of parties whether national or local do not take into account the principles of the Sermon on the Mount.

Nobody knew better than the Lord Jesus himself that his teaching would not be universally accepted, but rather the contrary. He requires total allegiance and uncompromising acceptance of his teaching. This he makes abundantly clear at the end of the Sermon on the Mount when he speaks of two men: one accepts his teaching without any qualification and makes it his way of life, his Highway Code. He is the one of whom the Lord says: *"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundations on the rock"* (Matt.7:25). Then the contrast is brought home graphically: *"But every one who hears these sayings of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand"* (v.26). Buffeted by rising streams and wind, it collapses.

The Law Within

In the same Sermon the Lord utters some very searching things. He says not only that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us

(5:44), but the Lord tells us that it is not sufficient to refrain from adultery. It is, rather, essential that no unclean thoughts should be harboured (5:27-28).

When we examine the publications of today, the TV programmes, and the conduct of so many in high office, often we may ask: "Where do we see the practice of the Sermon on the Mount?" It is when we read of the activities of the early disciples that we can see how powerfully the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and his personal example, influenced them.

In time the apostles came to a deep appreciation of how inadequate their own response had been to the teaching and example of their Lord, for they abandoned him when he was seized, tried, and sent to the cross. But their Lord, risen from the dead, freely forgave them, and this they never forgot. On the occasion of the Lord's trial, Peter, surrounded by the enemies of the Lord Jesus, lost his nerve and was even reduced to denying he had anything to do with the man from Nazareth. When the Lord looked at him after his miserable failure, he shed bitter tears (Luke 22:61,62).



Brothers of Jesus

With his unique insight into human nature, and the grace of which he was so wonderful an embodiment, the Lord forgave the failure of his followers. This is simply demonstrated by his use of a single word, when he revealed himself to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection: he instructed her to take the news of his resurrection to his "brothers" (John 20:17). He had not disowned them; they were together with himself members of God's family. There is an echo of this in

Hebrews 2:11: *“Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”*

If then Jesus is the head of God’s new society, he in no way lords it over his followers, rather the contrary. In the picture the Lord himself presents of what will happen when he returns to the earth, and unites his people, he says: *“It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them”* (Luke 12:37). What other head of state has ever been known to do such a thing?

Not Yet Perfect

While we have indicated the wonderful concern for others shown by the Lord Jesus and by some of his outstanding followers, Luke shows in the Book of Acts how some members of the new society started well but then fell away (see notably Acts 5:1-11).

There is nothing surprising about this because, as we have repeatedly seen, the challenges faced by those who aspire to be worthy members of God’s new society are many, and all who belong to it are required to grow spiritually. And not all will achieve that, for, as the Lord Jesus declared on one occasion: *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved”* (Matt.24:12,13).

Inevitably, the occasional lapse will occur but where there is repentance there is always forgiveness; to quote the apostle John: *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9).

Following Him

The example of the Lord Jesus must always be the beacon to lighten the path of all who aim to follow him. Peter, as we have seen, failed at a time of crisis but was freely forgiven and became a leading champion of faith in the risen Lord Jesus. Ruefully he must have penned the following words to fellow Christians of his own day:

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21,23).

In the Book of Revelation a number of scenes present the consummation of God’s purpose with mankind. One of these is chosen because it is so relevant to the major theme developed in the present series of articles, this being the last:

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no-one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9).

This will be the assembly of God’s new society, drawn from all nations, the men and women who will have tried to follow the Lamb wherever he has led them.

