

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



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Life After Death

TAKE A LOOK at the front cover picture. It's a still life painting by a 19th Century artist called Henri Fantin-Latour. The flowers are so vibrant, you can almost smell them.

A few days after they were painted those flowers will have faded, wilted and died, and eventually there would be nothing left of them but dust. A few years afterwards, the same thing happened to their painter. That's how life is.



The transience of our lives is not something we tend to like to think about. Some prefer to ignore it. Others take the attitude that as they don't have long, they need to do everything they can to enjoy the time they have—*"Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"* (Isaiah 22:13). Others turn to religion for comfort.

The central appeal of most of the world's religions is the promise that death is not the

end—that there is some part of a person that can live on. It may surprise you to learn that the Bible is almost unique among all the world's religious texts in that it insists that this is not true:

For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? (Psalm 6:5).

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... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

Is Death the End?

How can this be? Isn't life after death a central theme of the Bible? Yes it is. Jesus Christ talked about it frequently:

And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:40).

How do you reconcile these verses? On the one hand, death is the end of existence; on the other hand, God offers everlasting life to those who want it.

The answer to the puzzle is summarised in a report that was published in 1945 by a Church of England commission, called

Towards the Conversion of England. The report noted that the idea of an indestructible human soul “owes its origin to Greek, not to Bible, sources. The central theme of the New Testament is eternal life, not for anybody and everybody, but for believers in Christ as risen from the dead” (Article 53).

This is true. The idea of the ‘immortal soul’—the spark of consciousness which is said to be the essence of life, which is independent of the body and can go to heaven when the body dies—is not an idea which is found in the Bible.

Evidently this report was not widely accepted, because the Church of England along with the majority of other Christian denominations continues to encourage belief in the immortal soul. Nevertheless, the report’s finding is correct. The idea of the immortal soul can be traced directly to the Greek philosophers, notably Plato who lived in the 4th–5th Century BC. What the Bible says about the human soul is quite different:

Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son

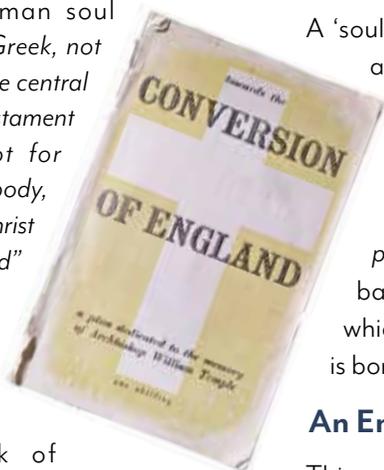
is Mine; the soul who sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:4).

A ‘soul’, according to the Bible, is simply a living creature. When we see the word in an English Bible it’s usually a translation of the Hebrew word *nephesh* (Old Testament) or the Greek word *psyche* (New Testament), which basically mean ‘living being’, ‘that in which there is the breath of life’. A soul is born, it lives, it dies.

An Emotive Subject

This subject calls for sensitivity. The idea that we have an eternal spark within us that will be unharmed by what happens to our body can be tremendously comforting when we or a loved one are facing the end of life. I knew a lady who had been encouraged by the thought that her parents and husband were in heaven. When she started to read her Bible and to suspect that this was not the case, she said it was like being bereaved of them all over again.

But the Bible does talk about life after death, in great detail. It describes what it is, what it will be like, how it works and why it works, and how to obtain it—logically, consistently, and beautifully. Read on to find out more.





Reflections at a Graveside

THE SUN WAS breaking through the clouds, and it was mild for a British January day. My friend had chosen to have a ‘natural burial’: he was to be buried in a wicker basket in an open field at the edge of a wood.

I stood with his family and other friends under the eaves of the wood, overlooking the beautiful countryside of Herefordshire and Worcestershire with its rolling hills and green quilted farmland.

What were our thoughts as we laid him to rest? The grave seems so final. There is no opportunity to say anything we perhaps should have said before; even just to tell him how much he was loved, that we wished we could have spent more time together. In these situations there is a sense of emptiness, frustration, loss and finality.

