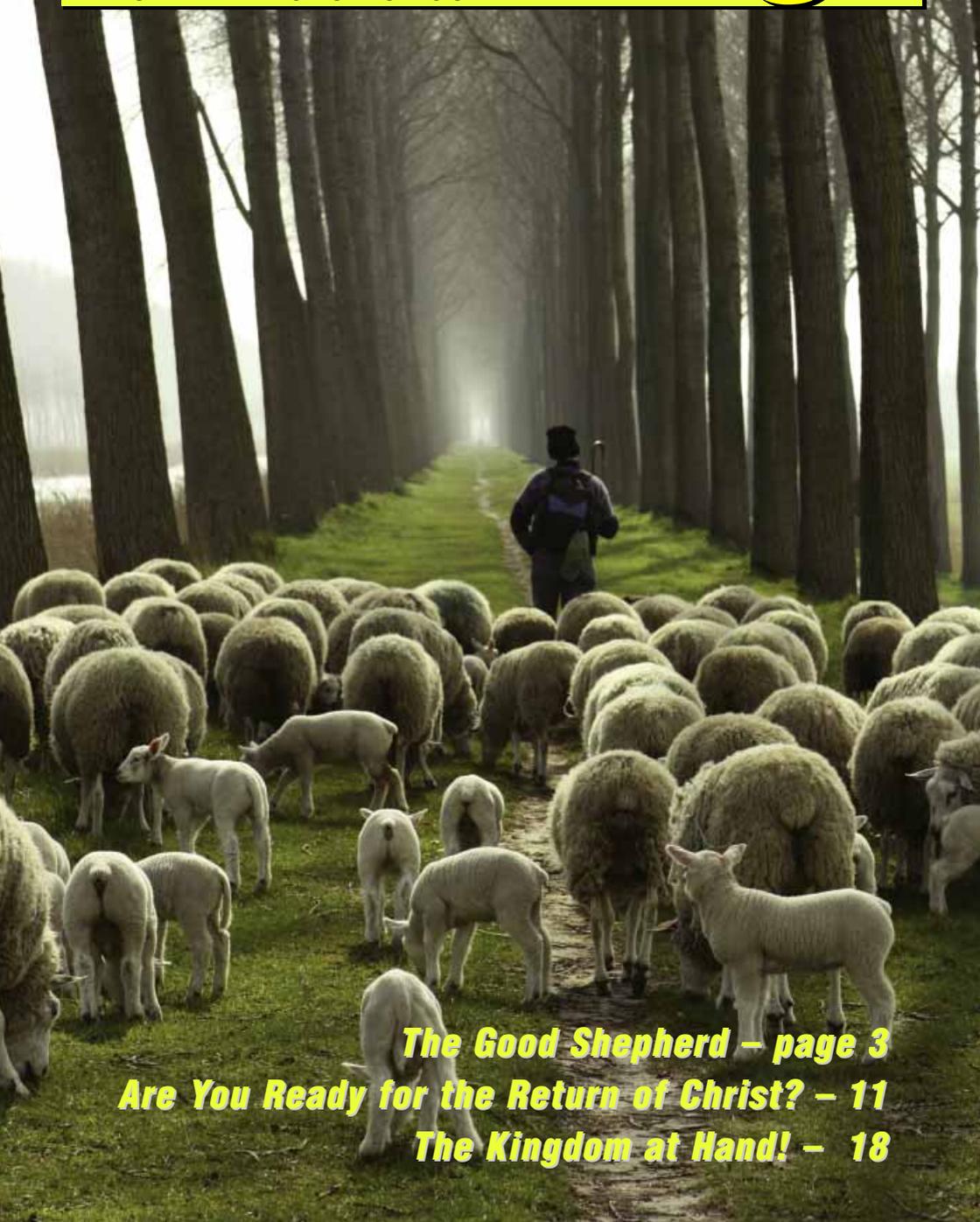


Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1486



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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

124th Year

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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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The Good Shepherd

In one of the most exciting prophecies of the Old Testament, the problem we face as individuals is summed up in just a few words.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6).

Gone Astray

If you have ever walked along hillsides where sheep graze, you probably used sheep tracks. For sheep tend to follow one another: one leads and the rest fall in line. That is just what has happened to the human race, as God’s prophet observed. Adam led the way by choosing to break the one commandment that God had given mankind. He took the fruit that was offered to him and, the record says, “he ate” (Genesis 3:6).

The far-reaching consequences of that decision are considered later in this issue, but they are also apparent in the early chapters of Genesis. Cain killed his brother Abel, because he was jealous of him, and then lied about what he had done; and that was only the beginning! A few hundred years later almost everybody had walked along the same track – away from God. God looked at the society that then existed and passed this sentence:

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and he was grieved in his heart. So the LORD said, ‘I will destroy

man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (Genesis 6:5-7).