Tom Barling

Quotations from the NIV



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Bible Reading

Old Testament Once - New Testament twice each year - Reading

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g Tables

Read God's Word every day and prosper



APRIL

1	Num.	15	Prov.	11	Luke	24
2	...	16	...	12	Gal.	1, 2
3	...	17, 18	...	13	...	3, 4
4	...	19	...	14	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	15	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22, 23	...	16	...	3, 4
7	...	24, 25	...	17	...	5, 6
8	...	26	...	18	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	27	...	19	...	3, 4
10	...	28	...	20	John	1
11	...	29, 30	...	21	...	2, 3
12	...	31	...	22	...	4
13	...	32	...	23	...	5
14	...	33	...	24	...	6
15	...	34	...	25	...	7
16	...	35	...	26	...	8
17	...	36	...	27	...	9, 10
18	Deut.	1	...	28	...	11
19	...	2	...	29	...	12
20	...	3	...	30	...	13, 14
21	...	4	...	31	...	15, 16
22	...	5	Eccl.	1	...	17, 18
23	...	6, 7	...	2	...	19
24	...	8, 9	...	3	...	20, 21
25	...	10, 11	...	4	Acts	1
26	...	12	...	5	...	2
27	...	13, 14	...	6	...	3, 4
28	...	15	...	7	...	5, 6
29	...	16	...	8	...	7
30	...	17	...	9	...	8

MAY

1	Deut.	18	Eccl.	10	Acts	9
2	...	19	...	11	...	10
3	...	20	...	12	...	11, 12
4	...	21	Song	1	...	13
5	...	22	...	2	...	14, 15
6	...	23	...	3	...	16, 17
7	...	24	...	4	...	18, 19
8	...	25	...	5	...	20
9	...	26	...	6	...	21, 22
10	...	27	...	7	...	23, 24
11	...	28	...	8	...	25, 26
12	...	29	Isaiah	1	...	27
13	...	30	...	2	...	28
14	...	31	...	3, 4	Col.	1
15	...	32	...	5	...	2
16	...	33, 34	...	6	...	3, 4
17	Joshua	1	...	7	1 Thes.	1, 2
18	...	2	...	8	...	3, 4
19	...	3, 4	...	9	...	5
20	...	5, 6	...	10	2 Thes.	1, 2
21	...	7	...	11	...	3
22	...	8	...	12	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
23	...	9	...	13	...	4, 5
24	...	10	...	14	...	6
25	...	11	...	15	2 Tim.	1
26	...	12	...	16	...	2
27	...	13	...	17, 18	...	3, 4
28	...	14	...	19	Titus	1, 2, 3
29	...	15	...	20, 21	Philemon	...
30	...	16	...	22	Heb.	1, 2
31	...	17	...	23	...	3, 4, 5

JUNE

1	Joshua	18	Isaiah	24	Heb.	6, 7
2	...	19	...	25	...	8, 9
3	...	20, 21	...	26, 27	...	10
4	...	22	...	28	...	11
5	...	23, 24	...	29	...	12
6	Judges	1	...	30	...	13
7	...	2, 3	...	31	James	1
8	...	4, 5	...	32	...	2
9	...	6	...	33	...	3, 4
10	...	7, 8	...	34	...	5
11	...	9	...	35	1 Peter	1
12	...	10, 11	...	36	...	2
13	...	12, 13	...	37	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	14, 15	...	38	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	16	...	39	...	3
16	...	17, 18	...	40	1 John	1, 2
17	...	19	...	41	...	3, 4
18	...	20	...	42	...	5
19	...	21	...	43	2 & 3 John	...
20	Ruth	1, 2	...	44	Jude	...
21	...	3, 4	...	45	Rev.	1, 2
22	1 Sam.	1	...	46, 47	...	3, 4
23	...	2	...	48	...	5, 6
24	...	3	...	49	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	4	...	50	...	10, 11
26	...	5, 6	...	51	...	12, 13
27	...	7, 8	...	52	...	14
28	...	9	...	53	...	15, 16
29	...	10	...	54	...	17, 18
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OCTOBER

1	1 Chron.	15	Ezek.	27	Luke	24
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3	...	17	...	29	...	3, 4
4	...	18, 19	...	30	...	5, 6
5	...	20, 21	...	31	Eph.	1, 2
6	...	22	...	32	...	3, 4
7	...	23	...	33	...	5, 6
8	...	24, 25	...	34	Phil.	1, 2
9	...	26	...	35	...	3, 4
10	...	27	...	36	John	1
11	...	28	...	37	...	2, 3
12	...	29	...	38	...	4
13	2 Chron.	1, 2	...	39	...	5
14	...	3, 4	...	40	...	6
15	...	5, 6	...	41	...	7
16	...	7	...	42	...	8
17	...	8	...	43	...	9, 10
18	...	9	...	44	...	11
19	...	10, 11	...	45	...	12
20	...	12, 13	...	46	...	13, 14
21	...	14, 15	...	47	...	15, 16
22	...	16, 17	...	48	...	17, 18
23	...	18, 19	Daniel	1	...	19
24	...	20	...	2	...	20, 21
25	...	21, 22	...	3	Acts	1
26	...	23	...	4	...	2
27	...	24	...	5	...	3, 4
28	...	25	...	6	...	5, 6
29	...	26, 27	...	7	...	7
30	...	28	...	8	...	8
31	...	29	...	9	...	9

