

# Glad Tidings

*Of The Kingdom Of God*



## Featured Articles

The Danger of Cults (p. 3)

What Happens After Death? (p. 12)

The Politics of Jesus Christ (p. 15)

A monthly magazine written and 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 humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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# The Danger of Cults

THE NEW RELIGION of Christianity was regarded with suspicion by the Roman authorities. Christians didn't believe in the Roman gods, they worshipped another God. They behaved differently and had different moral values. Their insistence that they were all of equal status was an affront to the strictly hierarchical Roman society. Their peculiar ritual of taking bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ sounded to the Romans like cannibalism. They were seen as a threat.



Two thousand years later, Christianity has changed. Modern Christianity is a broad spectrum. At one end is the respectable mainstream, who may be barely distinguishable from their non-religious neighbours. At the other end are fanatics, with extreme views and lifestyles. You may have heard harrowing stories about so-called Christian cults which destroy lives. It's necessary to beware of these cults.

The problem is, true Christianity always has been seen as extreme, and it is still viewed by some as a dangerous cult, even today.

How can you decide what is a cult, and what is the genuine faith of the Bible?

Psychologists identify certain characteristics of cults. Let's compare these characteristics with what the Bible says about true Christianity.

- **A cult will have a charismatic leader.** This is a key indicator. True Christians revere Jesus Christ as their 'head' (Ephesians 4:15), their high priest (Hebrews 2:17), their saviour (Philippians 3:20) and their Lord (John 13:13). No other personalities matter. It's clear from the account of the early church that the apostles themselves did not lead by force of personality—for example the great Apostle Paul appears to have had little charisma (2 Corinthians 10:10). A true Christian community should not be dominated by a personality.

- **A cult will recruit by promising a new start as part of a chosen group.** To be a disciple of Christ is exactly this! *'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'* (1 Peter 2:9). You don't have to be special—what you need is to believe God and obey Him.

- **Cults often use 'rites of passage' to reinforce allegiance.** The start of the life as a follower of Christ is baptism—a simple but hugely profound public ceremony that

involves symbolic '*burial and resurrection*' by being dipped in water (Romans 6:3–4). Some call this a 'rite of passage'.

● **A cult will often recruit by means of 'love-bombing'**—extravagant shows of affection and flattery which make the victim feel special and wanted. The fact is, God loves us more than we can appreciate. So much that He gave His Son to die for us. Inevitably His followers will be loving people (John 13:34–35). But to become a Christian is a huge and life-changing commitment, and no one should be baptised until they are convinced of the truth of the Gospel and fully understand what they are doing.

● **Cults will seek to isolate their members from friends and family on the outside, often depicting the outside as evil.** According to Jesus Christ and his apostles, the world is a place of evil (John 7:7). Jesus said that being his disciple would result in tensions with those outside the faith (Matthew 10:35–36). Christians are urged to be separate from the world (2 Corinthians 6:17). But they are also told to love their neighbours (Luke 10:25–37) and shine as lights in the world (Matthew 5:16). This is not compatible with being isolated from friends and family.

● **Cults will require inordinate sacrifices from their members, often in the form of money.** Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for us, and he requires that we give nothing less than our lives to him (Matthew 16:24–27). However, the example of the early church shows that its activities were funded by free will offerings, and there was never coercion to give money or anything else (1 Corinthians 16:2).

● **Cults believe that the ends justify the means.** That is, they are justified in requiring any form of activity from their members, however strange or immoral, in the service of their cause. Christianity on the other hand is a life governed by a wholesome moral code, and no one is entitled to require behaviour that betrays that code: '*As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*' (1 Peter 1:15).

● **Cults will discourage members from expressing doubts or questions.** The Bible abounds with accounts of people expressing doubts and fears, questioning and learning. Christians should be encouraged to talk about their doubts and questions, that's how we learn.

