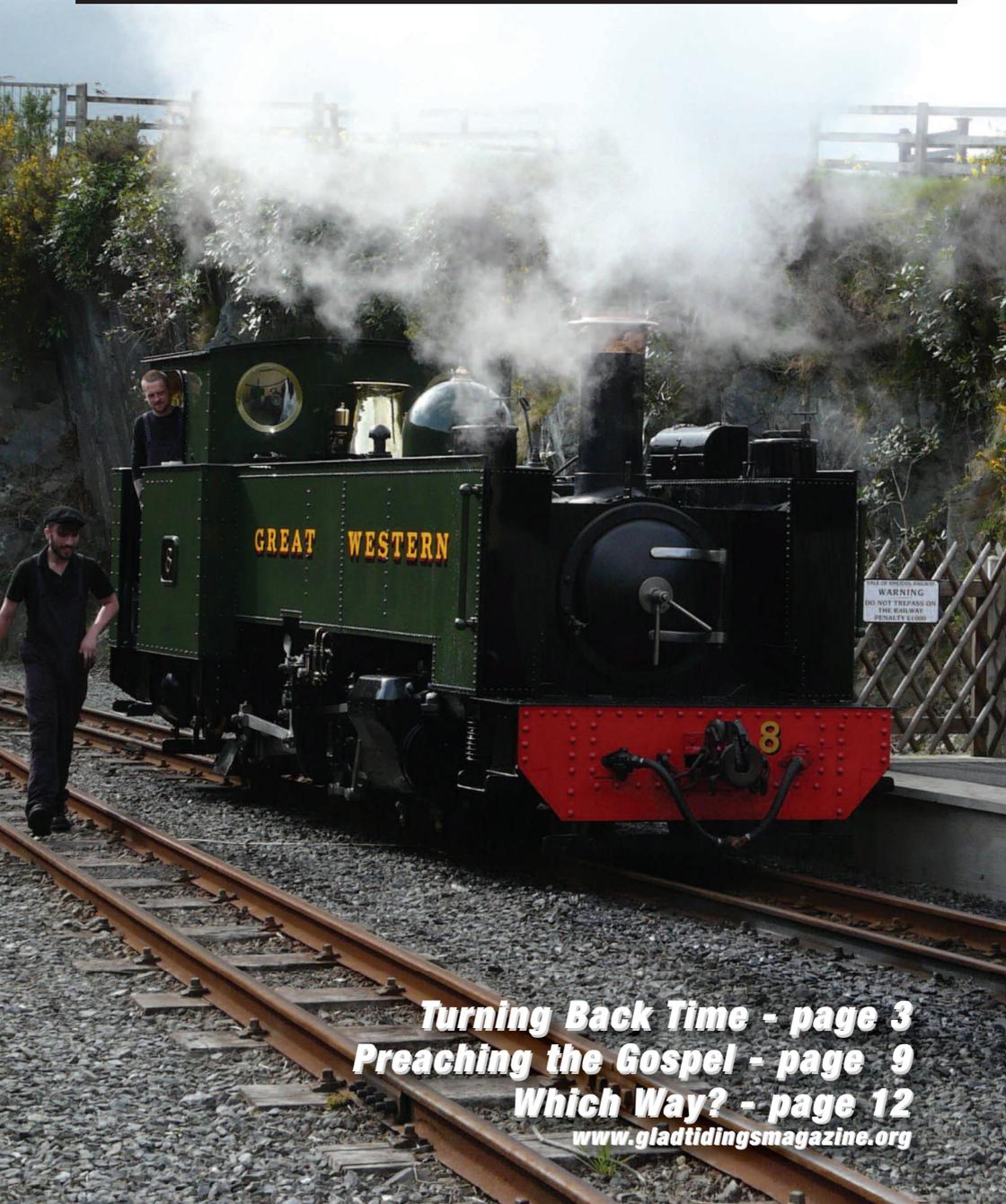


# Glad Tidings

*of the Kingdom of God*

1601



WARNING  
DO NOT TRESPASS ON  
THE RAILWAY  
PENALTY £1000

***Turning Back Time - page 3***  
***Preaching the Gospel - page 9***  
***Which Way? - page 12***  
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# Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

133<sup>rd</sup> Year

K17

1601



A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are - to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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# Turning Back Time

Our front page shows the impressive sight of a steam engine in action. Up and down the UK there are many old railways which have been restored to allow steam trains to operate. These are very popular days out for families – especially for grandfathers, it seems!

