

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1606



Real or Fake? - page 3
The Bumpy Road of Life - page 11
The Lord's Prayer - page 16

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of the Kingdom of God

134th Year

C18

1606



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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Publisher: The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity - Number 248352

Bible Talks, Study Classes, Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs are held regularly by Christadelphians worldwide. The address of your nearest group can be obtained either from one of the Glad Tidings Distributors listed above, or from one of the contact addresses listed on the back cover.

Contents

Real or Fake?.....	3
What God is Like.....	5
Nicodemus - the Secret Friend	8
The Bumpy Road of Life.....	11
It's All in God's Hands.....	14
The Lord's Prayer.....	16

Acknowledgements

Photographs:

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Real or Fake?

Sometimes it can be difficult to spot what is real from what is fake. It isn't hard to tell a stone statue from a real person or animal, but daily life can be more complex.

A frequent topic recently has been 'fake news'. This means stories or reports carried by the press or other media, which are just not true. Their intent would be to change people's views or even to change the course of events. Election results are thought to have been influenced by fake news, and world leaders have blamed it for many stories not to their liking.

A major development in technology and entertainment is 'virtual reality'. By putting on a headset, we can seem to swim with dolphins, fly with an eagle or even go into space. Even children play games on their mobile phones, which mix maps, their cameras and animated characters – this is known as 'augmented reality' – mixing reality with make-believe.

When Pontius Pilate asked, "*What is truth?*" (*John 18:38*), that corrupt, vain man was actually asking an important question – and one we still have to deal with today.

Is the Bible Real?

The same question has often been asked of the Bible. It claims to be the word of God, written down by men inspired by His power:

No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20–21).

It also claims to be the guide for people who want to please God:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Many critics have claimed that it is just a set of human writings which cannot be trusted. However, they ignore the important evidence that the Bible is a reliable record of what was written down under God's guidance.

A Reliable Record

The Bible we can read today, in our own language, is a translation of the original text and the message it contains is completely unchanged. We can find support for this view for both Old and New Testaments.

Although the Old Testament was written between 1500 and 400 BC, recent discoveries show that it has been very carefully copied over the intervening centuries. So critics are wrong to suggest that the original message has changed: it has not.

In 1946 the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in caves near the Dead Sea. They contain many documents, including much of the text of the Old Testament. They have been dated as having been written between 300 BC and 100 AD. This means that they are about 1000 years older than the oldest known texts before they were discovered. Comparisons have shown

that there are no significant differences between these ancient writings and the Bibles now in general use. This means that the Old Testament we have today is an accurate copy of what was originally written down.

The New Testament was completed in the First Century, and many very old manuscripts exist. These help us to see that, again, our Bible is an accurate copy of the original. The 'Rylands Library Papyrus P52' is a fragment from the Gospel of John. Scholars have debated its age using a variety of methods, but the range is from 90 to 175 AD. This means that it was copied within a few decades of the apostle John having penned its words. Again, the Bible is shown to be a reliable record. We can trust what we read.

The Word of God

The Bible gives a simple test which we can apply, to decide if a message comes from God, or not.

When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken (Deuteronomy 18:22).

If a prophecy doesn't come true, it is fake. This test still works, as of course humans cannot foretell the future.

The Bible contains a lot of prophecy. For example, Daniel prophesied about the empires of his day (Babylon and Medo-Persia), those to follow (Greece and Rome) and the time (up to our own day) when there would be no single world power. His prophecies came true – read Daniel 2 for a good example.

Several of the prophets accurately foretold the exile of the Jews and their return under King Cyrus:



Rylands P52

“For behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah,” says the LORD. “And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it” (Jeremiah 30:3).

How to Respond?

There is much more evidence that the Bible is the Word of God and we detail that from time to time in *Glad Tidings*. How should we respond? Our earlier reference helps:

Whoever will not hear My words... I will require it of him (Deuteronomy 18:19).

Let's heed the warning and take time to read the real word of God.