NOVEMBER

1	2 Chron.	30	Dan.	10	Acts	10
2	...	31	...	11	...	11, 12
3	...	32	...	12	...	13
4	...	33	Hosea	1	...	14, 15
5	...	34	...	2	...	16, 17
6	...	35	...	3	...	18, 19
7	...	36	...	4	...	20
8	Ezra	1, 2	...	5	...	21, 22
9	...	3, 4	...	6	...	23, 24
10	...	5, 6	...	7	...	25, 26
11	...	7	...	8	...	27
12	...	8	...	9	...	28
13	...	9	...	10	Colos.	1
14	...	10	...	11	...	2
15	Neh.	1, 2	...	12	...	3, 4
16	...	3	...	13	1 Thes.	1, 2
17	...	4	...	14	...	3, 4
18	...	5, 6	Joel	1	...	5
19	...	7	...	2	2 Thes.	1, 2
20	...	8	...	3	...	3
21	...	9	Amos.	1	1 Tim.	1, 2, 3
22	...	10	...	2	...	4, 5
23	...	11	...	3	...	6
24	...	12	...	4	2 Tim.	1
25	...	13	...	5	...	2
26	Esther	1	...	6	...	3, 4
27	...	2	...	7	Titus	1, 2, 3
28	...	3, 4	...	8	Philemon	...
29	...	5, 6	...	9	Heb.	1, 2
30	...	7, 8	Obadiah	3, 4, 5

DECEMBER

1	Esth.	9, 10	Jonah	1	Heb.	6, 7
2	Job	1, 2	...	2, 3	...	8, 9
3	...	3, 4	...	4	...	10
4	...	5	Micah	1	...	11
5	...	6, 7	...	2	...	12
6	...	8	...	3, 4	...	13
7	...	9	...	5	James	1
8	...	10	...	6	...	2
9	...	11	...	7	...	3, 4
10	...	12	Nahum	1, 2	...	5
11	...	13	...	3	1 Peter	1
12	...	14	Hab.	1	...	2
13	...	15	...	2	...	3, 4, 5
14	...	16, 17	...	3	2 Pet.	1, 2
15	...	18, 19	Zeph.	1	...	3
16	...	20	...	2	1 John	1, 2
17	...	21	...	3	...	3, 4
18	...	22	Hag.	1, 2	...	5
19	...	23, 24	Zech.	1	2 & 3 John	...
20	...	25, 27	...	2, 3	Jude	...
21	...	28	...	4, 5	Rev.	1, 2
22	...	29, 30	...	6, 7	...	3, 4
23	...	31, 32	...	8	...	5, 6
24	...	33	...	9	...	7, 8, 9
25	...	34	...	10	...	10, 11
26	...	35, 36	...	11	...	12, 13
27	...	37	...	12	...	14
28	...	38	...	13, 14	...	15, 16
29	...	39	Malachi	1	...	17, 18
30	...	40	...	2	...	19, 20
31	...	41, 42	...	3, 4	...	21, 22

By courtesy of The Christadelphian

Just Listening

"You're not listening to me!" An exasperated parent tries to get a message across and the child, with defiant and set face, sulks about the rebuke, being in no mood to accept the scolding. We've probably all been there: as a parent, a child, or both! Not really listening to what is being said, just feeling hurt inside.

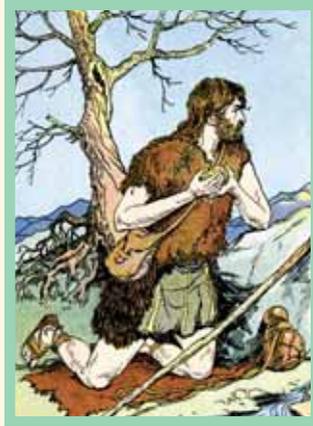
Listen to Me!