It's a common feature to find a band of dedicated volunteers in these places. Whilst there may be some paid staff, usually these railways will be hugely reliant on willing hands to keep the machinery working, clean and in service. There seems to be no shortage of them either. For some, it is the opportunity to exercise otherwise unused skills; for others, it is a welcome social activity. For volunteers and visitors alike, steam trains provide an enjoyable visit to a past age.

Especially as we get older, we tend to wish we could 'turn back time'. Maybe it would be to re-live happy experiences or to spend time with loved ones who are no longer with us. Perhaps it would be to take different decisions at crucial times in our lives. For some, it might be to escape present difficulties.

However, of course we cannot do this. We live in the 'here and now', we are told that we cannot 'live in the past'. We live in the present and can hope for the future. There are some interesting Bible examples of people who would have liked to go back and make different life choices.

## Esau – Wishful Thinking

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the elder, and as such would receive the larger inheritance and

blessing from his father, as was his birthright. However, after a day's hunting, he was famished and found Jacob with a pot of stew. For the sake



of a meal, he gave his birthright to Jacob, showing just how little he cared about the future, or God's blessings.

When Jacob took those blessings, admittedly by subterfuge, Esau was deeply upset. He wept and swore to kill Jacob. But there was no going back – he had made his decision, as the New Testament comments:

*Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears (Hebrews 12:16–17).*

We have to live with our life decisions, so let's make the right ones.

## Paul – Why Go Back?

The Apostle Paul was always very conscious of his own past. He had persecuted the Christians, even having

some killed, before his own conversion. He was so grateful that he had been called by Jesus, and forgiven.

*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief (1 Timothy 1:12–13).*

In his writings, he reminds the believers that they had all come from unbelief, some from very godless backgrounds indeed, and how privileged they were to be part of God's family.

*Remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:11–13).*

Because of this, he is forthright in telling them NOT to go back to their former state. Why would they? Whether originally Jew or Gentile, there is no better state than being known by God, and through Jesus becoming part of His family.

*But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? (Galatians 4:9).*

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the

*heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered... What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life (Romans 6:17, 21–22).*

The same applies to us; if we have made the right decision to follow Jesus, we must stick with it and keep trying to do the right things, to please God.

## **Living for the Future**

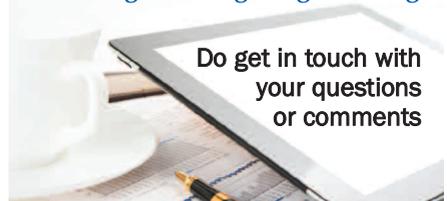
There is one way in which time can and will be turned back. In the Kingdom of God, the conditions of the Garden of Eden will be restored. Read Isaiah chapter 65 and Revelation chapters 21–22 to see descriptions of long life, fruitful agriculture, safety and godly living.

This is the hope we can share through Jesus; we make our decision whether to follow him now. Let's make that commitment and live in hope:

*Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new..." He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son (Revelation 21:5, 7).*

## **Editor**

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# **Jesus and the Amazing Catch of Fish**

Fishing can be a frustrating business. You sit all day beside the pool without a bite, and just when it is going home time, you see your neighbour's rod bent double as he hauls in fish after fish from the same patch of water.

Peter and Andrew knew the feeling. Their angling was more than a hobby – they fished for a living. An empty boat for them meant nothing to sell on Tiberias market; no money to take home to their wives. They had had many a night like that before – hours of toil, damp and dripping nets, and nothing to show for it. It was all a matter of chance – the weather, the food available to the fish, or where they happened to be. You just had to shrug your shoulders and carry on.

