

Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing in Christ

"HAPPY ARE YOU, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord" [Deu 33:29]. There is no one who can call themselves truly blessed except God's people. They, among all other creatures, are exceedingly blessed.

The Apostle Paul expressed this same thought when he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus. He said "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing" [Eph 1:3]. In the midst of all the trials that Paul experienced for his faith in Christ, he could confidently say, he was blessed with every spiritual blessing.

The apostle, Peter, tells Christians that they are 'special', they are God's chosen people, appointed for special service "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession" [1 Pet 2:9]. Both Paul and Peter inform us that we are made special for the work of **praising God**. Peter says we are chosen "that you may **proclaim** the excellencies of Him who called you". We have been made the children of God for the express purpose of praising God.

Our destiny is heaven, and our

occupation there, whatever activity we may be engaged in, is praising God. We need to get into practice.

The praising begins on earth. All Scripture testifies to the believers' duty of praising God during our pilgrimage through this world. The saints in both old and new testaments were rejoicing in God. Hannah said "My heart **exults** in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord...because I **rejoice** in Your salvation" [1 Sam 21:1]. The Psalmists were constantly declaring their praises to the Lord. All the believers in Acts were "praising God and having favour with people" [Acts 2:47]. Paul says "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice" [Phil 4:4].

When we stop praising God, we have lost sight of who we are - children of God, blessed with every spiritual blessing. What greater privilege can there be than to be sons and daughters of the Creator, saved with an everlasting salvation?

It is healthy and spiritual to recall and review all our privileges and blessings which we have in Christ - and the more we do it, the stronger our faith becomes. It was when the apostle John **beheld** the glory of the One and Only, who was full of grace and truth, that he was able to say "we have all received grace upon

grace" [John 1:14-16].

The whole purpose of being told what we are 'in Christ', is that we will **enjoy** the blessings which Christ purchased for us and cost Him so much.

The blessings we have are **spiritual**, not material. Material blessings are not worth too much. They keep on losing their value until they are worth nothing. Spiritual blessing increase in value. A car, a house, a yacht, a swimming pool will all lose their 'attraction' when trouble comes our way. They cannot replace an empty heart and an empty soul. Multi-millionaires can be sad and depressed. Simon Cowell the TV personality, worth 55 million pounds, said on 'Desert Island Discs', he was never satisfied and was always unhappy.

A inward peace and joy, the peace of God, is worth more than millions of pounds. The *"peace that is beyond understanding"* [Phil 4:7] is far more valuable than all the treasures portrayed on our TV screens and magazines.

The spiritual blessings Paul speaks of in Ephesians are all *"in Christ"*, they are not in ourselves. The reason we might not 'feel' these blessings is because they are 'in Christ' and not in ourselves. Faith is an objective thing, not subjective.

True faith looks out to Christ and to what He has said, and does not look and search into our own hearts for good signs, for our hearts are desperately wicked and deceitful. We cannot rely on what we see in our hearts anyway.

The more we realise our standing 'in Christ', the less we will be affected by the disappointments of the world. The world are for ever disappointed with what it offers. Time after time, many look for happiness and comfort from this and that event, but in the end, there is disappointment. When 'best-selling' author, Jack Higgins, was asked 'What is the one thing you wish you were told in school?', answered, 'I wish I was told that when you get to the top, there is nothing there!'

Christians should never be concerned **why** God loves them. They should never ask 'Why would God choose a person like me?' God tells us there was no reason why He chose us - He chose us *"according to the good pleasure of His will"* [Eph 1:5]. He just wanted us.

One of the great blessings God gives His children is setting them in families. Today, many children are not sure where their families are. Their father and mother live apart and someone else might be shunting them from one parent to another. But God has given His children a Father (Himself), and a mother (the Church) where there is community and fellowship. God Himself is in a Family of Three. Community is a concept of heaven, isolation is a concept of hell, where there are *"none to know me"*!

Every Christian should rejoice and praise God for all the spiritual blessings that he has in Christ. In this life he has wonderful spiritual blessings, but the best, Peter says are *"reserved in heaven"* [1Pet1:4].

Visit to a Karen Refugee Camp

THE STORNOWAY APC minister, Revd George Macaskill, went to a Refugee Camp on the Burma/Thailand border in November last year to teach in the Bible School there. Here follows a short report of his visit.