In the world in which we live, there are always voices telling us what we should think, say and do – politicians, governments, teachers, trainers at work, friends and neighbours. Perhaps we sometimes feel like the child – too many voices, all telling, nobody listening to me! Anyway, why shouldn't we just do what we want? Out there is a wilderness of sound; it's so confusing.

It may be, however, that if you listen carefully among all those words there is one sane voice – a message of quiet certainty and absolute calm. How would it be if we could find somebody to listen to who would bring order, meaning, purpose and happiness to our lives? There is such a voice even in these noisy 21st century days.

The Voice

Just before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ nearly 2000 years ago the words of a major Bible prophet came remarkably true. Six hundred years before that, the prophet Isaiah had said that his readers should listen out for someone who was coming. He would be the herald of a great Saviour



and Deliverer, and in all the intervening time Israel had waited for such a message and, because they had been overrun by enemies during most of that time, they had very much wanted to hear what this herald would have to say. For Isaiah had predicted:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in

the desert a highway for our God' (Isaiah 40:3).

When at last the message came, it turned out to be John the Baptist who was speaking to the Jewish people. Instead of someone who worked and taught in the Temple at Jerusalem, John was in the wilderness of Judea and from there he invited people to look and listen to Someone who was coming – who would bring peace and comfort into their lives.

But first they had to get ready, as he put it, they had to prepare a *"highway"*. That meant being willing to listen to God's message for them, then changing their lives (or repenting). They were to start living in expectation, in particular of the coming of Jesus Christ. And it meant being baptised, to

show they really had repented and wanted a fresh start, which is why John is known as “*John the Baptist*”.

Listening and Doing

Please don't think that John's message was the only one around at the time; in those days there were just as many people trying to get others to listen to them. They might want a following, have something to sell, be collecting for good causes, be trying to get political support, offering work, and suchlike. Then, as now, the thoughtful Israelite had to choose to listen to John's voice rather than any other. Notice also that listening meant doing: if they really wanted to prepare for the Coming One they had to repent and be baptised, for that's what John was asking them to do.

Real listening means being willing to make a fitting response by making changes to our thinking first and then to what we may say or do in the future, if we really believe the message we are hearing. Of course, today we are not in a position to listen to John the Baptist.

He died a long time ago. But his message about preparing for the future and for coming changes is still vitally relevant, which is why his words and those of the Lord Jesus Christ have been captured for us in the Bible. Through its words we can indeed listen, by reading what Jesus said and did, and by that means we too can change our lives. This is all the more reason why we should be willing to listen, why we should set aside personal preferences and prejudice and open our hearts to what is being said.

Who to Hear?

How do we know that the message in the Bible really is the most important message in the world – the one to which we should be listening? Hardly anyone else listens to it today and a lot of people think that the Bible is simply a collection of myth and folklore. They find it too difficult and much too complicated. Or they are as confused by it, or by what people say about it, as they are by any other message that comes their way today.

Yet here's a curious thing. People think the Bible is a long and complicated book but they think nothing of tackling a trilogy like “*The Lord of the Rings*”, or the six books written by J K Rowling. People get deeply involved in Science Fiction, or Greek Mythology. But it is often the case that whilst they can answer the most complicated questions about works of fiction, or ancient history, they have little or no knowledge about the Bible.

These articles offer another chance for you to listen to His Master's Voice. Years ago there was a record label with just that title, with a picture of Nipper the dog listening to the voice of his master which had been recorded on a phonograph.

The idea eventually became the trading symbol of the HMV record company. But, in a way, it could become a visual reminder of our own desire to hear the Word of God.

For, if we listen to what God has to say, we are taking note of our Master's instructions and waiting to do His will in our lives. That idea is what we will explore in this series of articles.