Editor

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The God of the Bible - 3

What God is Like

Whenever we think about God, we must always bear in mind a very important thing that He says about Himself:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9).

So, we should not be surprised if the Bible reveals God to be different from how we might expect – or, indeed, want – Him to be. Nor should we be put off by that.

We only know what God is like because He has chosen to tell us about Himself in the Bible. It is important to remember this, as otherwise there is the danger that we could ‘create God in our own image’; in other words, make Him out to be the kind of God we would like Him to be. That might be like your favourite uncle, or some kindly elderly benefactor.

But we don’t need to do that, and in fact we must not. God has revealed Himself to us and it is up to us to accept Him as He is.

In Heaven

The God of the Bible is often called ‘the God of heaven’ and that is where He lives.

God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God (Psalm 53:2).



He has reserved heaven as the place of habitation for Himself and the angels. These are His heavenly messengers who consist of spirit, and travel between heaven and earth to carry out His instructions. He created the earth for human beings.

The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD’s; but the earth He has given to the children of men (Psalm 115:16).

Although God is a real person, He is also a spirit and so cannot be contained in any one place. So, in a sense, He is everywhere.

“Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?” says the Lord; “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” says the LORD (Jeremiah 23:24).

Unique

We must not decide for ourselves what God we would like. God is God, and that is that. But throughout the world people have their own ideas of Him. The Bible reveals that there is only One True God, the God of the Bible, eternal and invisible in the heavens:

I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me (Isaiah 45:5).

The LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King (Jeremiah 10:10).

Immortal

Did you notice the word 'everlasting' in the last quotation? Over and over in the Bible, God is described as 'everlasting' or 'eternal'. We know that we humans are mortal, that we have a beginning and an end to our lives, but it is not the same with God. He may give immortality, but only He is by nature immortal.

He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see (1Timothy 6:15-16).

All-Knowing

By His Spirit, God can be everywhere at once and so nothing escapes Him.

You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off... For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether... Where can I go from

Your Spirit? or where can I flee from Your presence? (Psalm 139:2,4,7).

God knows in advance everything that He intends to do. Sometimes He chooses to tell man and women about His plans.

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done (Isaiah 46:9-10).

His decisions are never wrong, even though sometimes they might be difficult for us to understand.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor? (Romans 11:33-34).

All-Powerful

God is the Creator of the world and we owe our lives to His power. He sustains everything on earth. We read:

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:24-25).

If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust (Job 34:14-15).

Active

The God of the Bible is a real being who thinks, speaks and acts. He is a living God. If creating the world was not enough, He has designed its future, too. Nations might think that they're in control of their own destinies, but we read that:

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will (Daniel 4:17).

God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are at work in the world today. Through the angels they influence the lives of indi-



viduals and governments to bring about the courses of action on which God has decided. He is even now working towards the establishment of a world-wide empire inhabited by people completely obedient to Him, which the Bible calls the 'Kingdom of God'.

If that sounds fantastic, remember that this is the God of the Bible we're talking about. He can do anything, in stark comparison to the failure of human politicians.

He does not fail, and He does not change course. What He does stands, and what He says goes. He is not fickle, nor is He swayed by public opinion.

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:11).

Pure

Being God, He is superior to anything and anyone else – in power, in knowledge, and in character, too. Unlike the gods that the Greeks and the Romans worshipped, He does not behave like a human being.

Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity... Surely God will never do wickedly, nor will the Almighty pervert justice (Job 34:10,12).

The LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does (Daniel 9:14).

Jesus Christ, God's Son, said:

Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God (Mark 10:18).

One of the prophets put it like this:

You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness (Habakkuk 1:13).

God is 'good'. Not just in the sense of being generous, but perfect through and through. This has implications for us. What chance is there for us, if He 'cannot look on wickedness'? If He hates wrongdoing, how does He tolerate us wrongdoers?

As we shall see, there is good news for us here!