Jesus at the Graveside

It is interesting to think of the Lord Jesus at the graveside of his friend Lazarus. The account is in John chapter 11. How did he feel?

Jesus and his disciples arrived at the house of three close friends, Lazarus and his

sisters Mary and Martha. Mary came out to meet him, weeping.

He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And he said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” (John 11:33–36).

Grief, compassion, sympathy and even anger are suggested by the original Greek words which are used to describe how Jesus felt over the death of Lazarus. The anger almost certainly was because some of those present were insincere and were using the occasion to be critical. As we read on we find that Jesus was in fact about to bring Lazarus back to life again—fully healed of the disease which had caused him to die. But let’s make no mistake, Jesus genuinely felt the grief as all other human beings do, standing beside the grave of a loved one.

Why Do We Die?

I hardly need to ask the question: why is death such a terrible thing? The answer takes us back to the very beginning—to Genesis chapter 3. Adam and Eve had

been given a command, not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). They disregarded God's command and did their own thing. God had said that they would die if they ate the fruit, and so it happened—their nature was changed and they became dying creatures.



Was this not right? What a dreadful thing it would have been if they had become immortal sinners, considering the amount of wickedness some people manage to cram into one life-time!

So there had to be one rule for all. This was God's sentence:

Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return (Genesis 3: 17-19).

This is not the full story, but what it amounts to is that humankind's existence from then

on would be a struggle, which would be a constant reminder of mortality. This theme is continued throughout the Bible:

Nevertheless man, though in honour, does not remain; he is like the beasts that perish (Psalm 49:12).

This is pretty terrible stuff! But what we should also realise is that it is all out of God's love for us. The entire human race has become corrupt because of sin,* and living for ever in that state of corruption would be a terrible condemnation. So, yes, we die—and potentially we perish for ever. But God has given us hope.

Hope Beyond Death

John's Gospel expresses this beautifully:

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).

Yes, there is still corruption at work amongst all men and women—but by faith in God there is also hope of an everlasting and incorruptible life.

So as I stood at the graveside of my friend, I was comforted in the knowledge that not only was he loved by all of us standing there: he was loved by God also. And God is able to make him live again.

My friend believed in God, and his life revolved around that belief. In his life he

* For a definition of sin see page 18.

had tried by faith to follow the example of Jesus, who had lived an ordinary human life subject to all the challenges of human nature, but unlike us overcame them all. Jesus died a terrible death on the cross, then rose again from the dead—the same Jesus, and recognisably so, to live for ever. He is alive even now, in heaven, watching over his people and waiting for that time when he will return to set up God’s Kingdom. When he returns he will take to himself those who have followed him in their lives—whether they are alive or dead at the time he returns, that won’t matter—and they will live with him for ever in his Kingdom.

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).



Notice how the Apostle Paul expresses this. Those who are loved by God are described, not as perishing, but as asleep. Naturally, at the end of each day, we go to sleep and expect to awaken in the morning, refreshed, ready to start again—so this is the hope for all true believers.

Paul continues:

For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in

Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at his coming (vs. 21–23).

My friend is sleeping, and awaits the resurrection at the last day.

What Matters in Life

So what really matters? It matters of course that we have used this life well—to the honour and glory of God, living it as closely as we can to the revealed will of God, by faith.

It matters that amassing a fortune, having a good time, worldly ambition, human pride all count for nothing. What really matters is that we believe in God’s love for us—that He is willing to forgive us for all our weakness and sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are baptised and live as he wants us to then when he returns he will by grace grant us that wondrous blessing of eternal healthfulness—whether we are alive or dead at the time.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son (Revelation 21: 7).

And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 John 5:4).

So on that bright winter morning as I gazed into the grave’s abyss, it was in the sure and certain hope that my friend will rise from the dead. By God’s grace we will meet again.

David Nightingale



The Virus and the Bible

THE CORONAVIRUS has caused havoc throughout the world. There has not been such a crisis or such global fear since World War Two. Leaders instruct us how to protect ourselves, whilst giving optimistic messages. But in this unprecedented situation it is difficult to see the long-term solution. Some people are asking the question: “Why?”