Unfortunately, for net men like Peter and his brother, even after a fruitless trip, you still had to tidy up before you could go home for a rest. The fine cord meshes had to be cleared of weed and washed free from mud, or they would dry hard and stiff in the sun. The two disciples were sorting wearily over their heaps of netting at the water's



edge, when the shadow of Jesus fell over them.

It was Peter's boat that had caught Jesus' eye. The crowds were following thick behind, and he needed more space to teach. Climbing aboard, he asked Peter to pull out a little from the land.

From his floating pulpit, Jesus could be seen and heard by all, and nobody could thronk him. As the sun climbed into the sky, the disciples waited politely until he began to round off his remarks. Perhaps they could now slip away for a bite and a cool beaker of wine. But Jesus had other ideas.

*When he had stopped speaking, he said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4).*

## **An Amateur Fisherman?**

It was embarrassing. Did he not realise they had caught nothing all night? There was no point in going out again, and the nets were clean – if they dropped them into the water, they would have to wash them all over again. As a carpenter, he could hardly be expected to know the lake like they did. Though they did not like to offend him, Peter's reply had a hint of condescension:

*Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at your word I will let down the net (v5).*

Once more they toiled away from the shore, and then stopped, with Jesus watching. With the grace and precision of the expert they shot the huge 'basket' net, weighted with small stones and ringed with cord, until it ballooned out over the water, and sank slowly beneath the ripples.

At once an excited Peter knew from the pull on the ring that they were on to something really big. The whole net heaved with the frenzied churning of hundreds of slippery, silver bodies. They had trapped an entire shoal. It was going to be a record. He could feel the meshes strain and snap under the enormous load, good fish escaping back into the sea.

Desperately he beckoned to his partners, out of earshot, but standing by the second boat, to come out to help them. With the combined efforts of the four men, they managed to haul the

catch over the gunwales, first of one boat, and then the other, clawing out the flapping fish until the twin heaps threatened to submerge the boats under their very weight.

It was the catch of a lifetime. Peter could calculate quickly how much it would be worth at the market. He could see debts repaid, replacement fishing gear, presents for the family, even surplus funds to invest.

Then, suddenly, he remembered Jesus, sitting quietly in the boat a few feet away from him. Jesus, who had directed the catch. Jesus, who evidently knew more about fish than he, the professional, had learnt in years. Jesus, the great prophet who had come from God. He had marvelled before at the miracles of healing in Galilee, but this sign touched his own heart.

*When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" ... And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men" (v8, 10).*

## **Lessons from the Catch**

There is much to be learnt from this incident. First, it sounds highly authentic. It would be difficult to suppose Luke would have invented something that was so obviously the catalyst or trigger for Peter becoming a full time disciple. Peter's reactions to Jesus, both before and after the letting down of the net, are typical of human nature and true to the impulsive character he afterwards reveals.

Secondly, there comes a similar turning point in the life of every disciple, a moment of realisation when the call of Jesus of Nazareth suddenly



becomes not just an invitation to accept or ignore if we please, but the voice of the Son of God himself, with all his power, bidding us share in his everlasting Kingdom. In that moment of decision, all the rewards of this life, attractive as they seemed only a short while before, can be left behind as we follow him in the way.

And then, thirdly, there is something deeper still, a meaning to this story revealed by Jesus' words to Peter. Peter the fisherman was to become Peter the apostle. From plucking silver fish out of the dark waters of Galilee, he was to travel instead the sea of mankind, spreading the gospel net to bring in disciples for the Kingdom of God. Often in that weary task it would seem the waters were barren and empty, and spirits would sink low. But the eyes of Jesus see deep into the hearts of men and women. The unlike-liest material, by human judgement, may have the greatest potential for his Kingdom. It is a point the scriptures consistently make.