This magazine is produced by Christadelphians. We are a small group of Bible believers who take our faith very seriously. We have been labelled a cult by some. But on the contrary, we see ourselves as a fellowship of people whose faith and practice is as close as you're likely to get to that of the First Century Christians. We invite you to take a look at us, and decide for yourself.



# Be Strong and of Good Courage

SINCE THE COVID-19 pandemic began people have become more fearful of mental illness caused by loneliness and anxiety about the future.



Increasingly we hear people speaking about 'mindfulness', 'mental wellbeing', building 'self confidence' and 'self esteem'.

During this time, while reading my Bible, I could not help noticing how often phrases like '*Be strong and of good courage*' and '*Do not fear*' occur. Reflecting on these is an effective remedy to the fearfulness and anxiety of modern life.

## Conquest of the Promised Land

Our journey begins when Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. He said to the people, '*Fear not, stand firm, and see*

*the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again*' (Exodus 14:13).

As they approached the Promised Land they defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, then Og king of Bashan came out against them. Moses encouraged the people:

*The LORD said to me, 'Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand. And you shall do to him as you did to Sihon the king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon... and I commanded Joshua at that time, 'Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings. So will the LORD do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you (Deuteronomy 3:2, 21–22).*

Moses urged the people to be strong and capture the land which God was giving them:

*If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?' you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the LORD your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt... You shall not be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God (Deuteronomy 7:17–21).*



As Moses was approaching the end of his life he encouraged the people again, and inaugurated his servant Joshua as their new leader:

*Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it"... And the LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you" (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23).*

Moses died, and the book of Joshua opens with God's commission to the people's new leader:

*Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do*

*not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go (Joshua 1:6–9).*

God told Joshua not to be afraid of the five kings of the Amorites with whom he fought (Joshua 8:1), and Joshua passed on the encouragement to his people: *'Do not be afraid or dismayed; be strong and courageous. For thus the LORD will do to all your enemies against whom you fight' (10:25).*

At the end of his life, when God had given the land to Israel, Joshua called the people together, and commanded them to be faithful to their God: *'Be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left' (23:6).*

## Kings of Israel

Some four hundred years later, Israel was ruled by the valiant king David who fought many battles, always being of good courage and strength. Near the end of his life he called for his son Solomon, and charged him to build a temple for the Lord God of Israel:

*Be careful now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be*



*strong and do it... Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the LORD God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished (1 Chronicles 28:10, 20).*

Other kings of Judah who followed Solomon were also exhorted to be strong and courageous. For example Asa in 2 Chronicles 15:7-8, Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 19:11 and 20:14-17 and Ahaz in Isaiah 7:4.

## What About Us?

So what about us? The encouragement God gave to the great men of the past, He also gives to us: *'Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!'* (Psalm 27:14).

Looking forward to God's Kingdom, the prophet Isaiah had words of encouragement for the faithful: *'Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you" (Isaiah 35:4).*

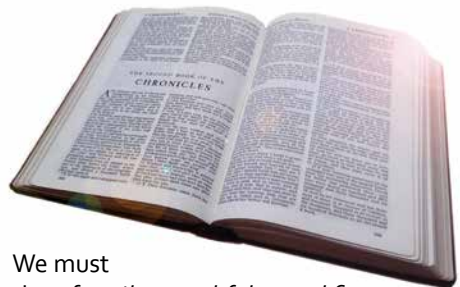
And again: *'He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint'* (Isaiah 40:29-31).

We have a hope of salvation through Jesus. At his birth the shepherds were told by the angel: *'Fear not, for behold, I bring you*

*good news of great joy that will be for all the people'* (Luke 2:10). Jesus himself said to his disciples (and us): *'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid (John 14:27).*

God Himself provides the equipment we need, through our reading of the Bible:

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-17).*



We must therefore *'be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong'* (1 Corinthians 16:13).