Some religious leaders claim that this dreadful disease and its consequences were predicted in the Bible book of Revelation. Others have declared it to be judgement from God for our wickedness, and a sign of the ‘end of the world’. Are these statements right?

There were occasions in the Bible when God did send plagues to punish people. For instance when the Israelites were journeying through the wilderness towards the Promised Land:

... the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague (Numbers 11:33).

Sometimes large numbers died (14,700 in Numbers 16:49, and 24,000 in Numbers 25:9). Moreover, as they approached the Promised Land God warned them that if they disobeyed Him they would be plagued and chastised again (Deuteronomy 28:15–22).

These accounts are part of the Bible, so they have divine authority. Nowadays, we do not have such authority. So it is unwise to attribute our problems to the direct intervention of God, when they could be a result of our own actions or inactions. When a tower fell on and killed 18 Jews in the time of Jesus, he said that the victims were no more evil than other people (Luke 13:4). We cannot always know “why”.

Things We Do Know

There are things about God that we most certainly do know. His character is love (1 John 4:8). So He is ‘*merciful, gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth*’ (Exodus 34:6). He made the earth to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18), and full of His glory (Numbers 14:21). He knows everything (Psalm 139:1–12) and nothing is too hard for Him (Jeremiah 32:27). His plans can never be thwarted:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void (Isaiah 55:11).

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

We do know that one day the world as we know it will end, when Jesus comes back to

raise the dead, to judge people and to set up God's kingdom on earth:

The Lord Jesus Christ... will judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom (2 Timothy 4:1).

He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

We know that before this there will be a time of great trouble:

And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:1-2).

And while we must remember that the dramatic images in the book of Revelation are figurative, not literal, the book does contain warnings of judgement (Revelation 9:18-21, 15:1, 16:18-21, 18:4-10). Ignoring God is foolish. Throughout the Bible He urges us to listen to Him and turn to Him.

So we cannot say that Coronavirus is necessarily a judgement sent from God, or that it was specifically foretold in the Bible. But it may well give us cause to sit up and think.

What We Should Do

After the tower had collapsed, Jesus told the people that they should all repent

so that they could be saved from death, which—after all—eventually comes to us all (Luke 13:5). He promised his true followers eternal life in his kingdom.

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 (John 3:16).

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. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 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).

Jesus told us to watch and to prepare for his return. He encouraged believers not to worry about this life, but to 'seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness' (Matthew 6:33).

We cannot help but be profoundly moved by the devastation caused to people's lives by such disasters as the Coronavirus pandemic, and it is hard not to worry about it. But surviving the virus cannot bring us eternal life. Taking notice of God's message in the Bible can!

Anna Hart

Joel

A prophecy of forthcoming judgements in Israel, including the final conflict in which God will dramatically intervene.

The Locust Plague (chapter 1) From the start God had warned Israel that if they turned from His word, great disasters would follow (Deuteronomy 28). Literal plagues of locusts were sent to remind God’s people of what He had said. When He appealed to the Jews through the prophet Joel, around 800BC, God likened the forthcoming invasions of human armies to the cutting, swarming, hopping, destroying locusts, which they may already have experienced (1:4).



Invading Armies (chapter 2) Assyrian and Babylonian invasions of the land of Israel, foretold in this chapter, were followed centuries later by Greek, Roman and Arab incursions. These left the Holy Land desolate until 1917AD, when the Jews were allowed to return.

Promise of Blessing (2:18–32) The troubles which were to come on God’s

people had as their object the return of Israel to the true worship of God. Great blessings are promised when this national repentance finally comes. Meanwhile, the greatest invasion of the Holy Land is yet to take place!

The Final Invasion (chapter 3) Details are given of an invasion by all nations, at a time when Israel are back in their land (3:1), as they are today.

The wickedness of all nations is now so great (verses 12–13) that when North and South become involved in a great Middle East conflict, God’s judgements will be seen on the earth. The time is ripe for the putting in of His “sickle” (verse 13) and the cutting down of the wicked! Verse 16 describes God’s dramatic intervention by sending Jesus Christ to establish his kingdom with its capital Jerusalem.