Rod Hale

Nicodemus – the Secret Friend

We may like the idea of a secret friend: someone who admires us or appreciates what we stand for; someone who does not stand out in our immediate circle, but nevertheless respects us from afar. Jesus was exceptional, in that he did not have pride. His mission was that people should love and respect his Father, the Lord God Himself. But he certainly had admirers, both public and private.

Nicodemus was a secret admirer of Jesus, which on the surface was most unlikely, as he was a Pharisee. This group constantly and often viciously opposed the Lord Jesus. They stood for the 'old order', for the way things were from before the Romans took control of the land of Israel, long before the birth of Jesus.

John chapter three also tells us that Nicodemus was a 'ruler of the Jews', which means that he was a member of the ruling council of the Jews, the Sanhedrin, formed more than 80 years before these events took place.

Questions at Night

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, presumably so that none of his fellow-councillors would recognise him, as this would compromise his position on the council. Eventually, any Jew would be excommunicated from their synagogues for professing to believe in Jesus, so Nicodemus needed to be unrecognised, at least for the moment.

Nicodemus explained to Jesus that many of the council recognised him as a teacher sent from God. Indeed, he



addressed him as 'rabbi', that is, a recognised teacher of the written and spoken laws of Judaism. Nicodemus had an unrecorded question for Jesus, which he answered:

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3).

What did Jesus mean? Nicodemus did not understand, and Jesus went on to explain that he meant being "born of water and the Spirit" (v5); he was talking about Christian baptism.



This means being baptised, completely submerged in water, having confessed that we believe that Jesus is Lord, that he is the Son of God, and that we want to be part of God's extended family. In doing so, we state

that we want to live spiritual lives which worship God as our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and try to avoid sin. This naturally leads us to look forward to the return of Jesus to the earth, to set up the kingdom of God here.

A Heavenly Message

Jesus continued, explaining that whilst nobody has ascended into heaven, he came to explain heavenly things to us, including the love of God.

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 (v16).

And that is just what Jesus offers us: everlasting life in the Kingdom of God, with no fear, injustice, illness, or disease. Then even death will be abolished for ever.

We saw that the offer is qualified – it is open to anyone who believes in Jesus (and what he stands for). This means that we need to recognise the concept which naturally follows: at some time, our lives will be inspected and assessed by Jesus himself. His next words explained that there is a clear difference made between those who accept him, and act accordingly, and those who do not:

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).

This sounds a little frightening, but it need not be. If we have been baptised into the name of Jesus, and really try to live lives that please him, we can welcome our meeting with him when he returns. How?

Earlier in their conversation, Jesus said that he must be “*lifted up*” (v14). This was a reference to his crucifixion. This sacrifice is how we are to be forgiven for all our failings, and to be accepted by God – even though we get things wrong all too often. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, God will treat us as ‘righteous’, or good enough to be in His Kingdom, when Jesus returns to the earth. What a fantastic promise!



Public Belief

Nicodemus never forgot Jesus, but it was only after the crucifixion that it became apparent how much Jesus meant to him. While the lifeless body of Jesus hung on the cross, Nicodemus again demonstrated his admiration, belief and love for Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea was another secret admirer of Jesus, and he went to Pilate to ask for his body. It was the tradition that when someone had been crucified, the eldest male relative had the responsibility of disposing of the body. Whether Joseph of Arimathea

was related to Jesus is a matter of legend, but he certainly took on this awful responsibility.

John tells us that Nicodemus met up with Joseph of Arimathea, bringing spices with which to bury Jesus' body. The mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight, (maybe 75lbs or 34kg in modern measures) would be worth a small fortune. More importantly, the effects of this mixture teach us an amazing truth about the Lord Jesus, as we will see.

Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury (John 19:40).

Three days later, the disciples Peter and John ran to the tomb. They had been told that Jesus was no longer there but had risen from the dead.

John got there first, and records what happened:

And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed (John 20:6-8).

Public Evidence

Why did John believe in Jesus' resurrection?