On the Burma/Thailand border lie many refugee camps where up to 150,000 have fled from oppressive Burmese authorities. One such camp, where approximately 55,000 seek shelter, is called Mae La Refugee Camp which, almost exclusively, protect Karen people. It is reported that up to 80% of the Karen people profess Christianity.

These refugees are victims of the political situation existing in Burma (now known as Myanmar). The ruling Burmese Military Junta use their Army to 'force' the Karen people out of their homeland. Many of the Karen people are therefore trapped in the jungle in Burma.

Several of them are ministered to by the 'Free Burma Rangers' who supply medical help and other necessities. Those who manage to escape across the border to Thailand are housed in basic

Refugee Camps, in total numbering 150,000 persons.

The United Nations has recently been in discussion about the situation in Burma and one can only hope and pray, that this will at least result in the plight of the Karen people being made better known.

Life inside the Refugee Camp is very basic, but everyone is amazingly content. In the Bible School part of the camp, there is a real faith among the people. As Psalm 34:1 records of David, they, too, really do *"bless God at all times"*, even when oppressed.

Within the camp itself there is a disabled 'Home' for those who have been seriously wounded by land-mines as they tried to escape from their enemies. In this Home, all were blind, some also crippled and some with no hands, yet they were resigned to God's will. They are living examples that persecution strengthens faith, not destroys it.

Included in their normal church service is a part when the whole congregation recites a portion of scripture from memory. This is because they have been told by their pastors that during war (which they are presently experiencing) they may

not be able to possess a copy of the scriptures to read.

Another part of their church service involves one of their number giving their 'testimony'. This is not simply their 'conversion' experience, but an account of how God dealt with their souls while they were escaping from Burma and lost members of their families as some were literally being shot before their eyes by the Burmese Army.

During our stay in the camp, a group of 47 Koreans arrived with a Mobile Clinic and gave health checks to around 2,000 refugees. They discovered that two small infants had very serious heart conditions and would need instant surgery in order to prevent them dying within a few months.

Teaching in the Bible School was a very humbling experience as these young people are so spiritual. They all seem to have an interest in theology, but as their English is poor, the teaching of the finer points of doctrine became very difficult as they have no word in their own language for some of the theological terms. Some students stayed behind after lectures to ask more questions.

It is a wonderful experience to be wakened each morning by the noise of worship before 6am. In the Karen Baptist Bible School, in Mae La where we were, worship is conducted several times each day.

These refugees are considered as 'displaced' people and for up to 16 years, they live each day on just two meals, and are unable to travel, they draw water from a well

daily, have no money, yet, enthusiastically worship God. Their level of Christian commitment put many of us in the West to shame.

Many of them have a dream – it is returning to Burma, their home country, and telling their people about Jesus Christ. When asked what their favourite texts were, some of their answers given were: Matt 5:44 *"love your enemies"*; 2 Cor 5:7 *"we walk by faith, not by sight"* (in relation to the hope of returning to Burma); Prov 31:30 *"a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised"*.

Around three hundred have chosen to study theology in English so that if and when they are able to return to their homeland they will be equipped to preach the gospel to their people.

Politically speaking, the outlook for a speedy return to Burma (Myanmar) looks well-nigh impossible, but when Pastor Simon of the Karen Bible School was asked if he was positive or negative about the situation, he replied: 'We must always hope in God'. They ask for our prayers and that we tell others about their plight. Let us look up to God with and for them.

It is not enough to pray, if we can do something about a situation. The hope of the Karen people returning to their own country seems impossible humanly speaking, and one despairs of the UN doing anything effective to relieve their situation, but like Pastor Simon, we must never give up hope as long as we have God on our side. There IS something we can do,

besides praying. Here are a few suggestions:

1) Learn more, and tell others. Many websites have information about the scale of the problem.

The Free Burma Rangers (<http://www.freeburmarangers.org>) deliver food and medical treatment into areas targeted by the SPDC, and also gather information about atrocities.

They have extremely up to date reports.

Burma Campaign UK: <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk>

US Campaign for Burma: <http://www.uscampaignforburma.org>

2) Write to your politicians.