**Rosie Parkinson**

# Treasure in Heaven

SEEKING TREASURE has been a preoccupation of people from time immemorial. Many have spent their whole lives on the quest. Some have been rewarded with great finds of gold, silver and jewels. Treasure has been found in deep sea shipwrecks or buried on obscure islands, but when it is found, there is much rejoicing and sometimes it makes the news.

## Spiritual Treasure

However, a true disciple in Christ has a different view of treasure. A God-fearing person's treasure is not gold or silver or jewels, but spiritual. Jesus said:

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19–21).*

Your treasure is something that you hold to be the most important thing in your life.

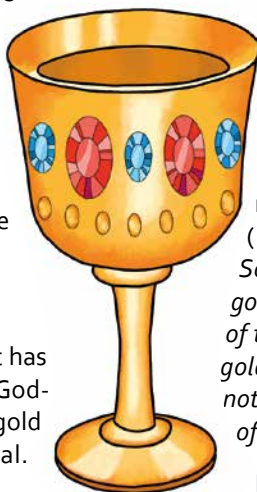
In the time of the Bible's Old Testament, a person's wealth was measured by the number of possessions they had. It showed their social standing and influence. Job, for example. After his great trials had ended,

he was doubly blessed by God: *'And the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning. And he had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 yoke of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys (Job 42:12).*

King Solomon was also renowned for his great wealth, especially when accumulating materials for his building projects (1 Kings 10:14–18). *'All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver; silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon' (v. 21).*

## How to Get Rich

It is not clear whether Solomon was affected by his great wealth, but he did write: *'In the house of the righteous there is much treasure, but trouble befalls the income of the wicked' (Proverbs 15:6).* This proverb illustrates the spiritual dimension of treasure. This treasure comes to the faithful, who walk in the path of righteousness. Spiritual treasure is accumulated by faithful people during their lifetime: in service to God the Father, and Jesus Christ His Son, and to their fellows. This treasure is accumulated by reading the Word of God and absorbing it into their hearts, and putting it into practice in their everyday lives.





This is what Jesus meant when he said 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also' (Matthew 6:21).

## A Problem with Wealth

For a follower of Christ, the accumulation of worldly wealth can present a problem to their spiritual life. The Apostle Paul warned Timothy, *'The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs'* (1 Timothy 6:10). If striving for money becomes an obsession to someone, they open themselves to many disappointments and sorrows.

Jesus told a parable about a rich man:

*The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God (Luke 12:16–21)*

## The Rich Ruler

Being rich toward God requires genuine Godliness—rather than having material wealth. Jesus said they who hear the word of God, and keep it, are blessed—(Luke 11:28). Then, we have the record of the time he was visited by a rich ruler:

*And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus*

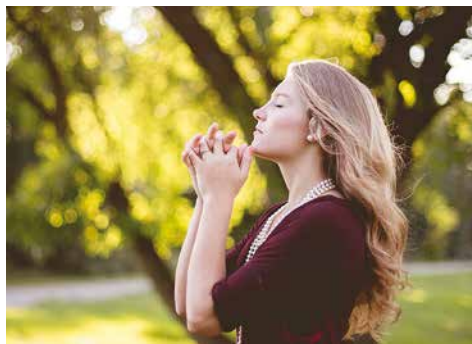
*said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:18–24).*



Jesus gave the man a selected list from the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17). He omitted the commandment against covetousness. The man was able to confirm that he had kept the commandments which Jesus mentioned. Then Jesus identified the commandment which was the man's stumbling block—he challenged him to give up his wealth. (The man was unable.)

This world's wealth has no purpose in God's Kingdom. What matters for eternal life, is having a good and honest heart, keeping the commandments of God and the Lord

Jesus Christ, and to love the Lord God with all one's heart, soul, might and mind (Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:5).



## Treasure in Heaven

What does it mean, then, to have treasure in heaven? It means having our name written in the book of life, and having a crown of righteousness laid up for us in heaven, like the Apostle Paul had (2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 20:12). As Jesus said, your heart is where your treasure is (Matthew 6:21).