## The Sequel

It is not always realised that there was a sequel to Peter's fishing expedition. Two years later, he and the other apostles came back to Galilee. Jesus had been crucified, dashing their hopes of his role as the King of Israel. Then he had come back to life, appearing to them in Jerusalem. At his special request, they had travelled north to a rendezvous in Galilee. Here he was to appear to them, and probably to many others, for Paul records that subsequent to the Jerusalem appearances, over 500 people saw Jesus at once (1 Corinthians 15:6).

It seems to be while they were waiting for this appointment that Peter



decided to go fishing. They were back at the lakeside; the boats and nets, neglected through the busy years of discipleship, were still there, and they had nothing for breakfast. Once more he set out on the familiar routine, lamps flickering in the darkness as they shot the nets time after time into the black water. Once more, the night dragged by and they caught nothing.

However, in the pink light of dawn, they heard a shout from shore, and saw a man looking towards them. He greeted them kindly:

*Children, have you any food? (John 21:5).*

Perhaps he wanted to buy his breakfast, they thought, as they replied that they had not. But the stranger advised them:

*Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some (v6).*

Could he see something from the shore that they could not from the boat? Obliging, they cast again and, once more, Peter felt the familiar tug of a huge shoal enclosed in the bulging meshes. His heart leaped with excitement. But it was John, more thoughtful or with better sight, who realised that history was repeating itself. *"It is the Lord!"* he cried.

Without hesitation, Peter jumped over the side and began to wade to the shore, leaving his friends to tow the bulging net to land, for it was too heavy for them to transfer the catch into the boat. Peter himself took over the last stretch, dragging the precious bundles safely up the beach. The strange thing was the size of the fish. Instead of a mixture, they were all large. They counted them. Laid out side by side on the shingle, there were 153. And despite the strain and the dragging up the beach, the net had not broken. Not one had escaped.



## A Significant Second Sign

John's careful and methodical reporting suggests we are meant to think deeply about this last great miracle of Jesus, and perhaps to contrast it with the earlier catch, when Jesus was with them in the boat. It is one of only eight miracles or 'signs' that John records in full.

There are obvious points of difference: the first time the net broke, but the second time it stayed intact. On the first occasion the catch was huge but normal; a mixture of good and bad, large and small. The second catch was less heavy, for Peter could drag the net alone to land, but it was all large fish, precisely numbered. The apostles

fished the same lake, but the second time the quality of the catch was much more important than the sheer quantity.

There is something comforting about the second catch. The gospel net, at its first casting, encloses all kinds of disciples, some good, some bad; some who will endure to the end, and some who will return to the world from which they were called.

The second catch seems to portray the day when Jesus, having gone away for a while, comes back at the break of a 'new day' to judge the world and set up God's Kingdom. And there, on the right side of the boat (the place of honoured guests at a feast) the nets will be found to have enclosed a catch of chosen men and women, all safely numbered and not one of them lost.

Peter and his fellow fishermen responded to Jesus' call and became faithful disciples, living in the love of God and doing His will. They needed time to fully appreciate what Jesus was teaching them and what was required, just as we do. Like them, we can appreciate the power and truth of Jesus' message.

**David M. Pearce**



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[www.gladtidingsmagazine.org](http://www.gladtidingsmagazine.org)

# Things of the Kingdom and of Jesus the Christ - 1

## Preaching the Gospel

*The things of the kingdom and Jesus the Christ are preached throughout Acts: from the third verse to the last verse of the book. This series of articles on Acts explores these 'things'.*

The Acts of the Apostles is a dynamic book – as dramatic as any novel! It is the inspired record of the words and activities of the apostles soon after the ascension of Jesus. These men were eyewitnesses of the things they believed (especially the risen Christ). Furthermore, Jesus had instructed them (Acts 1:2) and the Holy Spirit empowered them to speak the truth (John 14:26, Acts 1:8). They were utterly persuaded of the truth of their message, fearless before the hostile Jewish authorities and even prepared to risk their lives. This was an amazing transformation from having been terrified and lost (Mark 14:50).

The introduction sets the scene. Jesus gave the apostles *'infallible proof'* of his resurrection, and spoke about the *'kingdom of God'* (1:3). He told them to be witnesses for him:

*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem,*



*and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

The book goes on to describe how the apostles preached the Gospel, witnessing by words and actions (including miracles), and the responses they received.