Tell your local representative that you are concerned, ask what they can do about it, and urge them to encourage the Government to enforce targeted sanctions on Burma. Advice on what to write is at this site, along with contact details for UK MPs: [http://](http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/sanctions_mp.html)

www.burmacampaign.org.uk/sanctions_mp.html

American readers can apply the same advice in letters addressed to your congressperson:

<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>

and/or write directly to: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, U.S .

Department of State, 2201 C Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20520

3) Support local

organisations working with people displaced from their homes, such as:

Partners ([http://](http://www.partnersworld.org/)

www.partnersworld.org/)

The Free Burma Rangers (<http://www.freeburmarangers.org/>)

The Karen Woman's Organisation (<http://www.karenwomen.org>)

"O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You." [2 Chron. 20:12]

The Duty of the Church

"HISTORY TELLS US THAT A CHURCH IS SURE to lose its Christian character if it ceases to be conservative. History also tells us that a church will become extinct if it fails to be progressive...Let no one think that by this time the church has exhausted Holy Scripture. It has done nothing of the kind. It remains the God-assigned task of the church to explore the Word of God ever more thoroughly and to bring forth from its depths ever greater riches of truth.... It is important that the church distinguishes sharply between Scriptural teachings and human traditions, and it must ever stand ready, if need be, to discard the latter, no matter how ancient and firmly established they may be. Still another duty of the church which it may not neglect, but often does, is to apply the teachings of Scripture to the specific problems and peculiar needs of the times."

R B Kuiper

Good News for the New Year

By Wayne Pearce

“But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil” [Deut.11:11-14].

WHO WAS IT that said ‘a New Year’s resolution usually goes in one year and out the next’?

The sad truth about New Year resolutions and similar self-help and self-improvement exercises and techniques is that they very rarely produce the desired results. Instead of relying on self however we need to be focusing on God and relying on His grace and strength. There are three wonderful truths in the above portion of God’s word that

provide us with Good News for the year ahead. Let us therefore appropriate them for ourselves individually and collectively and urge others to do so too.

Firstly, God wants us to possess the land of promise: *“But the land that you are going over to possess is a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven” [11].*

God has manifested His amazing grace in delivering the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. They were living in abject misery, drudgery and affliction. Their situation had appeared hopeless and helpless but God rescued them as He had promised.

And of course this is a picture of what God does for the individual believer and the church collectively in and through the person and work of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We too had once been in bondage to sin, Satan and the Egypt of this world. We too were once *“separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no*

hope and without God in the world" [Eph.2:12]. However by grace through faith in Jesus Christ we have been translated from the kingdom of darkness into that spiritual land which is flowing with milk and honey - watered by rains from heaven!

And yet we would do well to remind ourselves of how the stubborn disobedience of Israel kept a whole generation out of the land of promise. On account of their sin their disobedience and unbelief - they were to spend forty years wandering aimlessly in a barren wilderness. They were living in sight of the Promised Land but unable to take possession of the blessing.

Sadly many professing Christians are like the children of Israel. They are living in close proximity to the Promised Land but unable to appropriate God's blessing for they love sin too much! Such people prefer to do things their way instead of submitting to God's ways. Subsequently they wander without purpose in a spiritual wilderness unaware that the land of promise is only over the Jordan. They spend their time mining fools gold when the real thing is to be had by grace.

The land God would have us take possession of is described as a land of hills (mountains NIV) and valleys. It is Immanuel's land and can only be entered by faith. And as we learn to walk by faith we increasingly appreciate that God is with us, He is for us, He is in us - the hope of glory. King Jesus is the sole King and Benefactor of this

Kingdom. Moreover it is a land of mountains and valleys which speaks to us of a land of beauty and variety.

It is not a land of clones like the old Soviet Union where one had a choice of battleship grey or battleship grey or battleship grey - you get the picture! Instead there is a rich diversity within the kingdom of personalities and gifts and yet God's people are one in Christ. Sin has polluted, corrupted, defamed, deformed and distorted the Egypt of this world. Not so, the Land of Promise; the Kingdom of God. It is the antithesis of this world. It is a land to enjoy and rejoice in and over. Have we appropriated these glad tidings of peace and joy? Are we recipients of grace; citizens in Christ's Kingdom?