In Isaiah we read, '*The fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure*' (33:6). This is also translated '*The fear of the LORD is his treasure*' (KJV, RSV). To fear God is to revere and to seek Him. A believer who has a godly fear of the LORD has real treasure.

We have hope of being granted eternal life in the world to come. At Christ's return, his faithful followers will be rewarded when their treasure in heaven results in the gift of eternal life. But it is sobering to realise also that this treasure can be lost if we lose the faith we once possessed.

We see then, that real treasure is not money, wealth, or possessions, it is not gold or silver, it is spiritual:

*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1).*

This treasure is priceless, and is a gift by the grace of God. Only in the Bible do we discover how we can get rich toward God. Godliness, faith, keeping God's commandments, and service toward Him and others, are what constitute real treasure in heaven.

**Grahame A Cooper**

## Questions? Comments?

### We'd love to hear from you!

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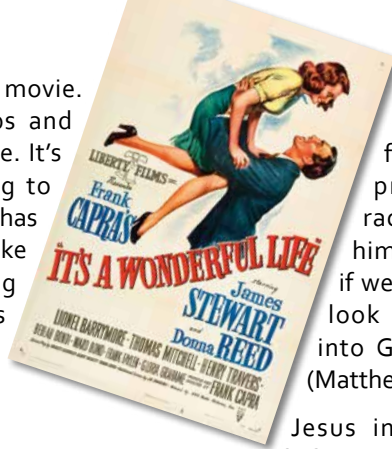
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# It's a Wonderful Life

THIS IS MY FAVOURITE movie. It was made in the 1940s and has been popular ever since. It's about a man who is going to lose everything he has, and has decided to end it all and take his own life. But then along comes Clarence, who has been sent to point out to him just how worthwhile his life is.



If this man had not existed, so many people's lives would have been affected. In his youth he had saved his brother from drowning. Later, his brother, as a naval officer, had been responsible for saving the lives of other sailors on a sinking ship. The man had also averted the death of a chemist's patient when he recognised that he had been prescribed the wrong drugs. And the examples went on.

What does this have to do with God, and His greatest gift to us—life?

First of all, He gave us the Bible, His written word recording the history of the world. In the Old Testament, through the prophets, He foretold how He would send His Son (Jesus Christ) to be the world's saviour.

Through his faith, righteousness, benevolence and devotion to his Father, Jesus showed us a perfect life. He suffered and died on the cross, an innocent victim of human cruelty. His self-sacrifice enabled all of us to have the opportunity to be

forgiven for our sins. Furthermore, he rose from the dead with a promise to the human race that if we believe in him, if we're baptised, and if we live faithful lives, we can look forward to a welcome into God's Kingdom on earth (Matthew 25:21).

Jesus indicated the imminent fulfilment of these promises when he warned us that in the latter days the earth would be in distress (Luke 21:25–26). And when he ascended to heaven, angels promised that he would return (Acts 1:11).

God gave us life so that we all should be able to enjoy the wonders of His creation. It's only reasonable that we should respond by showing our gratitude in prayer. Some of us are slow to realise the enormity of what God has given us.

The film climaxes with the words, 'No man is a failure who has friends'. And what a friend we have in Jesus, who will always welcome us if we turn to him, and never dismiss us as failures. So look further into the truth of the Bible, and God's response will be one of love and rejoicing: *'There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance'* (Luke 15:7).

**Dennis Jones**

# What Happens After Death?

WE ARE living, breathing creatures. In the course of time we will die. Will there be any part of you or me that survives after we die? Or is death a complete end of consciousness—do we simply cease to be?

It is a subject that evokes strong opinions and emotions. The idea that an immaterial part of us will survive death and continue to exist in a disembodied state, is basic to many of the world's religions. It is believed by the majority of the churches of Christendom. It is such a widely held view that it is often assumed to be a fundamental doctrine of Christianity.