### The True Gospel

English versions of the Bible contain four books with titles *"The gospel according to..."* with the name Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These inspired records tell about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Mark 1:1 reads *"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God"*.

The word 'gospel' occurs many times in the New Testament. For example, in the NKJV it occurs 23 times in the four gospel records and Acts, and 79 times in the letters. An interesting example is found in Luke chapter four. Verses 14–21 contain the full account, but verse 18 reads: *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor..."*

This is a quote from Isaiah 61:1 which Jesus claimed to fulfil. The words in Isaiah (translated from Hebrew) are 'good tidings' and this is what is meant by the Greek word which is translated 'gospel'. Sometimes this Greek word is also translated 'good tidings', notably in Luke 2:10 when the angels told shepherds about Jesus' birth. Every single New Testament reference to the gospel is associated with good tidings about Jesus of Nazareth.

## Not a New Message

However, the apostle Paul said that ‘the gospel’ had been preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), which was thousands of years before Jesus was born. So how could the life of Jesus have been described so long before his birth? Abraham was promised a land, many descendants, and a single special descendant through whom all families of the earth would be blessed. The Jewish nation came from Abraham (as did the Arabs), and their existence was a part of the promises. But the much greater promise was that all families (Jews and non-Jews) would be blessed through a single special descendant (Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:1–3 and Galatians 3:16), who was Jesus. The apostles stressed repeatedly that salvation is only possible through Jesus the Christ. The whole of God’s plan for the world has always centred on His Son Jesus. This simply cannot be over-emphasised.

The apostles risked their lives in order to witness to the true gospel. Paul warned that even in his time the gospel message was getting corrupted, with dire consequences (Galatians 1:6–12). They preached “*things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 8:12), which is the core of the gospel.

If we want to be saved we need to understand and believe this one true gospel by reading the whole Bible.

## To the Jews First

The apostles’ witness was first to the Jews. Jesus was a Jew, and the promises about him had been given to the Jewish nation (Acts 26:6, Romans 3:1–2). However, many Jews doggedly refused to accept that Jesus was ‘the

Christ’ (Messiah, anointed one) and their promised saviour. This is not too surprising given that they had previously rejected the evidence provided by Jesus himself, and had him killed.

However, God had always said that salvation would be offered to Gentiles (non-Jews) and the first Gentile convert was Cornelius (Acts 10). This was a shock to the Jews, but the gospel was being preached to both Jews and non-Jews.

## What Was Preached?

The table opposite shows themes that occur regularly in the book of Acts, specifically before chapter 10, i.e. while the witness was to the Jews. The main events in these chapters are: the ascension of Jesus (chapter 1); the apostles receive Holy Spirit power (chapter 2); they do miracles and get arrested and persecuted but continue to witness (chapters 3–8); Saul of Tarsus is converted (chapter 9).

In studying this table, we must remember that Old Testament scriptures were well known to Jews. So, the apostles did not need to emphasise things which their audience already believed. We see the critical importance of Jesus. His death and resurrection fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. There was an urgent need to respond as God required.

There is only one gospel, as we saw above, and these themes need to be central to our Christianity. Are we studying the whole Bible so that we can make proper sense of what the apostles taught? How do our lives compare with those first century apostles in terms of dedication and enthusiasm for the gospel?