Norman Owen

By kind permission of ‘The Christadelphian’

Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible

- ◆ Joel 1:4; 2:25—see Deuteronomy 28:38,42.
- ◆ Joel 2:27; 3:17—see Ezekiel 37:26–28.
- ◆ Joel 3:2—see Zechariah 14:2–4.
- ◆ Joel 3:13—see Revelation 14:14–19.

Humility

THIS IS A prayer to God, written by a king:

*I am poor and needy; make haste to me,
O God! You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay (Psalm 70:5).*

Notice the humility here of a man whom ordinarily you wouldn't expect to show it. He had after all been anointed the King of God's people.

Yet God rewards humility. Jesus demonstrated this when he said:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:3–5).

The importance of humility is emphasised in the book of Micah, where it is listed as one of three qualities God requires in those who come to Him:

He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8).

Humility is however very difficult to achieve. We naturally want the opposite—to build ourselves up in the sight of others. How, then, do we achieve meekness when it is contrary to our nature?



Moses was described as the perfect example of humility: “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

Moses spent the first 40 years of his life as an Egyptian prince in Pharaoh's household—and his next 40 years as a shepherd. He learned to be the leader of the nation by caring for sheep. David also started life as a shepherd—that's where he learned the skills of kingship. And Jesus himself described himself as a shepherd: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Three great leaders, whose lives were characterised by putting others first.

God requires humility in those who come to Him. The meek will inherit the earth. We can learn this essential quality from some great characters of the Bible, and best of all from Jesus Christ:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28–29).

Robin de Jongh

Christ Is Risen!

A man trudges wearily homewards. The strain of hard experience shows in his face. Last year his farm was flooded and all his livestock died. Thankfully his family survived, but they were left with nothing, and they were facing the very real prospect of starvation. He'd sowed his last few grains of rice with a fearful heart. But now there is some light in his eyes, because he is bringing home the first gathered crops—the firstfruits. In these fruits is centred all the hope, joy and thankfulness of those who have been saved from perishing.



In this man's rural community the firstfruits can be critically important. This is how agricultural life has worked for most of history. This life was well known in Bible times, and the Bible uses the picture of the firstfruits to illustrate the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

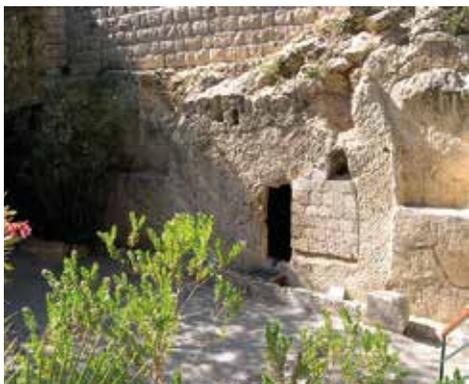
The rising of Jesus Christ from the dead brought hope to the world, because the firstfruits hold the promise of the full harvest to follow.

This fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is often known as the 'resurrection chapter', because in it the Apostle Paul explains in detail about resurrection—rising from the dead. The Bible relates how Jesus Christ rose alive from the tomb, and Paul explains that the fact of Christ's resurrection is crucial to the Gospel message: *"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" (v. 17).*

This is because it is inextricably linked with the core beliefs of Christianity. All these beliefs are futile without the resurrection of Jesus. The whole plan of creation from the beginning, the whole scheme of divine redemption, the fact of salvation and the purpose of God Almighty, all revolve around the resurrection of Jesus. They require that what happened at the break of dawn on the first Sunday after Christ's crucifixion, in the garden, when the stone was rolled away and revealed an empty tomb, is true. It is the world's greatest wonder, mentioned dozens of times in the New Testament. It was the absorbing theme and the crux of the message of the Apostles (for example Acts 17:2–3, 31).