David Nightingale



HIS MASTER'S VOICE

The Resurrection of Lazarus

Jesus and his disciples had been hiding in the remoter regions beyond the river Jordan for fear of being stoned by the Jews, when news was received from his much loved friends, Martha and Mary of Bethany, that their brother Lazarus was sick – very sick. Knowing all about the many miracles Jesus had performed already, they thought that he would come straight away and restore Lazarus to health and strength. But he failed to come. The sickness grew worse and Lazarus died. There was nothing they could do but to arrange his funeral and bury him in a nearby tomb.

For the Glory of God

Why didn't Jesus go immediately to the aid of his friends? Perhaps he knew that he did not have enough time to get to Bethany before he would have died. But there was another reason. His response was:

"This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (John 11:4).

This sad event would provide a God-given opportunity for Jesus to raise Lazarus from the dead and so demonstrate the wonderful power God had given him. With this intention he stayed two more days where he was.

Eventually Jesus and his disciples made their way back to a place near Bethany in spite of the disciples being afraid that they would be running into danger. When they arrived, Lazarus had been in the grave four days already.

Jesus meets Martha

As soon as Martha heard that Jesus had come she went to meet him, wondering what he was going to say. Mary, on the other hand, remained "sitting in

the house" (v.20). Perhaps she felt resentful because she thought Jesus had let them down. Martha was quick to make the point that he hadn't come earlier to save her brother. She said simply: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". Perhaps she may even have thought there was a chance that Jesus might do something about it now, for cautiously she added: "But even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you" (11:22).

Here was a golden opportunity for Jesus to let Martha know why he had delayed his coming. So he began by just saying, "Your brother will rise again." This sounded quite exciting. Did he mean 'right now!' or some time in the future? To find out, she suggested his meaning. "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

To encourage her in her faith, Jesus responded, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are

the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." This response must have greatly delighted our Lord who had tried so hard to teach this truth to those who were willing to learn.

Jesus meets Mary

As soon as Martha returned home she informed her sister that Jesus wanted to meet her. Mary lost no time in going to see him. It was an embarrassing moment when they met for Mary broke down in tears, falling down at his feet. She greeted Jesus with the same implied reproach her sister had used, *"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."*

In such distressing circumstances it was not possible to hold a conversation: it was time for action. So Jesus asked her companions, *"Where have you laid him?"* They said to him, *"Lord, come and see"* (v.34). Jesus wept. Although he was Son of God, he was also Son of Mary and, as such, was capable of being overcome with human emotions.

At the Tomb

When they arrived at the tomb, Jesus said, *"Take away the stone!"* Martha, concerned for the comfort of the company that had gathered around the tomb, pointed out that after four days the body was bound to have begun to decompose and there would be an unpleasant smell. Jesus responded: *"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"* meaning that Lazarus would be

raised from the dead by God's power.

Having removed the stone, Jesus addressed his Father in heaven saying, *"Father I thank you that you have heard me. And I know that you always hear me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that you sent me."* Then he cried with a loud voice, *"Lazarus, come forth!"* And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, *"Loose him, and let him go."*(v.44)

Thoughts on the Miracle

Can you visualise what happened? The dead man heard the voice of Jesus calling him by name and telling him to come out of the tomb! The assembled crowd then saw Lazarus emerge from the tomb wrapped around with graveclothes. His astonished sisters and friends would then have gathered round

him in great excitement. Obviously, the first thing to do was to conduct him to his home where he could change, put on his normal clothes and reappear smiling, so pleased to be alive again.

In order for Jesus to perform a miracle of this nature it would have been necessary for him to have been out of reach when Lazarus died because, if he had been in Bethany at that time, his sisters would have urged Jesus to do something immediately. As things turned out, he was sufficiently far away for a miracle of resurrection to be needed. That was to be an even more wonderful recovery. It also meant, of



course, much sorrow and disappointment for the two sisters, but it was impossible to arrange things otherwise.

The Pharisees' Reaction

This remarkable miracle provided the Pharisees with sufficient evidence to show that Jesus had God's support and authority to preach as he did; but they were unmoved by this evidence. Why was this? One reason was they were blinded by prejudice. They disliked Jesus because he pointed out their faults and they were not prepared to accept that sort of criticism. If the criticism had been justified, they

should have accepted it.