Those spices, mixed in with the bandage-like funeral wrapping, would harden over the next couple of days and form a rock-like brittle casing for

the body. This was a little like the chrysalis of a caterpillar that is to change into a butterfly.

When the body of the Lord Jesus left the grave clothes, then the shape of the body would remain. This would not be a confused bundle of clothing, but a very precisely shaped mould, which had once encased the mortal body of the Lord Jesus. Now the casing was completely unnecessary, because he was risen!

There was the evidence of where Jesus had been, wrapped in grave-clothes. There was also a sign that he was no longer bound by death. John wrote at the end of this chapter:

These 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 (v31).

The disciples would see the risen Jesus a number of times before he ascended to heaven, 40 days later. We see his love for Thomas, who struggled at first to believe in the resurrection.

Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing (v27).

We can have this same confidence, we can be friends of Jesus. Then we also can look forward to the return of Jesus with joy.

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:13-14).

Peter Hale

The Bumpy Road of Life

As a young man, I was driving down a country lane late one night. The dim headlights of my old car caught a rabbit, too late for it to move. A moment later it lay dead in the road. I stopped the car and ran back to the spot. There was not a mark on it – no apparent cuts or bruises – so a few days later we feasted on rabbit stew!

As a young father, I was once again driving along a country road, this time with a two-year-old daughter riding in the back. A pigeon sat in the middle of the road. It seemed oblivious to the impending danger and too late it decided to try and fly away. There was the tell-tale thump and feathers everywhere. I pulled the car over and ran back to the spot, but there was nothing to be done, just a dreadful mess. My stomach turned over. As I climbed back into the car and drove on, a little voice in the back kept asking, over and over, “What happened to the pigeon, Daddy? What happened to the pigeon?”

These incidents seemed to highlight the way in which we react to the events in our lives. Sometimes we relish the challenge. On other occasions, we are appalled by what has happened, feeling either helpless or guilty about what has occurred.

At times, we seem oblivious to the suffering going on around us. At others, it becomes very personal indeed, and we may search for some specific reason, ultimately something or someone to hold responsible. Often it is God who is blamed. People say things like, “Why does God allow it to happen? I thought He was supposed to be a loving God?”



Whilst things are going well, very few of us stop to acknowledge God. So why should He be blamed when things go badly?

First Things First

Let's start from the beginning. We are told clearly that the starting point is with God and our belief in Him:

Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

This verse tells us that there is a rich reward for those who are willing to trust God and deliberately and carefully seek to please Him in their lives. The clear implication is that He, and He alone, can give meaning and purpose to the lives we live every day.

We have to acknowledge that He is the infinite God and that we are limited, finite human beings. He understands and knows everything. We on the other hand are going to have times when we simply don't know, and certainly when we don't understand what is going on in our lives.

However, we can be certain that God cares for those who are His. Jesus said to his followers:

Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom (Luke 12:32).

This is both comforting and challenging. Don't behave like a frightened rabbit; place your confidence in God.

The Future Kingdom

There is also a reward, the Kingdom of God. Just let your mind dwell on these word pictures of that future time.

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away (Revelation 21:3-4).

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing (Isaiah 35:5-6).

There are many passages like this giving a description of a world very different from the one we know today.

What a vision for us! God has given us a hope which far outweighs anything today's world has to offer.

A Clear Choice

It has always been like that, since the Garden of Eden. We read in Genesis chapter 3 that God offered Adam and



Evil a clear choice: obey Me – and enjoy life; or go your own way which will lead only to suffering and death. The man and woman chose to go their own way, and found only work, sweat, pain and death.

Even the earth itself was no longer in harmony with mankind, so providing food became a real chore. Life would be made more difficult with pests and weeds competing with humans.

Their choices had taken them beyond God's immediate care and protection – they were living on their own terms. Human intelligence would not be sufficient to sort out the problems in human life, especially the problem of death. Sin (ignoring and disobeying God) caused death, and mankind cannot fix this.