Devastating Destruction

What a catastrophic outcome for a world that had strayed away from God! The only satisfactory solution was to eliminate mankind and start again. That new beginning was possible because God offered a way of escape. He invited Noah, and all who wanted to join him, to build an ark and be safe when the flood of destruction came. But nobody wanted to know. Only seven others – all of them members of Noah’s family – found the salvation God offered.

Noah’s faith saved him and his family from certain destruction; for the world that existed at that time perished. But Noah was given a new lease of life:

“By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

“As it was...”

What goes around comes around. Now our world is in a similar state to that which existed in those far-off days. People have again wandered off the Way that God has shown us – the Way that leads to life. This was the path that Jesus trod when he lived on earth. He was the embodiment of the way back to God; so much so that he could say: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father

except through me” (John 14:6). If we try to follow his steps, he can lead us back to a right relationship with God. But again it is the case that very few people want to know about the salvation that God is offering. It is just as Jesus said:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26,27).

But today is like those days in another important respect. Just as God offered Noah salvation from destruction and promised him a new life in a new world, God offers us the very same thing.

The Good Shepherd

Sheep do not always follow each other heedlessly and pointlessly. When they have a shepherd to guide them – and in Bible times the shepherd always walked in front to show them the way – sheep will follow, especially if they know the shepherd and trust his guidance. The coming of a shepherd who would guide people back to safe pastures, by still waters, was something the prophet had anticipated, for whilst he said we would all stray, he also said this about the coming Saviour:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).



Read the whole of that exciting prophecy – written 600 years before the birth of the Lord Jesus – and you will see how graphically the saving death and glorious resurrection of Jesus was foretold. He would be oppressed and afflicted (verse 7), be cut off in death (verse 8), be buried in a rich man’s grave (verse 9), yet his days would be prolonged when God raised him from the dead and gave him the reward of everlasting life (verses 10-12).

Time and again in the New Testament this prophecy is seen to have been fulfilled by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He is the shepherd that God has provided to save us from destruction. In earlier times God provided Israel with kings who were to do just that, but they failed to give the nation clear direction and purpose. There were religious leaders too, whom God appointed, but they became too concerned about their own position and privilege. They left the nation leaderless; so God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what Jesus said to his followers, by way of encouraging them to follow where he led:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd; and I know my sheep, and am known by my own” (John 10:11,14).

Jesus laid down his life for all those who want to be his followers and who want eternal life. There can be no greater challenge in life, nor can there be a finer reward in prospect.

Editor

The Fall and its Consequences

❶ The record in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 provides us with both the setting and the circumstances for the entrance of sin and death into the world. We have already touched on these matters in earlier articles but now we come to look more particularly at the details.

❷ Adam and Eve were placed in an ideal environment, one in which their characters could develop in the way that God desired. We need to remember that they were created as full-grown adults but had not the opportunity of growing and developing in maturity with the passing of the years that we enjoy. There was therefore an innocence and a guilelessness about them that would nevertheless be balanced by the teaching that they would have received from the angels with whom they had day-to-day communication.

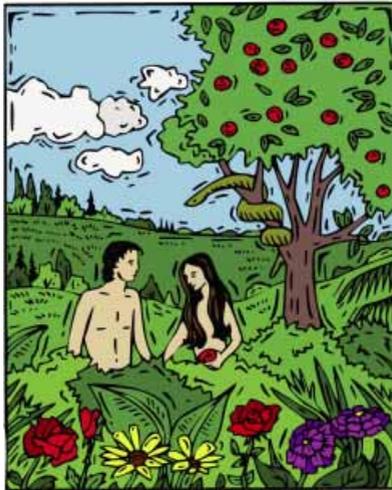
❸ We are told specifically of two trees that existed in the garden; the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were given just one command:

“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).

❹ We might wonder how this single prohibition could achieve that character development, with all those diverse features that God required.

Remember that they were living in an ideal environment; this communicated to them, in all its aspects, the

love and faithfulness of the God who had created them. His warning about the consequences of eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil must be set in this context. They should have known that His warning could only be an expression of His love and concern



for them. Thus, when the temptation came, it gave them an opportunity to show their appreciation of the love and faithfulness of God. By obeying God’s commandment they would be reciprocating his love and demonstrating their fidelity to Him.

To have triumphed in the trial of their faith would have produced a deeper and fuller joy than that simple happiness they had known in their idyllic state and a peace of heart and mind would have resulted which belongs only to those who love God’s law and so do not forget His word.

The time of testing would have developed that endurance that brings character, and the spirit in which they applied themselves to this task would result in the quality of longsuffering, love, faithfulness, joy, peace, patience. This list of virtues is not exhaustive, but it is sufficient to illustrate how, in the wisdom of God, this one, apparently innocuous, prohibition was sufficient to enable Adam and Eve to develop a character that would have been pleasing to God.