It is however a land of ascents and descents in the here and now for the Christian. When we are translated from the kingdom of darkness into the land of promise by faith we are not guaranteed an easy time. Instead we must expect growth pains for we are to grow in knowledge and grace.

There is also that internal and on-going struggle between that Spirit and the flesh. And we must be able to say along with the apostle: *"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin"* [Rom.7:24-25].

And there is that all too real opposition and persecution from the

Devil and his minions in this world whose enemy we are and who is unprepared to give us up without a fight! *"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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"* [Eph.6:12-13].

Entering the land of promise requires a miracle. We must be reliant of sovereign grace. God supernaturally intervened in order for the children of Israel to cross over the Jordan. And just as God parted the Jordan for the children of Israel to travel across on dry land so God the Father has provided an ark in the person of His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to see His people safely over Jordan into His Kingdom.

What is more, God in the person of the Holy Spirit is the wind who takes us over and ensures we reach our destination. In other words Holy Scripture leaves us in no doubt whatsoever that we must be converted to possess the land of promise and the resultant blessings. Be assured that the land of promise will cost you your life: *We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life*" [Rom.6:4].

Have you taken possession of the land of promise or are you still wandering aimlessly in a spiritual wilderness?

Secondly, if we possess the land of promise we can be sure that God will be with us from the beginning of the year to the end of the year: It is *"a land that the Lord your God cares for. The eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year"* [12].

God uniquely cares for His people: if God is for us, who can be against us! The Scripture says: *"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you* [1 Pet.5:7]. Do we? Are we leaning upon the Lord or are we seeking to do things in our own strength.

The Almighty is on our side: we must learn to rely on Omnipotence instead of seeking to do in our own impotence! God moreover is omniscient: He watches over His people continually. *"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil"* [1 Pet.3:12].

He has saved us that we might love and serve Him and our neighbour. Let us therefore seek to walk in love; let us walk by faith and let us walk in the Spirit that we would indeed glorify Him and enjoy Him whose eyes are constantly upon us - from the beginning of the year until its end. This is the way to ensure a blessed 2007!

Thirdly, whether or not we will be blessed with a happy New Year is dependent upon our faithfulness to God: *"And if you will indeed obey my commandments that I command you today, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul, he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil"* [13-14].

We must be faithful to the word of God. We must obey God rather than men. We must love the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly.

There must be no divided loyalty. The Lord must have first place in our hearts. You and I are to *"love the Lord your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul"*. God will bless those who are faithful to Him: *"then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil"*.

Let us strive then to be faithful to the Lord and let us labour and look for much fruit in the year ahead. For our God reigns and He is good. He is faithful to His word. May He grant us all a blessed new year!

The God of the Bible

WE AFFIRM THAT GOD is holy. This means that God is separate, distinct, pure, and 'wholly other', that is, wholly apart from His creatures. Why is this an important part of the gospel? Because if God were unholy, He could receive sinners without a sacrifice. Many popular books on the topic of spirituality speak as if God can be approached directly by anyone at any time in any way. The God presented is really no different from us; perhaps a bit more powerful, but not holy. Thus, there is no need for fear in his or her presence. No need for an atonement. Such a god is not the God of the Bible.

Nor is the god of civil religion the God of the Bible. After the terrorist attack on September 11, 'God bless America' signs went up all over America. Many Christians were glad that 'God was back' in American life. I was not convinced. Indeed, I was told that two adult book and video stores (porn shops) in Nashville had on their marquee 'God bless America'. But this was a different god, the god of modern hedonism, not the God who said, *"Be holy, because I am holy"* [Leviticus 11:44-45].

We also deny that the God of the Bible is the same as Allah, or the gods of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. We deny that it is possible to reach God without accepting His own righteousness as our own as found in Christ.

Erwin W Lutzer

Congregational News

DUNDEE

Our annual congregation meal on 2nd December was most interesting! It was held at Kevin and Sine's home and everything was going to plan - the day started with a prayer time in the morning and some members of the congregation staying on to help with the preparations for the meal to be held at night.