The Significance of Christ's Resurrection

A Muslim once said to a Christian preacher that he was able to point to the tomb of his prophet and was therefore sure that he lived, whereas Christians cannot even be sure of the place where Jesus Christ was buried. That is true! But the empty tomb is the glory and the very foundation of the Christian faith. Jesus Christ not only lived but he is still alive and is alive for evermore. The message of Christianity is not that Jesus once lived, it is that Jesus lives. We are not interested in where the tomb is, for the message of the angels was and is “He is not here, but is risen!” (Luke 24:6). And this supreme confidence is expressed by Paul: “If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile” (1 Corinthians 15:17).



The Bible is the infallible Word of God and the Old Testament prophets were messengers of God, who were moved to proclaim their messages by the Holy Spirit of God, and not at all through human desire (2 Peter 1:20–21). The resurrection of

Jesus Christ is the subject of Bible prophecy and so the truth and integrity of the Word of God depends on the truth of the resurrection. The Apostle Paul assures us “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4).

To which ‘scriptures’ was he referring? One Bible prophecy which speaks about Christ’s resurrection is Psalm 16, which the Apostle Peter quoted in his speech on the day of Pentecost:

I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence (Acts 2:25–28).

If this miracle of the resurrection was discredited the very fabric of the believer’s faith in the Bible would be shattered.

*If Christ is not risen, then **faith in the Word of God** is futile.*

All down the ages true believers have acknowledged their failings and prayed fervently to God for forgiveness of their sins. This is the consequence of a strong faith in the promise that Jesus Christ has delivered them from sin. They have put their faith in the effect of the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:28). They have had unshaken faith in the absolute victory

of the Lord Jesus over sin and death (Romans 6:9).

But the forgiveness of sins depends upon the truth of the resurrection. When Paul speaks about our being counted as righteous he links this with the resurrection of Jesus (Romans 4:20–25; Romans 10:9). The Apostle Peter makes the same link when talking about Christ and the second Psalm (Acts 13:32–37).

*If Christ is not risen, then
faith in forgiveness is futile.*

Christians look forward to a future life beyond the grave. The true doctrine of a future life depends not upon the flight of an immortal soul to heaven at death, but upon the resurrection of the body from the grave. This body will be changed, made gloriously immortal as Jesus is now—but it will still be the same body.



Christ's resurrection from the tomb puts the doctrine and fact of immortality upon an unshakable and immovable foundation. The resurrection of Christ foreshadows the resurrection of his disciples. He is the firstfruits of those who are 'asleep'. His resurrection is the assurance of a

harvest which is yet to be when the Lord Jesus returns in power and great glory (1 Corinthians 15:20–28). The hope of a future life is entirely dependent upon the truth of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, because all other resurrections depend in turn upon the raising up of Jesus to life:

For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:16–19).

*If Christ is not risen, then
faith in life after death is futile.*

One of the fundamental teachings of the Bible is the personal return to the earth of Jesus Christ in power and great glory, to sit upon the throne of David as King of Israel and ruler of the world, and to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. While this is not widely recognised, the evidence of its truth is overwhelming in the Bible. In the very dark hours of the life of Jesus Christ he proclaimed it. When it became evident that his kingship was rejected he assured his dejected and disillusioned disciples that he would come to earth again with all the holy angels and reward every man according to his works (Matthew 25:31–46).

The apostles repeatedly preached the resurrection of Jesus. In Athens Paul argued that the resurrection of Jesus and his return are coupled together inseparably. Because one has happened, the other must also.

This is the assurance that God has given to us. He has raised His Son from the dead. Jesus Christ is alive and will therefore return with power and glory to establish God's Kingdom (Acts 17:31–32).

*If Christ is not risen, then
faith in God's Kingdom is futile.*



And what good is a kingdom if the king is dead? What good is a throne if there is only a corpse to sit on it? How can the righteous hope for a reward, if he who has their reward is still lifeless? All the promises of God about Jesus depend upon the truth of his resurrection.

*If Christ is not risen, then
faith in his return is futile.*

The first act of obedience that a Christian is called upon to do after believing the Gospel of Salvation is to be baptised into the saving name of Jesus Christ. Total immersion in water is a symbol of being buried with Christ in the tomb, and rising from the water is a symbol of being raised with Christ from the tomb (Romans 6:2–4).