⑤ When the test came, it was through the agency of the serpent. It is worth noting that the last verse of Genesis chapter 2 (verse 25) belongs in fact to the record of the fall and is an introduction to that account. This is made apparent by a play upon words, as both the original word rendered 'naked' (2:25) and that translated 'cunning' (3:1) are both derived from the same Hebrew root:

"They were both naked (arom), the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more cunning (arwm) than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made" (2:25-3:1).

Before this time of testing the man and the woman were innocent – guileless and untainted. That a test was necessary suggests that if character was to be developed, it could only be done under conditions of trial. The nakedness (i.e. innocence and

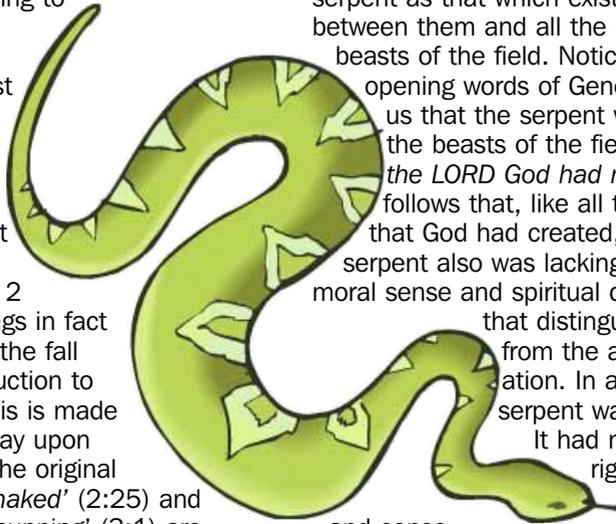
inexperience) of the pair laid them bare (or made them susceptible) to the cunning of the other.

⑥ It is important that we get the role of the serpent into its proper perspective - only thus can we have a correct understanding of the temptation of Eve. We must remember that it was only the man and the woman who were made in the image and likeness of God. Consequently there was as great a gulf between them and the serpent as that which existed between them and all the other

beasts of the field. Notice that the opening words of Genesis 3 tell us that the serpent was one of the beasts of the field: "*which the LORD God had made*". It follows that, like all the animals that God had created, the serpent also was lacking in that moral sense and spiritual discernment that distinguishes man from the animal creation. In a word, the serpent was amoral. It had no sense of right and wrong,

and consequently we must understand that, although afterwards it becomes a symbol of sin and wrong thinking, originally there was nothing intrinsically evil about it, and that which it did was not motivated in any way by malicious intent

To suggest otherwise is to lay the origin of sin at God's door, because He created the serpent thus – which is unthinkable. The record in Genesis chapter 3 is finely balanced in telling how the actions and reactions of the various parties combined to produce the first sin. God created the stage and the participants in the drama, but



He was not responsible for what they did subsequently.

⑦ The serpent was cunning; the word does not necessarily have evil associations. Literally it means ‘acute of mind’ and while on occasions it carries the idea of craftiness, it is worth observing that it also means ‘prudent’ and the same Hebrew word has been used in this way in an obviously good sense in the Book of Proverbs (see 12:16,23; 13:16; 14:8,15,18; 22:3; 27:12).

The word would appear to signify, therefore, no more than the fact that the serpent was a reasoning creature with an intellectual capacity that exceeded all the other beasts of the field that the Lord God had made. The derivation of the word translated ‘serpent’ is also relevant. Strong’s Concordance says that it means ‘to hiss, i.e. to whisper, to prognosticate, to learn by experience, to diligently observe’. (In connection with the last two meanings, see Genesis 30:27 and 1 Kings 20:33 where the word is used in these ways.)

The picture, then, is of a creature of superior intelligence which is capable of reasoning and which could learn by experiencing the things that it diligently observed. By these attributes it was led to form certain unfounded conclusions regarding the prohibitions that God had placed on Adam and Eve with regard to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

These wrong ideas were the substance of the counsel given to Eve which, although they were wrong, beguiled her, so that she fell into sin. Notice that while the serpent played his part in the fall of mankind, it was not later asked to account for its actions, because the animal had no

sense of right and wrong and consequently was completely lacking in moral perception and responsibility.

⑧ Although it was the woman who was first deceived “*She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate*”(Genesis 3:6), it is the man who has the ultimate responsibility. The man had precedence in the order of Creation, for the woman was made for the man not the man for the woman. Authority over all the works of God’s hands was vested in him and the blame was finally laid at his door. This could not be stated more emphatically than through the words of the Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans:

- *“through one man sin entered the world” (5:12)*
- *“by the one man’s offence many died” (5:15)*
- *“the judgment which came from one offence resulted in condemnation” (5:16)*
- *“by the one man’s offence death reigned” (5:17)*
- *“through one man’s offence judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation” (5:18)*
- *“by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (5:19).*

⑨ These dreadful results of sin did not fall only upon Adam and Eve but also upon all their posterity. Today we suffer the consequences, in the nature we bear with all human kind: “*Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin*” (5:12).