Late in the afternoon Kevin fell from the top of a ladders working on the roof of his garage. He broke his elbow and had to be taken to hospital. Sine was holding the ladders and fell with him to the ground. She was fine - for a few hours. The congregation rallied round and came early to finish the work for the meal. Despite the incident and while Kevin was in hospital we all enjoyed a wonderful meal in his home.

The next day, Sine was unable to move - the impact of the fall took late effect and she had to be taken to hospital - alongside her husband! The next day, at the church service, we prayed for them and we are happy to report that after several weeks off work, both of them are now returning to work.

It was encouraging to see the congregation unite together to help in a time of crisis and how many prayers were answered.

During December we purchased

250 copies of the Gospel of Luke and distributed them around the church together with a greetings card and an invitation to our Special Community Service on 17 December.

At our Special Community Service we had 45 people come along to the service. Some new faces from the community came and there was one young boy whose father was an atheist, but gave him 'permission' to come along to this service!

As usual, on the last service of the year we held a communion service, and although many were away on holiday, the Lord's presence was felt and we trust He was glorified in our worship of Him.

Please pray as we begin a new year that we would honour the Lord in all our meetings and that many would come to know the Lord.

STORNOWAY

The congregation hosted the Lewis Branch of the Gideons Rally on 01 December and installed a new recording system which records directly onto CDs. During the last week of the year, the evangelistic issue of 'Evangelical Times' was distributed to neighbours and other housing developments in Stornoway.

The Fellowship meeting, held twice a month after the evening service, heard from several speakers outwith the denomination, but the

most significant speaker was probably the congregation's own Thomas Parkes who has taken a year out to work with 'Youth for Christ'. It was most stimulating to hear of the work Thomas was doing in London schools.

The AGM of the congregation is scheduled to take place on Thursday 18 January.

LAIRG and ROGART

Numbers have been somewhat depleted of late through poor health and we covet your prayers that the Lord would strengthen us, build us up and add to our numbers in 2007.

I myself missed the inter-church Christmas service which I helped to organise due to the dreaded bug which has been wreaking havoc in these parts. However it was a great blessing to take a joint New Year's Day service in Rogart Free Church. Our joint-prayer meeting on the 2 and 4 Wednesdays in the month in Rogart similarly continues to be an encouragement. The greater numbers vastly improve the quality of our praise and having extra men to pray makes a real difference.

January proffers me the opportunity to minister in Lairg Primary School and additionally I have agreed to address the SU in Culloden Academy, Inverness. I similarly look forward to my visits to our Kinlochbervie congregation in January and February.

Many thanks to Bobbie Morrison who steps down from doing regular pulpit supply on the

first Lord's Day in the month after February. Please do remember the brethren who preach regularly in Kinlochbervie and in other vacant congregations in your prayers. Their labours are so needful and are greatly appreciated.

EDINBURGH

It was with deep sadness and shock that we learnt of yet another violent death in the Southhouse area. On Saturday the 16th of December I drove round to one of the streets to distribute leaflets but it was cordoned off by the police. Only family members were allowed access to the homes behind the police cordon.

There had been a fatal stabbing of a 17 year old male the night before. A 16 year old male and an 18 year old female have been charged with the murder. What indescribable heartbreak, sadness and sorrow for the family that lost a son. What a tragedy for all the families involved.

How important to remember, 'There but for the grace of God.' What a stark and powerful reminder of the urgency of the gospel. What a blessing that the gospel is nothing less than *"the power of God to save to the uttermost"*. The leaflet we were distributing read as follows: Hope. It's for real. It's for you. Come and hear! Then it gave the topics for the last four Sundays of the year: The promised Saviour; What it cost Jesus; Will you accept God's greatest gift and Which is more significant "A new year" or "A new you." Then it

read: "The name Jesus means saviour. The babe of Bethlehem was given this name because He would save His people from their sins.

Jesus lives up to His name. We are all sinners. How can we live up to the name Christian? By believing and trusting in Jesus as our personal saviour. We can then rely on Him for strength, grace and forgiveness each day. Jesus holds out hope to anyone who will take it on His terms. We either accept or refuse this hope".

Due to the editing skills of others, the leaflet was very attractive and read well. I expected to distribute them by myself but got help from five other people which was a great encouragement. One new person came to the bible study and a number of new children came to the Sunday School. It would be interesting to know how much the extra attendance was a result of the leaflet and how much as a result of our contacts in the area.