There is only one authority by which we can establish what is true Christian doctrine—that is the Bible. Let's look at what the Bible says on the subject.

## The Creation of Life

The account of the creation of life is very plain. *'The LORD God formed the man of*

*dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature' (Genesis 2:7).* No part of this language conveys the idea of immortality. The *'breath of life'* is the possession of all animals: *'For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven' (6:17).* This phrase is used of both people and animals—they are all living, breathing organisms. The nature of their life is basically the same.

Humans differ from every other form of life in that we are made in the likeness of God: *'Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (1:26).* We have a mental and moral endowment which distinguishes us from other creatures. For this reason our first ancestor Adam was placed under a law, for the formation of his character: and he was told that disobedience would be punished by death: *'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' (2:17).*

Adam disobeyed, and sentence was passed: *'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return' (3:19).* This is death – we return to the ground, to dust.

This record in the opening pages of the Bible is confirmed by all subsequent references. The Apostle Paul turns back

to Genesis to explain the need of man in relation to God's work in Jesus Christ. He shows that the 'fall' in the Garden of Eden is the background of Christ's work of salvation. We cannot ignore Genesis if we believe in Christ—neither can we understand the need for Christ unless we know what is written in Genesis. Paul says, *'Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned'* (Romans 5:12); *'sin reigned in death'* (v. 21); *'the wages of sin is death'* (6:23).

When he is explaining about the resurrection of the dead, Paul finds the cause of death's universal sway in human disobedience:

*As by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive* (1 Corinthians 15:21–22).

The Lord Jesus himself taught the same thing—that sin and death are related as cause and effect. *'Unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins'* (John 8:24). There is escape from death only by belief in Jesus Christ. The purpose of his coming was to provide this deliverance. *'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'* (John 3:16).

The simple Bible truth that when we die we return to the dust is emphasized by a number of plain statements that in death all consciousness ceases. You are your body: when it returns to dust, you will cease to be. There was a time when you had no existence, and if you die your existence will cease.

Solomon, a man of divinely bestowed wisdom, wrote: *'Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going'* (Ecclesiastes 9:10). ('Sheol' is the Hebrew word for the grave.)

The Psalmist asks of God, *'Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?'* (Psalm 88:10–12). ('Abaddon' is a Hebrew word meaning 'place of destruction'.)



## Body and Soul

There is no escape from these definitive testimonies by suggesting that they have reference only to bodily form, whereas the real person continues independent of the body. The state of death is a complete end of all activity, mental and bodily. *'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. Their love and their hate and their envy have*



*already perished, and for ever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun'* (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6). All life's activities, all mental manifestations, cease with death. The dead know nothing.

The Psalmist says, *'In death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?'* (Psalm 6:5). Again, *'Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish'* (Psalm 146:3–4).

When King Hezekiah had been mortally ill and God had prolonged his life, he sang these words of praise: *'For Sheol does not thank you; death does not praise you; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living, he thanks you, as I do this day'* (Isaiah 38:18–19).

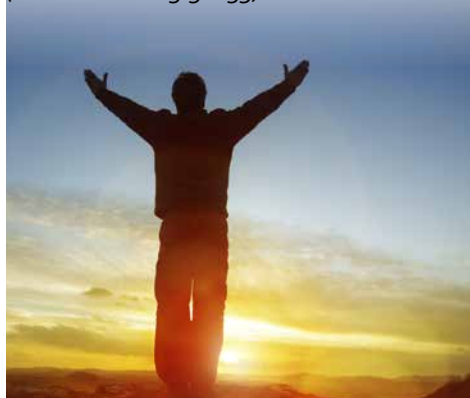
The Bible speaks of the transience of our lives. The Psalmist said of God: *'Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!'* (Psalm 39:5). The apostle said to his fellow believers, *'You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes'* (James 4:14). The Bible never uses any language which suggests that after death there is a transferral to another plane of existence. The term 'immortal soul' never appears in the Bible.