But God provided a remedy. If they tried to live a life close to God there was a way back to Him, to be reconciled to Him and to hope for a place in His Kingdom. That way is open to all of us, through the work of Jesus, but it is a choice we have to actually make.

For the most part, men and women have continued to go their own way and ignore God's offer. The earth was made imperfect because of sin, and symbolically groans with its effects:

For the creation was subjected to futi-

lity... For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now (Romans 8:20, 22).

How Do We React?

The natural disasters we see arise because of the imperfections in the earth's make-up. In some cases, men and women also make these worse by mismanaging resources, damaging the climate and choosing to live where they know there are risks. Whatever the cause, terrible sufferings result, and we rightly feel upset and sorry for those affected.

What would Jesus' reaction be? Fortunately, we are not left in any doubt. When faced with two disasters in his own time, in which people died he said that those people were no worse than others, but:

Unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:5).

The message is clear: we cannot control these incidents, but our priority must be to be right with God.

Another Bumpy Road...

One dusky, dusty African evening, I was driving quickly along a dirt road. Suddenly, in the headlights I caught sight of a huge ditch stretching out right across the road. I tried to brake, but on the dusty track the car went into a prolonged skid which seemed as if the car, with us in it, would nose-dive into the hole. At the last second, the car slewed round and came to rest with its nearside wheels on the very brim of the ditch. We cautiously got out of the car to assess the situation, a 'real near miss'.

All we could do was give thanks to God, feeling that He must have had us in His hands. We cautiously moved the car away from the edge of the ditch and drove on our way – thoughtfully and with a little more caution.

That is the lesson for all of us. Put God in control, trust Him, and give thanks to Him for His care and His promises.

David Nightingale



It's All in God's Hands

- But What Does That Mean?

Derek had undergone major surgery and was recovering. The surgeon had given him a list of instructions of what to do and what not to do during recuperation. Derek, however, had a mind of his own, and ignored this professional advice. "I'll be all right" he said. "He was a good doctor and I have confidence in him. I'm sure he's in control of my recovery." Sadly, Derek did not make a full recovery and the operation was unsuccessful.

The outcome of an operation cannot be guaranteed, but if things do not work out it is seldom as simple as blaming the doctor. Of course, we cannot know what would have happened if Derek had followed the doctor's instructions. Nevertheless, the doctor was not "in control" when Derek had deliberately ignored his advice. In fact, Derek was acting in a foolish and unreasonable way. While claiming that he trusted the doctor, he disregarded him.

Don't Presume on God's Care

Unfortunately, many people are equally unreasonable in relation to God, where the implications can be disastrous. While they might *claim* that they believe in God they do not actually believe Him, and consequently make little or no effort to obey Him.

People can seem to have faith by making statements like "It's all in God's hands" or "God is in control of my life and destiny. There's no need for me to worry". This may all sound very virtuous but it can be misleading -

presumptuous, fatalistic or even superstitious.

God most certainly can control situations and take care of people. The Bible is full of inspired accounts of this happening, especially when He oversaw the lives of people who trusted in Him. Examples are the Jewish nation (Deuteronomy 28), Joseph (Genesis 45:5-8) and the apostle Paul (2 Timothy 3:11). He can still do this, although we cannot always be sure of the specific occasions when He does.

God is in control

Most certainly, in world politics God is in ultimate control and nothing can spoil His plans. He raises up leaders of various sorts, in spite of our voting systems and despite any personal preferences individuals may have. While people imagine that they choose their leaders, the Bible is clear that we do not:

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men (Daniel 4:17).

Moreover, when God has determined that something will happen nothing and no one can prevent this (see Acts 5:33-42).

There are many personal situations where we are not in control. Our every breath is by the mercy of God, Who could withdraw it at any time (see Job 34:14-15, Psalm 104:29, Acts 17:25). Consequently, we cannot guarantee that the plans we make for tomorrow

will actually materialise, and we should therefore commit them to God.