**Anna Hart**

Theme in Preaching	References in Acts 1–9 (while witnessing to Jews)	Number of references in Acts 10–28 (witnessing to Jews AND Gentiles)
Jesus was approved by God	2:22; 3:13,14,26; 4:27; 7:52	2
Jesus was crucified	2:23,36; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 8:32-35	3
God raised Jesus from the dead	1:3, 22; 2:24,31,32; 3:15; 4:10,33; 5:31; 7:56	6
Belief in resurrection	4:2	4
Jesus was exalted / is in heaven	1:2,9,11,22; 2:33,36; 3:13,20-21; 4:11,27,30; 5:31; 7:56	1
Jesus is the Christ	2:36; 5:42; 9:22,34	4
Apostles were witnesses	1:8,22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32	5
Apostles had Holy Spirit power and authority <sup>(*)</sup>	1:8; 2:4,33; 4:31; 5:9,12,32; 6:3,5,8; 7:51,55; 8:6,17	17
Gentiles also to be offered salvation	2:39; 9:15	5
These events were prophesied in the Old Testament	2:16,25,30,34; 3:18,21,22,24,25; 4:11,25; 7:52; 8:32-35	8
The importance of the name of Jesus	2:21,38; 3:6,16; 4:10,12,17- 18,30; 5:28,40,41; 8:12,16; 9:14-16,21,27,29	9
Salvation is through Jesus	2:21,38; 3:19,26; 4:12; 5:31	6
Jesus will come back / judge the world	1:11; 3:20-23	3
Kingdom of God	1:3,6; 8:12	5
The need for repentance	2:38; 3:19,26; 5:31; 8:22	7
Baptism	2:38,41; 8:12-13,16,38; 9:18	10
The importance of the Jewish fathers	3:13,25; 5:30; 7:2,44-45	5
God is the Creator	4:24	2

*\* This was a very special privilege of the early apostles to enable them to establish the first century Christian churches.*

# Which Way?

Two men sat behind me, talking loudly. One said, “I’m not looking forward to driving abroad on holiday, as they drive on the wrong side of the road. Why can’t everyone go the same way?”



His words set me thinking. Many Bible passages show us the right way to go in life. The Lord Jesus was emphatic:

*Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:13–14).*

Could his words be any clearer? How are we to join such a favoured company? There is only one way to choose, and most people don’t want to take it. The narrow way may not be easy at times, but the prospect is superb!

## Choosing the Right Road

After Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, some three thousand people gladly accepted that way

(Acts 2:41). They were not taking the easy route, but the need to follow Jesus was evident. So much so, that thousands more followed.

Great persecution followed for many believers, and hundreds of Christians went to their deaths, some at the hands of their fellow Jews and many by the Romans. Yet they did so confidently believing that their Saviour would call them from death to a life that no ordinary man could offer.

What did they have to do? It was (and still is) necessary to believe in God and to obey Him.

*He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).*

It is clear. Believe in God, do what He asks us to do, and be baptised. What is that? It is a complete immersion in water, before witnesses, to show belief and to have sins forgiven.

## Keeping on Track

What follows is a life of purpose, committed to serve in humility, and to travel the way towards God’s kingdom on earth. This teaching is consistent throughout the whole of the Bible. For example, we read at the start of the Book of Psalms:

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful... For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish (Psalm 1:1, 6).*

It is remarkable that only one man in the history of the world was able to follow these instructions completely, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our perfect example, a pattern to follow. The verse quoted also reminds us that God knows you and me, and how we are 'walking'. When our Lord returns, or at the end of our life, will we be going the right way? The choice is ours and we each make up our own mind, but we can see the importance of a positive answer!

In the Old Testament, there was a man nearing death, who gave this confident expression of his faith:

*Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed (Joshua 23:14).*

Joshua had incredible drive and courage throughout his life, and had led God's people into the Promised Land. He had indeed seen God's promises being fulfilled, and could be confident that He would continue to fulfil them. This would give great direction to those who survived Joshua – it can do so for us too.



## Taking That Road

How should we react to God's appeal? What should our attitude be and how do we approach God?

David lived a life trying to please God, sometimes failing but doing his best. God was happy to overlook David's failures because his attitude was right. In fact, God described David as 'a man after My own heart' (Acts 13:22).

So, David is well placed to advise us on our relationship with God, for this was his prayer:

*Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day (Psalm 25:4-5).*

*Teach me Your way, O LORD, and lead me in a smooth path, because of my enemies... Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD! (Psalm 27:11, 14).*

This means that we, despite being imperfect, weak and failing all too often, can ask the mighty Creator to help. He wants to help us too.

The Lord Jesus Christ made it very clear that there really is only one way that we should choose, only one way to come to God, when he said:

*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).*

Which way will we choose?