The symbolic power of baptism then depends entirely upon the truth of the raising of Jesus from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

*If Christ is not risen, then
faith in baptism is futile.*

Christ's first day out of that tomb in the garden at Jerusalem was the means of stirring fresh hope in the hearts and lives of his distracted disciples, as he revealed himself to them as the risen immortal Lord. It is the one way that we, who have not seen him, can have real hope. The resurrection of Jesus is absolutely vital to the Christian faith.

Back to the man on the road. His family were in danger of starvation, but having gathered the firstfruits he now has confidence that they will survive. The firstfruits are evidence of better days ahead; good news in the midst of despair. Such is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without it we would be most miserable. But believing in the resurrection as the token of what God has promised us we have hope of being saved, and for that we too can be unspeakably joyful.

Dennis Gillett

Questions? Comments?
We'd love to hear from you!

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We'll Never Walk Alone



IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL Mediterranean evening, and my wife and I offered to take our twin 18-month old grandsons on a stroll along the sea front in order to give their parents a bit of time to themselves.

We strolled hand in hand along the wide promenade, Nan and I and our two boisterous toddlers. It was quiet at this time of the evening, as most of the tourists were eating indoors.

One of the boys wanted to go in one direction, the other wanted to go the other way. Eventually, after a vigorous waltz with one of them in my arms, I managed to disconnect his sense of direction and we all headed happily towards the marina.

Independent as ever, the boys wanted to walk on their own. They were steady on their feet but needed to balance themselves with elbows out, so it was a case of 'look out anyone in their way'.

One of them headed for the low wall on one side of the promenade—he did not care about the drop to the beach below. The other wanted to play on the grass on the other side—he did not care that it was evidently also attractive to the local cats. Nan and I scuttled behind them, trying to ensure they remained within arm's reach.

The prom began to grow busier as tourists came out to enjoy the evening. Most of them dodged out of the way to allow the boys to pass without incident. Then we came upon two elderly Spanish ladies, dressed from head to toe in black, heads protected from the evening sun by wide-brimmed hats with veils draped across their faces. They stopped, stooped and cheerfully greeted the charging boys.

The boys stopped in their tracks, terrified. Then they turned as one and ran to cling to our legs—one to Nan, the other to me. We laughed, took them up in our arms and

approached the ladies. With our limited Spanish, we told them “Yes, the boys are brothers”, “Yes, they are twins”, “No, we don’t dress them alike as each has his own identity” ... well, words to that effect. That was followed by some polite chat and with a final “Buenas noches” we went our separate ways.

The boys were lowered to the ground, and they gripped our hands firmly—for about a minute, maybe two—then they broke free and resumed their oblivious headlong charge.

Returning to our apartment, Nan called the boys to get ready for a bath whilst I tidied up.

Previous guests had left in the apartment a selection of well thumbed novels. There was also a Bible, which was not well thumbed—its pages were as white as they were when it was placed there some 25 years ago. Such a shame that the Word of Life seems to appeal so little to people! I took it down and found the place I wanted.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:1-4).

Our twin grandsons had demonstrated that, when faced with a scary situation,

they knew they could turn instantly to Nan and Gramps and be safe. They had charged recklessly on their way, but we were behind them watching and ready.



That is how it is for those who are God’s children. He is always there. Sometimes we may take our hands from His, we may be reckless and foolish, we may try to run ahead and go our own way and we may even forget about Him in our haste. But when we turn back to Him, He will be there. And when we put our hand in His, He will lead us in the way we should go. As the Lord Jesus said, “*Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32).

David Jones

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SP

What do you mean by 'sin'?

MANY PEOPLE take the view that we as humans are basically good. Given the right conditions we'll live good lives, and when we've learnt enough we'll be able to sort out all our problems and live together in a world of prosperity and harmony.

This is an appealing idea. But look around you at the world, look back at history, and if you're really honest look hard at yourself. There is something fundamentally wrong with us. Humanity never has and, left to itself, never will live in harmony.