## Resurrection

But in the Bible there are abundant references to life beyond the grave. The Bible speaks of eternal, glorious life, free from all the ills of mortality which beset us now. When the Bible speaks of eternal

life, it is by means of resurrection from the dead, and a change of nature from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible.

*Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality* (1 Corinthians 15:51–53).



Jesus Christ said, *'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live'* (John 11:25). Immortality is a matter of promise, made to those who belong to Jesus Christ. It is therefore not something that is inherent within us.

The realisation of the Bible's teaching about our mortality may cause discomfort, but it should not. Eternal life in the Kingdom of God is a joyous prospect, a promise made sure by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**From *Thus Saith the Lord***

# The Politics of Jesus Christ

JESUS CHRIST LIVED in Israel during the time of the Roman Empire. The supreme council in Israel was the Sanhedrin, and it contained two main political parties which were in opposition to each other—the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Another significant political force in Israel was the Zealots, who advocated rebellion against Rome.

Christadelphians take a keen interest in world events, but they do not engage in politics. In this they follow the example of Jesus Christ, who took no part in the politics of his day. There are politicians of all types who claim to be following the teaching of Christ. But let's look at some current political movements, and compare them with the teachings of Jesus and the Bible.

## Jesus the Liberal

Liberal political thought revolves around the freedom of the individual, emphasizing the fortification and protection of this freedom through laws.

Freedom was crucial to Jesus: *'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'* (John 8:32). He never advocated social or political revolution, instead he focused on true freedom: *'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed'* (vs. 34–36).

On numerous occasions, he challenged the Pharisees' rigid adherence to their traditions. For example he often healed on the Sabbath day, going against the Pharisees' interpretation of the Law of Moses. Many people considered this improper.



Jesus respected human freedom by being willing to engage with anyone, whether it was Nicodemus (the Jewish ruler), the Samaritan woman (Jews despised Samaritans), or Mary Magdalene (the woman with a sordid personal background). Furthermore, he scandalized respectable society when he dined in the house of a tax collector.

*And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Matthew 9:10–13).*

This is echoed by the Apostle Paul, who urged those who were seeking to return to rigid adherence of the Law of Moses, *'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1).*

Jesus was concerned with the freedom of the individual—not in a political or social sense, but in the ultimate sense of freedom from the burden of sin and mortality.

## Jesus the Conservative

For conservatives, preserving values and traditions is important, and they often advocate nationalism.

Jesus' teaching was firmly based in the Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament). He would teach in synagogues (Luke 4:16). Furthermore, he always behaved and acted by seeking his Father's help, as is necessary when embarking on anything. When the rich young man approached him, he referred him to the Ten Commandments, the core of the Law of Moses:

*And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do*

*you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:16–17).*

He never denied or reinterpreted any prophet, and he never contradicted any law. If it seemed as though he violated a law, it was because he was fulfilling the spirit of the law as defined by God, the law-giver: *'Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished' (Matthew 5:17–18).*



Jesus was clear about preserving the truth of God's Word. The Bible is a consistent whole from start to finish.

## Jesus the Socialist

Socialism in its modern sense is about the ownership of the means of production by

the people—as opposed to a privileged elite.

Jesus was a critic of the wealthy elite of his time, as manifested most notably when he drove out the merchants who were profiteering from the Temple:



*And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:12–13).*

He called the Pharisees hypocrites and whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27). He criticized those who fasted in order to be admired, and those who loudly recited lengthy prayers in order to impress others with their piety (Matthew 6:1–8).

He loved the poor, as evidenced when he commended the poor widow for her meagre gift (Mark 12:41–44). He himself

was a labourer, learning the trade of carpentry from Joseph, and his disciples were also working-class people, mostly fishermen. He considered work important, aligning with his Father, who placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it (Genesis 2:15).