You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:14-15).

God Allows Choice

Despite this awesome power of God, He does not force us to obey Him. Many day-to-day choices are just a matter of preference with no serious consequences. However, decisions about God and the way He asks us to live are a matter of life and death.

He has always looked for voluntary obedience and humility (Isaiah 57:15). In the past God pleaded with the nation of Israel to obey Him, and in a parable about a vineyard — representing Israel — the prophet Isaiah (5:1-7) asked 'what more could He do?' to save them. This was because the people repeatedly ignored the prophets God sent, preferring to do what they themselves thought best.

The stark answer came many years later. Jesus, also telling a parable about a vineyard, said that God finally sent His 'beloved son' (Luke 20:9-19). God gave Jesus as a sacrifice for sin and then raised him from the dead to immortality. Since then God has commanded men and women who want eternal life to turn to Him:

These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

He has told us what to do, and offered many wonderful promises. But these

promises are conditional and require action on our part.

We Need to Decide

We all have a decision to make — do we go our own way or take notice of God? Our ultimate destiny is determined by our response to this question. 'No decision' is, by default, a decision not to respond and it has dire consequences.

Worse than Derek who did not obey the surgeon and so forfeited the benefits of the surgery, we forfeit salvation if we do not try to do what God asks of us (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). God IS in control, but He asks us to act, and the outcome for us depends on our response to Him.

The reasoning "God is in control, so I don't need to do anything" is totally wrong. We cannot blame Him if we are not accepted in the day of judgement (Daniel 12:2). He has already done His part and will continue to so do, but His promises of protection and salvation only apply to us if we also do ours. If we do really trust God and follow His instructions, then the 'cure' is wonderful: eternal life in a perfect world (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Anna Hart



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The Lord's Prayer

Prayer was very important in the life of Jesus, and the disciples noticed how highly Jesus valued the experience. So, they asked him, “*Lord, teach us to pray ...*” (*Luke 11:1*). In reply Jesus gave the widely known and well-loved prayer known to this day as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’.

The prayer can be used as a model on which to base our own prayers, or it can be simply repeated, and we can think about each clause. In either case, the experience can be very uplifting.

The prayer (opposite), has a clear and simple structure. Notice that the prayer has three sections and that each section has three clauses.

The first section concerns God Himself – His name, His kingdom, and His will. The second section presents our own petitions – for our daily food, for forgiveness and for God’s care. Finally, the prayer returns to God, acknowledging that everything belongs to Him.

God First

The prayer opens by addressing God as “*Our Father*”. The first occasion in the Bible in which God is presented as a ‘Father’ refers to Him as a Father to the emerging nation of Israel and is found where Moses is commanded to approach Pharaoh and say:

Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn (Exodus 4:22).

The concept of God as a ‘Father’ therefore is associated with the ideas of belonging and of freedom. God set

**Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done on
earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our
daily bread,
And forgive us our
debts, as we forgive our
debtors.**

**And do not lead us into
temptation, but deliver
us from the evil one.**

**For Yours is the
kingdom and the power
and the glory forever.**

Amen.

Matthew 6:9–13

the Israelites free from cruel slavery in Egypt; God offers to set us free from the cruel slavery to temptation, sin and death.

Let us consider the first section:

Hallowed be Your name. If we love God, we will respect His name because God cannot be separated from His

name. God's name must, therefore be hallowed, treated as holy or sanctified.

Your kingdom come. Every follower of Jesus longs for the coming again of Jesus and for the Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah urges us to:

"... give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isaiah 62:7).

Your will be done. In Gethsemane, shortly before his death, Jesus prayed three times that his Father's will, not his own, be done. He went to the cross because that is what God asked of him. It is important that we do not repeat these words carelessly. We have to really want God's will to be carried out in our lives.

Us Afterwards

In the second section we present our requests:

Give us this day our daily bread. Jesus suggests that we should pray for each day as it comes – 'this day'. Elsewhere, Jesus teaches, *"Do not worry about tomorrow ... Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:34).