Let us not make the same mistake but be willing to listen to the wonderful Lord Jesus, believe in his message, honour him as the Son of God and do whatever he has commanded. This is what the evangelist John hoped we would do when writing about these miracles or signs that he had recorded. He wrote, *'These (signs) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31).*

Ralph Green

Series Concluded

Days that Changed my Life

Lazarus

I had known Jesus quite a while. He had often made our home his base when he was preaching in the region near Bethany.

I share it with my two sisters, Mary and Martha, and the three of us became very close to him and I know that he cared for us too. We understood that he was God's Messiah and tried hard to support his activities.

Jesus and his disciples were away preaching across the other side of the River Jordan when I fell sick. To begin with I felt a bit under the weather but rapidly I weakened and Martha became so concerned that she sent for Jesus.

It all gets a bit hazy after that. I knew that I was very

ill but couldn't find the strength to take more than a few sips of water. I vaguely heard Martha saying to Mary that she was very surprised that Jesus had not come, but I don't really remember any more than that about her agitation.

Dead and Buried

The next thing I do remember is finding myself in a cold dark cave, tied up somehow with smelly bandages from my neck to my feet and a cloth tied tightly around my head which was knotted under my jaw. I could hear a voice shouting to me to "Come out!" The wrappings were very tight and I could scarcely hobble towards the mouth of the cave, where it was lighter and there seemed to be some noise.

When I emerged there



was pandemonium. A crowd was standing around, but all I noticed immediately were my sisters standing each side of Jesus, who was giving instructions to get me untied. He had clearly been crying. It was all very confusing, but as they took off the wrappings I began to notice not only friends and neighbours but several important Jews. The other odd thing was that I seemed to have lost several days.

Centre of Attention

It was only when we got home that events were explained to me and I found myself the centre of a good deal of attention. Martha described how I had got much worse and slipped into unconsciousness.

Before Jesus could arrive I had died, which was a tragedy for we all knew how many other people he had healed. If only he had been there!

It took some believing that I had died. Not only that, my funeral had been held four days previously, which accounted for the tight wrappings. Martha said that Jesus had only arrived a few hours ago and that he sent for her and then for Mary, at the end of the village. Apparently they had brought him, with much grief, and accompanied by a crowd of nosey onlookers, to my grave. It was only later that Martha confessed to me that she was so agitated and grief stricken that she had rebuked the Lord for not being here when we needed him most. He had been very gentle with her and replied that if she believed she would see the glory of God.



At that point, so I was told, with this crowd around him, Jesus called to me, "Lazarus, come out". That was the call I had heard. He had not even touched the cave, others had moved the entrance stone aside.

New Life

So here I am, a resurrected man, in perfect health with an almost unbelievable story. I can vouch for that fact that it was not a trick. I had been far too ill for that and all the neighbours knew it. Those who had prepared my body for burial also knew that I was not just unconscious, and later it was obvious that even the enemies of Jesus could not deny what he had done for me. Later I learned that they were trying to engineer my death!

I have learned a lot about death this last week. I did not go to an afterlife, I knew nothing about anything. One minute I was vaguely aware of Mary and Martha and the next I was trying to stand up in grave clothes. I have learned even more about

life. I have, and am, the proof that the Lord Jesus has control of death, and that he can change it to life.

I am very grateful for what he did, words can't really express my full feelings, but I know that I shall have to undergo that experience again. I am not afraid of it now, because I know that the next time the Lord Jesus raises me from the dead it will be to live for ever, in his company. Who could want more than that?

Cynthia Miles

Part Two

Heaven, Hell or Somewhere Else?

In this article Mark Sawyer examines our prospects of living forever and begins by enquiring whether we are mortal or immortal by nature. If you want to know what your prospects are of surviving death and ending up in a better place, this is an article you need to read. But be prepared to be surprised.

Are You Immortal?

Does the Bible teach the immortality of the soul? It may surprise you to know that it certainly doesn't and that this has been frankly admitted by numerous theologians. It's not just the opinion of Christadelphians, although we have been completely unable to find that teaching in the Bible.

Here are a few quotes from religious writers and thinkers, none of them Christadelphian, before we see what the Bible teaches about what happens to us when we die and what the true hope of life after death really is.