**Ken Clark**

# Saul – the Failed King

Saul was the first king of Israel, and his reign wasn't very successful. He was weak-willed and vain, and ultimately God rejected him. However, we can learn from his poor example.

There are two important events in the life of King Saul which make particularly interesting reading: his failure to completely destroy the city of Amalek as God had commanded him; and his brutal massacre of the city of Nob. There is a lot for us to glean from comparing these two incidents – Saul's actions are recorded for us to learn from.

It is not our purpose to judge King Saul as a person, because we are told that the Father *'has committed all judgment to the Son'* (John 5:22). Interestingly, despite recognizing that Saul's actions were frequently ungodly, David lamented for Saul (and Jonathan) when they died in battle and described Saul in remarkably complimentary terms (see 2 Samuel 1:19–27). Perhaps we can take from this that we can learn from the actions of 'bad' characters in the Bible but we should leave judging them as individuals to Jesus.

## Not Finishing One Job

Saul was given the divine instruction to obliterate the neighbouring tribe of the Amalekites. This seems harsh, but God provided the reason why they were to be destroyed – they had tried to wipe out God's people when they were just nomads, heading for the Promised Land. Now God would punish them for their cruelty.

*Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1 Samuel 15:2–3).*

Saul carried out this command very well to begin with:

*So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley. Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt (v4–7).*

However, things took a turn for the worse after this, when Saul chose not to follow God's command exactly, but to do things his own way.

*But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. Now the word of the LORD*

came to Samuel, saying, “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night (v 9–11).

Saul had only partially followed God’s command and clearly this was entirely unacceptable to Him. Saul tried to convince Samuel that he had carried out God’s commands (see verses 13 and 20) but after trying to blame the people (see verses 15 and 21) he finally confessed his sin, “because I feared the people and obeyed their voice” (v 24). This disobedience was incredibly significant – it led to God rejecting Saul as King of Israel.

So Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you” (v28).

## **Violence to the Defenceless**

There are striking similarities between this incident and a later incident recorded for us in 1 Samuel 22. David was anointed by God and would be Saul’s successor. But Saul spent a considerable amount of time and effort chasing David and trying to kill him. The incident in question occurs when Saul needed to find out where David was hiding.

Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, “I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine” (1 Samuel 22:9–10).

Saul was deeply unhappy with the fact that Ahimelech the priest had helped David in what he saw as a conspiracy against him (see verse 13). Ahimelech made his defence:

*Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honourable in your house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much (v14–15).*

This did nothing to appease Saul’s wrath and Saul unleashed his fury upon Ahimelech and the other priests who were living in the city of Nob.

*And the king said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!” Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me.” But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD (v16–17).*



Saul's own Jewish servants knew better, and they would not attack the priests. They were defenceless, and were God's representatives. But there was a man who would!

*And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep—with the edge of the sword (v18-19).*

Here we have a vicious slaughter, carried out just to appease Saul's pride, and without any moral justification or command from God.

## Striking Lessons

When we compare the descriptions of these two events, the similarities are startling!

- ❖ Saul (partially) destroyed the people of Amalek with the edge of the sword.
- ❖ He struck Nob with the edge of the sword.
- ❖ Saul was commanded to put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey in the city of Amalek.
- ❖ He put to death both men and women, children and infants; also, oxen, donkeys, and sheep in the city of Nob.

What we are being taught is that Saul was more than capable of fully destroying the city of Amalek, which is

proven by the fact he utterly destroyed the city of Nob. His failure with Amalek was not one of ability, but of desire. He simply chose not to carry out God's commands, because it suited his purpose, or was more convenient.

The details which connect the two incidents portray a sad irony in the life of Saul. If only he had been faithful to God, and so had destroyed Amalek like he destroyed Nob, he would not have found himself in the terrible situation of being rejected as king. In this case, he would also not have been relentlessly persecuting David, the godly man who would succeed him. And then the massacre at Nob would not have occurred at all.