Jesus was a man of the people, who regarded everyone as equal in God's sight.

## Conclusion

In today's political landscape there are no purely liberal, conservative or socialist parties. Politicians tailor their manifestos towards the priority of being elected. Election campaigns are expensive, modern democracy requires tactical planning, and political compromises are inevitable.

Looking at Jesus, we can say that his teachings encompass elements from every ideology. But his teaching shows the perfect ideal to which all human ideologies aspire. He is human-centered; he respects and values traditions, and his mission is to set us free.

Political parties seek temporal power, while Jesus wants to show people the path of godliness. Jesus doesn't need to be re-elected; he doesn't flatter anyone for money or votes. His life and actions have been documented for almost two millennia, and his wisdom is essential for those who seek to live their best life now, with the prospect of eternal life in God's Kingdom.

Therefore, Jesus would not endorse any of this world's political options.

**Zoltán Mészáros**



WI

**How can you say Israel is God's chosen people? Have you seen what they're doing in Gaza?**

Ed

IT'S NOT MY PLACE here to comment on the justifications for the Israelis' and Palestinians' actions.

The Jews are God's people. *'Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD"' (Jeremiah 31:37). 'I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!' (Romans 11:1).*

The fact that Israel are God's chosen people does not mean that He endorses what they do, or that we should endorse it. Israel's history as narrated in the Bible was very often a tale of disobedience to God, and there's no reason to suppose that the nation now is any less godless than it ever was. That's not the point.

The fact remains, Israel is central to God's purpose with the earth. *'I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and I am God"' (Isaiah 43:12).* The re-establishment of the nation in 1948 was a fulfilment of prophecy (for example Isaiah 11:11), and a key step towards the alignment of the world's nations which will see the return of Christ (for example Ezekiel 38).

The last chapters of Zechariah's prophecy describe in detail (albeit in picture language which isn't always straightforward) the events leading up to and surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ. Chapter 12 opens with the Israelis alienating world opinion to such an extent that there appears to be a multinational invasion: *'Behold, I am about to make Jerusalem a cup of staggering to all the surrounding peoples. The siege of Jerusalem will also be against Judah. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it' (vs. 2-3).*

But God will intervene—by means of the promised return of Christ. And at this point Israel will have a change of heart: *'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn' (v. 10).*

Zechariah and other prophets go on to describe the establishment of the Kingdom of God, in which the reformed people of Israel will play a key role (Ezekiel 39:7), and all the world will be blessed with peace and prosperity (Micah 4:1-3).



# Politics in Jesus' Time

Israel at this time was politically unstable. The **ROMANS** were in control, and the Jews were looking to be saved by their Messiah. **SCRIBES**, also called **LAWYERS**, were avid students and teachers of the **LAW** of Moses, which they called the **TORAH**. The **SADDUCEES** were a rich group, often **PRIESTS**. The **SANHEDRIN**, or **COUNCIL**, was the highest court of the Jews and contained scribes and Sadducees.

**PHARISEES** were more middle class and obsessed with rule-following: they added their own laws to the Torah. Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were united in hating Jesus.

The **ZEALOTS** were a political group who used violence against the Romans. One of Jesus' disciples, referred to as Simon the Zealot (or Simon Zelotes), had probably been a Zealot before becoming a disciple.

*THE ELEVEN WORDS in capitals above are in the wordsearch, together with the names of three Pharisees:*

- A ruler of the Pharisees, who visited Jesus at night and acknowledged that he was a teacher sent by God (John 3:1–14)
- A Pharisee who warned the Council not to oppose the apostles' preaching (Acts 5:29–40)
- A strict Pharisee who initially persecuted Christians, but was converted and then preached the Gospel tirelessly (Acts 26:4–29).

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Answers:  
NICODEMUS, GAMALIEL, SAUL

Anna Hart

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