The margin of the Authorized Version of the Bible says “*in him all*

have sinned". The 19th verse makes clear how this could be, when it states that by Adam's disobedience we "*were made sinners*". Literally, we were appointed or constituted sinners, for Adam by his transgression unleashed the power of sin, the susceptibility to evil that resides in all his progeny and causes them to succumb to the promptings of their corrupt nature. When Adam sinned it became inevitable that we should inherit his corrupt nature and become sinners like him. In this sense when Adam sinned we all sinned, for the consequences of his act adversely affected us all.

We are not responsible for Adam's sin. It is our misfortune that we suffer because of it. We are responsible for our own sins and although we die because of Adam's sin, it is our own sins that could keep us in the grave for ever, but for the hope of salvation, offered to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fallen Image

Although these consequences are not explicitly stated in Genesis chapter 3,

all these truths are implicit in that chapter. They just need a little thought and consideration. For example, have you ever asked yourself why the events in Eden could not have been put right in a simpler way? Why did He not make a fresh start with their children and forget what had happened with Adam and Eve? It was because the action of the parents had involved all their posterity in their fallen condition; that was why God now acted as He did.

All human kind would now bear the curse of sin's flesh, and when Adam begat children, they were born in "*his own likeness, after his image*" (Genesis 5:3). Sadly, but inevitably, Adam's fallen condition was now reproduced in his children, and the dreadful consequences for all his posterity is emphasized by the words that run like a refrain through the remainder of that chapter 5. For the common lot of all who spring out of Adam's loins is summed up in those words which echo like a tolling bell: "*and he died ... and he died ... and he died*" (Genesis 5:5,8,11,14,17, etc.)

Dudley Fifield

Storms of Life

Storms may rage and winds may blow
And hailstones rend the air;
Clouds seem dark and lowering,
Yet God is always there.

When all our troubles loom so large
And we need peace within our soul,
What better than to rest assured
That God is always in control.

Peggy Rawson



Part Two

The Problem of Suffering

In the first part of this short series, **Lawrence Cave** showed that much human suffering comes about as a result of our own actions, whether from minor injuries, accidents or life-style choices. Often we know what we should do, but choose to do something else, regardless of the consequences. But we may get caught up in something – like a civil war – over which we have no control. This is suffering caused by mankind, where we had no choice in the matter.

Wars and Persecution

We sometimes ask the question, “If there is a loving God, why has He allowed people to inflict so much suffering on other humans?” When we think like this, we should remember that if we want our Creator to intervene, He could well intervene in our lives and stop us doing things which cause suffering. Many of us would resent such restrictions in our lives. We all have a selfish streak which wants its own way.

The Bible doesn’t just explain what God is going to do to solve all our problems. It also tells us what the root problem is, and why we have a problem which needs urgent attention. That being so, it should not surprise us that, from time to time, our self-interest is the cause of suffering.

In the Bible, Jesus has an interesting comment about suffering inflicted on innocent people. Relations between the Roman governor Pilate and the Jews at the time of Jesus were never very good. The tension from time to time resulted in blood being shed. The people pointed out to Jesus a recent incident:



The results of atrocities in Cambodia

“There were present at that season some who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.’” (Luke 13:1-3).

Jesus answered their question by assuring his listeners that those killed were no more wicked than other people. The interesting point for us to note is that he is showing that such events should make us stop and think about the fact that we shall all die eventually. Such events disturb our routine and remind us that it could be our turn next. Like suffering caused by injuries, we are being warned that we have a problem that requires thinking about. This should encourage us to look into what life is all about.

Man-made problems

Almost all of us choose to do things which we know cause suffering. The way we cause pollution is just one example. We make the choice to pollute and must take the consequences of illnesses such as asthma.

If we were to expect a loving God to prevent all suffering, this would include that caused by pollution. This would affect most goods and services in industrialised countries.

All suffering caused by people should make us stop and think. We are being reminded that something is not as it should be. We should think about the consequences of what we are doing in relation both to other people and to the planet on which we live.

Many people are now thinking about the current and potential problems caused by human activity and are realising that there is something wrong. Measures are being taken to try and reduce the problems.



Many people suffer from asthma as a result of pollution

“Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5).

Jesus spelt out what we are capable of:

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man” (Matthew 15:19,20).

The prophet **Jeremiah** was even more blunt:

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

The apostle **James** in the New Testament tells us that we are an imperfect dying race because of this selfish streak:

“Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:14,15).