## Making the Right Choices

In the heat of the moment, we can all make foolish decisions which may have dreadful consequences. It is highly unlikely that the consequences of our mistakes will be as horrendous as the callous murder of eighty-five people, but the principle remains.

*He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly (Proverbs 14:29).*

The most important thing is to listen to God's Word, and to obey Him. Samuel had wise words for Saul, and for us:

*Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams (1 Samuel 15:22).*

**Stephen Blake**

# Matters of Life and Death



One Saturday morning I received an urgent call from a friend of mine, who told me her dog was very ill. As she didn't have a car of her own, she asked me to help her take her dog to the vet.

The dog was lying on the floor on an old sheet and was unable to move his legs because they had stopped working – this was serious. With the help of another neighbour, we managed to carry him to the car and laid him down in the back. Then, with the sick dog settled in the back, my friend and I drove to the vets. When we arrived, the vet and a veterinary nurse lifted him out of the car and took him into the surgery.

The vet told us he didn't know what was the matter, but the dog was obviously very sick. It would cost a lot of money to investigate, which my friend could not afford, and the vet felt there was little likelihood of a recovery. The only other option was to 'put the dog to sleep'.

After a brief discussion, my friend decided on the second option, although it was a painfully sad one. She was upset, and I was too because I'd known the dog since he was a

puppy. The vet gave him the lethal injection; he went from a creature that was obviously alive to a lifeless corpse. He lay there with his eyes open, a solid unyielding body that had once been a much-loved pet; but now the life had gone from him, he was transformed into a lifeless, dog-shaped lump.

## Life – and Death

Sad as it was, the experience set me thinking about death and the miracle of life. God the Creator gave life in the beginning – life is very precious; He made life upon earth for a reason. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that God spoke and created plants and trees, fish and birds and then the land creatures.

*Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so (Genesis 1:24).*

Finally, God created Adam and Eve who were to be the pinnacle of His creation. They were commanded:

*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:16–17).*

They disobeyed God and ate of the fruit – this was the first sin, and as a consequence, they would eventually die. Not just them though; because of Adam's sin, death was introduced to

all creation. The Bible is clear about what death means for us:

*For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust (Ecclesiastes 3:19–20).*

*For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten (9:5).*

*Return, O LORD, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:4–5).*

*Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish (Psalm 146:3–4).*

## **A Way Back**

However, God did not want this situation to remain – He has a plan which will ultimately result in the Garden of Eden being restored upon earth and the earth being populated by immortal, obedient believers. This will be in the Kingdom of God.

It was in speaking to the serpent in the story, that God showed there is a way for mankind to come back to Him.

*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).*



From that time on, the serpent came to symbolise sin. It was part of God's plan from the very beginning that He was, at some time in the future, going to send someone who would save people from sin, specifically those who showed faith in God. The promised Saviour was to deal a death-blow to sin (bruise the head of the serpent) but it would hurt him temporarily (bruise his heel) in the process.

The Lord Jesus Christ is that person, described in the New Testament as the 'last Adam'. His work is explained by Paul:

*For if by the one man's offence, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Romans 5:17–19).*

## **Eternal Life**

When Life is mentioned in the Bible and particularly in the New Testament,

it usually means eternal life. Jesus said:

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved (John 3:16–17).*

It is a comforting fact that God does not want anyone to perish. However, if we refuse to listen to His word and His Son, we effectively bring condemnation on ourselves. By ignoring His appeal, we leave ourselves subject to sin and permanent death. It was the same in the time of Jesus.

*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God (v19–21).*



Jesus came into the world to grant life to any who sincerely believe in him and come to God through him. This is the hope we can share.

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth, he will raise the dead and judge them. He will decide who has genuinely tried to do the will of God, and should be granted eternal life.

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom he will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son... For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth — those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:21–22, 26–29).*

We should be excited at the prospect of being found worthy to enter the kingdom of God, and should make the effort now to respond to Him, to be baptised and to do our best to please Him.

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory... Then the King will say to those on his right hand, “Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:31, 34).*

**Grahame A. Cooper**

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