Forgive us as we forgive. In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus told a parable about someone who had been excused an enormous debt but who could not find it in his heart to excuse a colleague a very small debt; he was condemned. Equally, if we cannot forgive others who wrong us in any way, God will not forgive us our faults. Jesus gave the stern warning:

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does

not forgive his brother his trespasses (Matthew 18:35).

Do not lead us into temptation. It will be easier to understand these words if we consider an example. Peter was a strong, brave man but he was also self-confident. He said to Jesus:

Lord, I am ready to go with you, both to prison and to death (Luke 22:33).

Later, when they came to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus urged his disciples, *"Pray that you may not enter into temptation"* (v40). But the disciples did not see any special danger and they did not pray.

After the arrest of Jesus, Peter followed him into the place of his trial and there were servants in the courtyard. It was a cold night and a fire had been lit. Peter approached the fire but that brought him among company. He was noticed:



Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee" (Matthew 26:69).

All eyes turned on Peter and he blurted out, *"I do not know what you are saying"* (v70) and then *"I do not know the man"* (v72). In fact, three

times, Peter denied any knowledge of Jesus. His courage, his bravery and above all his sword were completely useless now. If a soldier had challenged him he would have responded bravely, but a servant girl had mocked him and he fell.

If it had been a warm night Peter would have stayed away from the fire and he would not have been noticed. But it was a cold night and so Peter's weakness was exposed – and he learned not to trust in himself. If we are aware of our own weaknesses we will remember the words of the prayer, “Do not lead us into temptation”.

Closing Praise

The final section of the prayer is not found in many modern translations of the Bible and nor is it thought to have been in the original text. It was maybe added during the very early years of Christianity for use in the churches.

Nevertheless it is good that we remember that the kingdom, the power and the glory all belong to God. It is also worth knowing that the words do have a Bible basis from a prayer of David in the Old Testament.

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and You are exalted as head over all (1 Chronicles 29:11).

Following a Pattern

Notice how short the prayer is. If we try to say long prayers our minds are likely to wander. A short prayer will be more enlightening and uplifting.

In the Old Testament there is an example of a man who prayed passion-



ately, and his prayer followed the same pattern as ‘The Lord’s Prayer’. Good King Hezekiah had received and ultimatum from the proud Assyrian king. Hezekiah took the ultimatum into the Temple, and there he unrolled it and prayed to God.

O LORD God of Israel, the One who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. Truly, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were not gods, but the work of men’s hands—wood and stone. Therefore they destroyed them. Now therefore, O LORD our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD God, You alone (2 Kings 19:15–19).

He began his prayer by acknowledging God’s greatness. Then he asked God to deal with the problem and then

he ended his prayer by asking that God's sovereign will should be fulfilled.

Hezekiah's prayer was heard, and Jerusalem was miraculously saved. The lesson for us is to note how concise Hezekiah's prayer was and that he prayed about just one problem.

The wise man of Ecclesiastes advises us to remember,

God is in heaven and you are on earth, therefore let your words be few (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

Keep Praying

Jesus taught more about prayer:

Then he spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart (Luke 18:1).

The parable that followed concerned a widow who repeatedly asked a judge to help her. At first, he was reluctant but finally he gave the help that the widow needed. The lesson? We should pray tirelessly and ceaselessly. If we neglect prayer we will become spiritually tired and our faith will become weak.

In the same chapter is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee prayed telling God what a good man he was, but the tax gatherer prayed humbly, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (v13). The Pharisee had prayed to himself, not to God. But the tax gatherer's prayer was heard, and he went away with his sin forgiven.

May God bless our efforts to pray.

David Budden

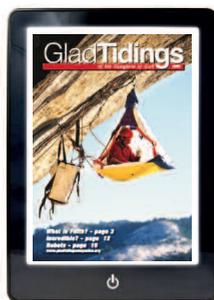
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