So, we clearly have a big problem to resolve if we are to see an end to human suffering. It requires a changed world and a changed society: individuals must think differently and act in a way which puts other people and their needs before their own.

That is exactly what God plans to achieve when He puts an end to suffering and sorrow.

Lawrence Cave

To be concluded

- ❖ We can choose how to live our lives
- ❖ We can choose how we treat other people
- ❖ Other people’s deaths remind us that our lives will not last for ever
- ❖ Suffering should make us think about the effect of our actions on others

Our Selfish Streak

That is the root of the problem: of the human dilemma. We do not always want to think about others because of the way we are made. The Bible tells us that we are basically self-centred. In the early days of our history, the Bible tells us what this produced:

Are You Ready for the Return of Christ?



People have long believed that if the sky is red at night, the following day will be a good one. To put it more poetically, the saying goes: "Red sky at night; Shepherd's delight."

But it isn't always true, whether the saying rhymes or not. In the time of the Lord Jesus there were similar sayings that were widely believed, and those were times when the weather mattered a great deal, especially if you were a farmer. Yet note how strongly Jesus rebuked those people who were busy about one thing, but who missed the thing that really mattered:

"He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red"; and in the morning, "It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening." Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matthew 16:2,3).

Signs of the Times

For centuries their Bible – known to us as the Old Testament – had forecast

the greatest of signs, a prophet who would herald the return of the Messiah. Then it happened, for John the Baptist came boldly proclaiming the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He issued a rousing call to all the nation: they were to repent and to receive him. Multitudes accepted John's clarion call and gladly went down into the waters of baptism, thus acknowledging the need for a change in their way of life.

Great men are often envied and John, outspoken to the end, finished his life beneath the executioner's sword. Immediately after this tragic outcome, the Lord Jesus continued with the same call. Now it was Jesus who commanded the people to "Repent". This required men and women to have a complete change of mind.

They were being called to a different way of life: to give loving and dedicated service, as true children of God. There was nothing mournful about such a life. Jesus offered good news and gave them an astonishing thought: *"I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).*

How rarely it happens today, that a sinner repents of his or her sin. Will you give joy in heaven? Do give an answer now. Tomorrow might be too late.

The Great Sign

The established religious leaders were greatly irritated by the success of this teaching, and they were deeply envious of his influence and power. Jesus knew that this enmity would grow and predicted to his disciples that he would suffer many things of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and be killed. But he also told them that he would be raised the third day (Matthew 16:21).

The resurrection from the dead of someone who had been publicly executed was to be a great sign: it would be unparalleled in history. The only sinless man who had ever lived was to be taken by jealous hands and handed over to Roman soldiers for a horrifying death on the cross. Yet, wonder of wonders, he would rise from his grave as a living testimony to the truth of his words, and the power of his Father. He did so.

The never-to-be-forgotten words of chapters 27 and 28 of Matthew's gospel account paint a graphic picture of the events of the day. At his death, an earthquake shook the land with such ferocity that even a godless soldier could proclaim: *"Truly this was the Son of God!"* (Matthew 27:54). Reverently his followers placed his body in a new tomb, but the dramatic events were not finished: they were only just beginning! As it began to

dawn towards the first day of another week the earth heaved again, and the guards quaked in their shoes as the grave stone rolled back.

Great News!

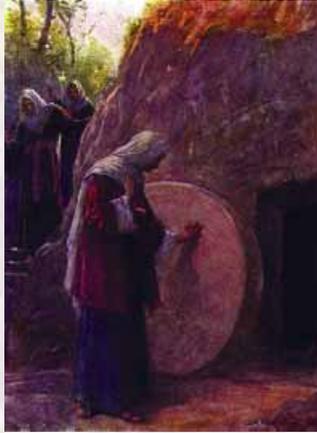
One cannot fail to be thrilled at the account of the sad women going to the tomb, only to meet an angel, who said marvellous words: *"go quickly and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead"* (28:7). Their feet sped from that cemetery to tell this message of the greatest joy. The grave had been conquered! But it didn't stop there. For six weeks the risen Lord remained with his disciples teaching and encouraging them. Finally he gave them this great commission:

"You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

What a task for such a small band, and what a privilege – to be allowed to continue his work and to spread this great news! And there was even greater news to come. Walking with him towards Bethany, across the Mount of Olives, before their astonished gaze he ascended to glory in heaven. And as he was ascending the angels that appeared said this:

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Glorious tidings like that cannot be hidden. Despite every obstacle the



news spread across the Roman Empire, and was so well attested that it has reached right down to the 21st century to stir our hearts.

Are We Ready?

All this poses an urgent question. “Are we prepared to meet our Lord?” Jesus foretold that great events would precede his return as king. There would be a time of unparalleled trouble and uncertainty, with great anxiety and worldwide unrest. Only the coming again of Jesus would cause all that sighing and sorrowing to cease and only then if men and women gave their hearts willingly to God. But will the Lord welcome us with pleasure, when he comes, or dismiss us?