What is the problem? Modern philosophy finds it difficult to understand, but the Bible describes it perfectly—it calls it sin.

The Apostle Paul puts it like this: *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find"* (Romans 7:18). We all know how he felt. For example we know we should be kind, patient, selfless—but so often we find ourselves being unkind, impatient, selfish. Why do we do it?

'Sin' is another word for anything we do that is wrong: *"Whoever commits*

sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). The Bible also uses the word 'sin' to describe our very human nature, because human nature is prone to sin: *"If, then, I do what I will not to do... it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me"* (Romans 7:16–17).

The concept of sin is crucial. Not only because it enables us to make sense of why human nature is the way it is, but because it shows us what God has done to solve the problem. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to give his life as a perfect sacrifice. Jesus had the same human nature as the rest of us with all its temptations to do wrong—but he mastered it, he never sinned. When he died, he defeated sin. *"Now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself"* (Hebrews 9:26).

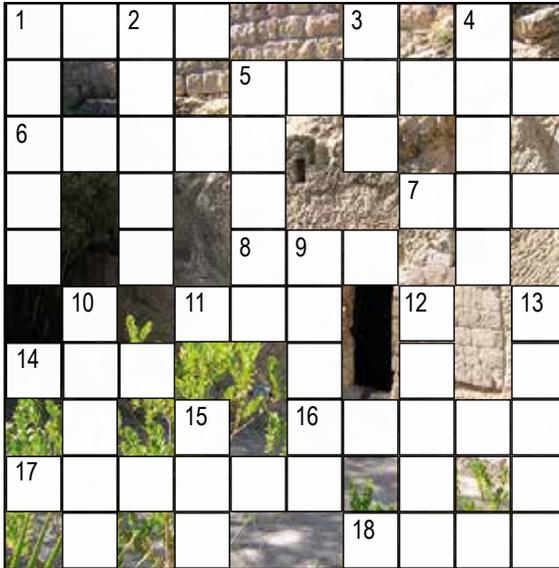
Sin leads to death. It's all explained at the beginning in Genesis chapter 3. But if we give our lives to Christ, we take advantage of the victory that he achieved: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Do you have a comment or question? E-mail editor@gladtidingsmagazine.org

Ed

Across

- 1 The women were reminded that Jesus had said he would do this (4) (Luke 24:7)
- 5 The title in 18 across was put there by this man (6) (John 19:19)
- 6 The women found that this had been rolled away from Jesus' tomb (5) (Luke 24:2)
- 7 The women left the tomb with this (3) (Matthew 28:8)
- 8 *And those who heard it said, "Who then ___ be saved?"* (3) (Luke 18:26)
- 11 A woman was healed when she touched this (3) (Matthew 9:20)
- 14 An angel ___ on the stone which was rolled away from the tomb (3) (Matthew 28:2)
- 16 Thomas wanted to see the print of these in Jesus' hands (5) (John 20:25)
- 17 The angels asked the women why they were looking for these among the dead (6) (Luke 24:5)
- 18 The title on the cross said that Jesus was king of these (4) (John 19:19)



Down

- 1 "He is not here, but is ___!" (5) (Luke 24:6)
- 2 The soldiers were bribed to say that the disciples ___ the body (5) (Matthew 28:13)
- 3 "He expounded to them in ___ the scriptures the things concerning himself" (3) (Luke 24:27)
- 4 Jesus ___ in the midst of his disciples... (5) (Luke 24:36)
- 5 ... and wished them this (5) (Luke 24:36)
- 9 "And they said ___ themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone?'" (5) (Mark 16:3)
- 10 One of the languages in which Jesus' title was written (5) (John 19:20)
- 12 The angels at Jesus' tomb wore clothing of this colour (5) (John 20:12)
- 13 Jesus expounded from the writings of this man (5) (Luke 24:27)
- 15 Jesus said he would do this on the right hand of the power of God (3) (Luke 22:69)

(These clues use the New King James version of the Bible. If you're using another version some words may not be quite the same.)

Colin Jannaway

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