Dr F S M Bennett, former Dean of Chester, wrote:

"It was (Augustine) who took Plato's doctrine of the inherent immortality of the soul, disengaged it from ideas of reincarnation and gained for it the general credence which it has held to this day ... No doctrine of the natural or unconditional immortality of a part or nucleus of the human organism, called the 'soul', has any right of place within the precinct of revealed Christian truth."

The late **Bishop Gore** in his work, *The Epistle to the Romans*, wrote:

"... the doctrine of the necessary immortality or indestructibility of each human soul, as stated for instance by Augustine or Aquinas ... was no part of

the original Christian message ... It was rather a speculation of Platonism taking possession of the Church."

A report commissioned by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York was published in 1945 entitled "**Towards the Conversion of England**" concluded:

"The idea of the inherent indestructibility of the human soul (or consciousness) owes its origin to Greek, not to Bible sources. The central theme of the New Testament is eternal life, not for anybody and everybody, but for believers in Christ as risen from the dead."

And a more recent admission reported by *The Times* newspaper, in Oct 2003, in a book review of 'For All the Saints', by **Dr Tom Wright**, currently the Bishop of Durham, reads:

"Dr Wright says that Anglicans have drifted into a 'muddle and a mess' over what happens to people after they die. They have put together 'bits and pieces' of traditions, ideas and practices and created a 'fudge' around the eschatological concepts of death, judgment, heaven and hell ... The concept of the soul as a pre-existent and immortal entity has little basis in the New Testament and is instead derived from the teachings of Plato. Dr Wright argues that, in the modern age, a loss

of confidence in Biblical promises along with the development of liberal theologies has led to a belief in a sort of universal salvation for all, with everyone ending up at a final destination, although few seem to be clear what this destination is."

What startling admissions these are! The Bible, they admit, does not teach the immortality of the human soul or universal salvation. Nor does it allow for a class of people who are both wicked and immortal. So, what does the Bible teach about the state of the dead?

What is Death?

The Bible teaches that death is a state of unconscious oblivion. In Genesis we read that the sentence of death passed upon Adam and Eve meant returning to the dust of the ground:

"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (3:19).

This was a punishment because of wrongdoing in the Garden of Eden. It was not a reward that would enable them to start a new life in heaven, as some people think death to be. The "breath of life" from God, which had energized their bodies, was to be withdrawn.

Let's be clear about this. The "breath of life" belongs to God, not to man. With it, mankind lives. When God withdraws it we die. Without that life force, a living soul or being becomes a dead soul or being. The Bible account of creation does not say that God breathed into man a living soul, let alone an ever-living soul. Man *became* a soul or being. Equally clearly, the "breath of life" without the body is certainly not a

"soul." Man was not created an ever-living being, nor did he have an immortal element implanted within him. So, death was not to be the gateway to further life, but a punishment for disobedience.

What about Us?

Where do we stand in relation to this law of God by which death follows as a consequence of sin? Paul's letter to the Romans shows that we inherit Adam and Eve's mortality and their tendency to sin, though not their guilt (see Romans 3:23, 5:12 and 6:23). We all die, not only because we are all mortal, but because we all sin. Sin, like an employer, pays its wages. As Paul puts it: *"the wages of sin is death" (6:23).*

Here are some more Scriptures that say the same thing:

- **Psalm 49:20** tells us that the person "without understanding" dies without hope of resurrection. Our "understanding" therefore has an important bearing on our prospects of life beyond death.
- **Psalm 146:3,4** teaches that when breath departs our thoughts cease. We become unconscious.
- **Ecclesiastes 9:5,10** explains that the dead have no consciousness. *"The dead know nothing."*
- **Isaiah 26:13,14** informs us that Israel's oppressors, who worshipped pagan idols, will never be raised. *"They are dead and shall not live."*

But there is a hope of life after death and we shall be examining that in the next article in this series.

Mark Sawyer

Two Free Offers

Bible Reading Planner

The middle pages of this issue supply a Bible Reading table that, if followed daily, will take you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice during one year. If you would prefer a gentler introduction, this Bible Reading Planner offers you a careful selection of chapters and the accompanying notebook gives some helpful comments. Read yourself rich!



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