The way we act now will decide his reaction then. Are there guidelines? There most certainly are!

1. We need a firm belief that God has spoken to us, and a response that shows that we are God’s children. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, but that faith must be translated into actions.
2. We too have to repent, realise that our sins must be cleansed and a new start made. The Lord showed us the way when he went down into the waters of baptism. We must follow his example, for among his last words on earth was the command to his followers: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19.)
3. Have you been baptized? Bible baptism means being put totally under water, as an adult who has reasoned his or her need for God’s

grace. There is no other way, for the Saviour had said, “You *MUST* be born again” (John 3:7). We either believe or perish. Baptism brings us to a new birth in Christ, and we enter God’s family. There is no greater privilege. But we cannot stop there for if we have been so honoured we must show that we are Christians. Do we? We make the answer now.

What Baptism means

Baptism is not the end but the beginning of a new and committed life, a life that is due to last forever. As the apostle Paul said: “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23). Eternal life is a present from heaven for those who are preparing for the Lord’s coming. We cannot receive it if our life is of unending pleasure, or we join in the immorality of the age, indulge in drugs, or become obsessed with sex.

We are shown a finer way, a nobler way that leads to a radiant future. The present age parallels that of Noah’s time. God obliterated that era when He judged it and found it faulty. He will deal with this crooked generation too. Soon His Son will return as King of Kings, to purge this world of its wickedness, and accept those who long for his appearing. Will we be there?

Put Self Aside

How then are we to prepare for our Lord’s return? The Christian tries to the uttermost to be a saint. It means putting self on one side and coming to the Bible with humble and thankful hearts. We must not only read what God has commanded, but we must live it too. If we can do that, it will eradicate all self-pity and pride. It will mean

that we give more:

- ✓ *more love to our parents, children and partners;*
- ✓ *more effort to our employers, and*
- ✓ *more appreciation to our employees.*

This will not be the debased love of the 21st century, but the enduring love shown throughout the Bible to sinners. We will see the tremendous effort that the Saviour made to present himself faultless before the Father. We will try to follow his footsteps, however far we feel we fall short of his ideal. Can we do it? We must try if we are to be preparing for the greatest event of all time.

God's Offer

It is only when we acknowledge our lawlessness before God that we can accept His offer of salvation. It will bring to us a peace and a quality of life that leads to a new paradise here on the earth. We will see an era of glory that has never been seen on earth before. All men and women will worship God who made it possible. It doesn't matter whether we are white, black, red or yellow, God loves all His creation (John 3:16).

Do not let us be prejudiced or lazy about the great invitation. Our very future depends on our life now. Ask questions and look for answers. What is God like? What is He saying to me? Is there more I have to learn? How do I react to trouble in my life?

If we are really sure that God has spoken in His Word – the Bible – we can build a faith that will never let us down. We can have confidence in the future. We can see each day as given us to live to His glory. Our whole life will revolve around Him. He has blessed us, and by grace we will praise Him for evermore.

You may ask: "Why doesn't God send His Son now, when there is so much evil in the world?" The apostle Peter provides the answer:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

God's Appeal

God is appealing to you now. We can read His call on page after page of the Bible, the most dynamic book in the world. Consider it prayerfully, then respond with your whole being, and go out and share your bounty with others. We can see the challenge, so let us surrender our will to God.

- ❖ *Let Him speak to you.*
- ❖ *Let Christ live in you.*
- ❖ *Believe, repent, be baptised and let your whole life be converted to Him.*

There is no finer way. Do not sit on the fence of indecision, but show the humility of the man who called out, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). God grant that you and I will be ready, for Christ will return.

Ken Clark

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The Christian and Politics

We are told by the apostle Paul that the government of the country in which we live has been set there by God.

“Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1,2).

It follows from the fact that God has appointed the various governments of the world, that the Christian cannot take part in revolutions or demonstrations or strikes in an attempt to bring about change. Jesus himself lived under Roman rule, and suffered with his fellow countrymen from the occupation of his country. But he did nothing to overthrow Roman rule.

Not of this world

When Pilate questioned the Lord Jesus as to his political status, he insisted that though he was a king, his kingdom did not belong to this world. That is a useful pointer for us – the Christian’s kingdom is not of this world. It will come, when God is ready, but it does not yet exist on earth. Paul has a similar ruling in the passage we have just looked at, where he says: *“Let every soul be subject to the governing*

authorities” and “whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God”.

It is for the very same reason that true Bible Christians will not vote in elections to appoint government officers, whether in local elections or national ones. They have to act like pilgrims and strangers; as the faithful have done in every age. When an election takes place in one country, a person from another country is not allowed to take part in the voting. He or she lives in the country, but has no part in its affairs. That is exactly the position to adopt.

What about Conscription?

Some countries, including Eastern European ones, have compulsory military training for young men, and in some cases women too. Even in countries with a professional army, in a time of war inevitably there is conscription, which means men below middle age are obliged by law to take up arms to defend the State. As followers of Jesus, we are forbidden to defend ourselves with violence, or to take away human life:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you



to go one mile, go with him two” (Matthew 5:38-41).

No matter how severe the provocation may be, the Christian is not to strike back. He is to leave his life in the hands of God and the angels. There was a time when Jesus himself was attacked by enemies – at his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane. Peter bravely pulled out a sword and began to hit out at the people who were holding his Lord. But Jesus immediately rebuked him:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?’” (Matthew 26:52,53).

Hard though it is to suppress our natural instincts to defend ourselves, it is our duty to leave everything in the hands of God. *‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay’*, He says (Romans 12:19). Historians record that the first century Christians refused to fight in the Roman army. Gibbon, in his mammoth book *‘The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire’* writes:

“The Christians felt and confessed that human institutions might be necessary for the present system of the world, and cheerfully submitted to the authority of their pagan governors. But while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience, they refused to take an active part in the civil administration or the military defence of the Empire.”

On entering military service, a soldier has to swear an oath of allegiance. In this he promises to obey senior officers, and to give his life for his country if required. But Bible Christians have

no such allegiance to the country where they live. They belong to God’s kingdom. There is a practical point which confirms this is the correct attitude to adopt. Suppose a Bible Christian were to join the army. He has sworn to obey orders. His officer commands him to drop bombs on an enemy city. He knows there are Bible Christians, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, living there. How can he possibly kill his brothers and sisters? In the American Civil War 150 years ago the early Christadelphians asked to be excused from military service for exactly this reason. There were believers in both the North and the South and they could not kill each other. In the Great War of 1914-18 some Christadelphians went to prison for refusing to be conscripted, and a brother in Germany was executed.

People will say it is not realistic for a country to live by Jesus’ rules. “What about Hitler”, they say: “Surely this evil man had to be stopped by force? If the Allies had not attacked him, he would have conquered the world, and we would all have been slaves.” The fact is that Jesus’ commands were not intended for nations. They are for individuals. Those individuals are being trained for the future age, when they will help Jesus bring judgment upon unrepentant men and women. But for the moment they cannot support one state or another. They must remain neutral. Happily they know that when God’s judgments are over, there will come a time of universal peace, when all nations will be taught to live by Jesus’ standards, and men ‘will learn war no more’.

God’s Law or Man’s?

You may feel at this point that there is a conflict here. On the one hand, we

must obey the laws of the country in which we live; yet when that law says we must fight, we are to disobey that law! That is absolutely true, and there is an important principle here. If God's law conflicts with man's law, we have to give God's law priority. For example, when Peter and his friends had been strictly forbidden to preach about Jesus, they disobeyed their earthly rulers. Here is their defence:

"When they had brought them, they set them before the [Jewish] council. And the high priest asked them, saying, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood on us!' Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:27-29).

There are other scriptural examples of brave men who defied their rulers when they had to choose between God's law and man's. Daniel's three friends were commanded to bow down to an idol. They refused, because God's law said they must not. They were prepared to die in the fiery furnace rather than abandon their principles. And Daniel himself was thrown into the lion's den because he would not obey the king's decree that all people should worship only him.

Refusing To Fight

Human rights legislation says that people who find military service unacceptable, because it goes against their conscience, have a right to exemption. Most Western countries have agreed procedures for people who refuse to fight for reasons of conscience. The 'conscientious objector', as he is called, is made to attend a court or tri-

bunal, where he is examined to ensure he is genuine, and not just seeking to avoid military service out of fear. If his case is approved, he then has to undertake alternative service to the army by doing work 'of national importance'. This includes tasks such as hospital work, farming, forestry or mining. Such people were despised and hated because they would not fight for their country, and some were bullied or had to spend spells in prison. They accepted this reproach as suffering for the sake of Christ.

It is clear that young Bible Christians have a test of their faith when the time comes for them to register their objection to military service. It must be remembered, though, that even middle aged people may be 'called up' if war breaks out. We all have to be ready to take our stand for Christ, even though the consequences may be unpleasant. And there is one very important point on which to conclude. If we have to stand before a tribunal committee to prove we are genuine, we will need to have evidence to support our claim. We will need to be able to show that we attended services, that we read the Bible every day and said our prayers, and that our life was free from drunkenness and immorality.

Could your neighbours give evidence that you were a changed person after you were baptised – that you showed kindness and forgiveness to others, cared for the poor, spoke the truth, and kept your promises? If not, it is high time to make changes, because, who knows, it could be very soon when we all have to stand before the tribunal of the Lord Jesus himself.

David M Pearce

The Kingdom at Hand!



It isn't often nowadays that you see a man wearing a sandwich board that says something like "Eat at Joe's" on one side and "The End Is Nigh!" on the other. It's difficult to know if such advertising really worked but it is clear that it is no longer fashionable, which is why the technique has been abandoned.

Unfashionable

When John the Baptist started telling people to prepare for what was about to happen, and when the Lord Jesus indeed appeared, as predicted, both these messengers from God had an unfashionable message. Their basic message was:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus was the long-promised King of that Kingdom, so when he says that we need to do something in preparation for the coming Kingdom, we should listen. It was important for the people of his day, and it is equally important for us, for the indications are that the return to earth of the Lord Jesus is now at hand.

What should the message have meant to those who first heard it? Clearly many believed it and repented and were baptized in the expectation that soon the Messiah would come

and reign over God's people, bringing them deliverance from their enemies, the Romans.

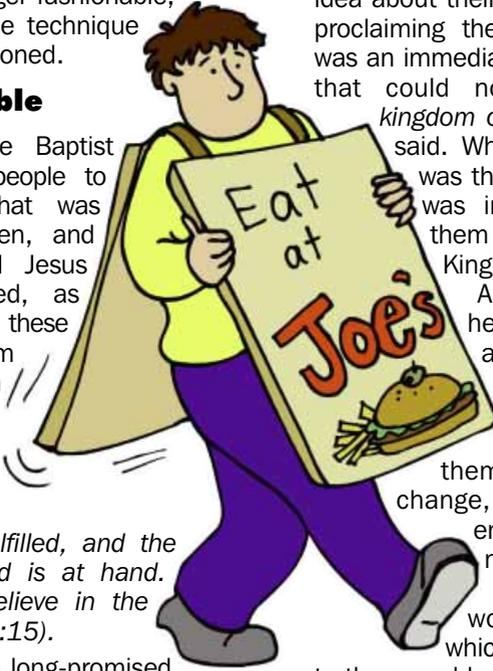
All Mixed Up

History tells us that they had the wrong idea about their Messiah. Jesus came proclaiming the message and there was an immediacy about the message that could not be denied: "the kingdom of God is at hand", he said. What they failed to realise

was that the kingdom of God was indeed there amongst them – in the person of their King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As he walked, taught, healed amongst them, as he challenged their lives, showing them their errors, their sin, and also showing them how they could change, he was the living embodiment of God's new world order.

Jesus showed them a world without defect which was founded upon truth, a world which was full of compassion for the human condition, a world which rested entirely upon God's will and His power, eternally safe and indestructible. And this despite the fact that men, be it the ruling Jews or the Roman government, would do their collective best to destroy it. But the life of Jesus was not that easily quenched and they only succeeded in showing – through the public execution and subsequent resurrection of Jesus – that his life really was, and is, invincible.



Jesus showed us that men can and should live their lives as if they were in the kingdom of God now, but also that we should live in constant expectation of his Coming as King.

First Importance

This is how Jesus said we should live, and his words have everyday relevance:

"... do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:31-34).

That is his counsel about how we should live now: but notice the idea of "seeking". Put the kingdom of God first in your life, Jesus is saying. It is something to be looked for, to be anticipated, and to be prayed for:

"Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven ..." (Matthew 6: 9-13)

The kingdom of God is clearly one of the first things for which Jesus told us to pray, with a particular purpose in mind; 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. God's will is done in heaven but, whilst God rules over all the world in which we live, He has allowed man the freedom of choice as to whether we do His will or not. All the evidence points to the fact that mankind now pays very little, if any, attention to what God wants. His will and purpose are not considered by

most people; indeed, even His very existence is widely disregarded.

Lifted Up

It was not like that with Jesus. The testimony of the life of Jesus is that he perfectly fulfilled the will of God. In speaking to the Jews Jesus once said:

"When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father taught me, I speak these things. And he who sent me is with me. The Father has not left me alone, for I always do those things that please him" (John 8:28,29).

Jesus obeyed God perfectly, but when will the world as a whole comply? How will the will of God be done on earth as it is done in heaven? When the Lord Jesus reigns from Jerusalem, that is the time when all on earth will come to obey God's will. Then there will be real peace and harmony filling all things. I believe it to have been John Ruskin who said:

"The power and glory of all things consists in them being obedient to the divine law, from insect to archangel, from grain of dust to planet. At the pinnacle is man who chooses to reflect the divine glory by the obedience of faith."

When this situation prevails throughout the earth then the kingdom of God will have come. In the meantime, it is interesting to note that as a result of the teaching of Jesus it is said that, 'many believed in him' (John 8:30). This is a reminder that when we hear his voice, we too should believe, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

David Nightingale

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