One remarkable thing that happened the other week was that, Lola a Nigerian lady who attends with her family felt very strongly that she should speak to the children in the Sunday School and she did. They listened with exceptional attention as she explained Proverbs 3:1-4. *"My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favour and a good name in the sight*

of God and man".

Another remarkable thing is how some of the worst children can, when they choose, be shining examples to everyone else. You have to see it to believe it. We have seen this with some, who have made us shudder whenever we saw them coming near the door. This is a graphic reminder of how the most unlikely can become outstanding Christians. We are not aware of this happening here yet, but we wait eagerly for it. Only God knows how much you can play a part in this by your prayers. We will be eternally indebted to you if you do.

Towards those we serve in this area we aim to be:

Very friendly and welcoming.

Genuinely and deeply interested in them.

Caring for their happiness, welfare, health and above all their spiritual wellbeing.

Not patronising.

Serving with love, humility and joy.

Charitable but not gullible.

We want: God to be No 1 in their lives. Them to have a clear saving and practical knowledge of Christ. Them to be aware that: We are their friends. We are there to help in every sensible way within our power, but we are not a soft touch and we are not in the business of condoning wrong doing. We genuinely respect and appreciate peoples good qualities.

We are fellow travellers in life who will give and take whatever help and encouragement is on offer. We

are not perfect or superior or beyond criticism and advice but can give and take. We are not religious freaks indifferent to all the rest of life. We are warmly interested in every legitimate aspect of life. We are not in it for selfish or vain motives.

If anyone is endeavouring to go God's way we will aim to back them 100%. We have not attained to the above but we strive towards it. JR

DINGWALL/INVERNESS

Another day, another year ! It is not without significance that the Bible many times calls on us to consider the fleeting nature of our lives on this earth. In childhood days, the age of twenty-one seemed the pinnacle of life which would launch us out into a world of excitement and dreams come-true. Now, as I look back on life, that longed-for age of maturity has long since gone over the horizon. Am I morbid about it? Certainly not. There are things in life that I should have done better, and things I should not have done at all - but life has been an adventure with God, and that gets exciting. Now rushing into another year, I look for greater things from Him, closer fellowship with him, and greater signs of his saving grace.

What a privilege and a joy it is to have the Gospel to preach and be called to it! Those with a Bible to read have a message to give. It may not be to stand in front of a group of people, whatever the number, but a life to live that is the gospel in leather shoes. At Kingsview and in

Dingwall, my prayer is that in this year we as a group of people will extend the message to those around us. Society around is dark, and often the 'church' is not 'brighter', much to our shame, but our Jesus lives on. His power has not diminished.

I believe that the issue the Christians have to deal with is NOT more meetings with one another, good as they may be, but MORE meetings with God. I know that in Inverness, church life in the city is inundated with 'church meetings'; we have '*meetingitis*'. It is easier to get response for a '*social-spiritual*' meeting than for a specific prayer meeting.

That is why I urge on you that you make this year, a YEAR OF PRAYER. There was a very costly, and admittedly impressive, display for the launch of the Year of Culture in Inverness. But, that part of the party is over. We want to see this year, in the words of Romaine, 'A year famous for revival'. In Inverness we have been having early morning prayer meetings, and one of these in particular has become very focused - and that is good. We are praying that the Lord will give us this hillside for Jesus Christ.

"So now give me this hill country" [Josh 14:12]. We are not the first to ask for a hillside for God. We thank God for encouragements, and we ask his blessing on the discouragements! If we do what David did, we will discover that the encouragements are the greater of the two. Join us in that before the throne.

(Calum MacInnes)

What Shall it Profit a Man?

Mr R W M MacKenzie, Fearn

The ninth successive annual service for farmers, crofters and friends in Dingwall Auction Market, arranged by the Inverness and District Gospel Male Voice Choir, took place on the afternoon of the Lord's Day, 10 December 2006. It was again wonderful to see a congregation of about five hundred and fifty gather. Following some community singing, the service commenced with prayer, led by the Choir Chairman, and after several other items of praise, in some of which the congregation participated, and a Scripture reading, Choir member Roderick MacKenzie, Fearn, gave a gospel message based on the well-known text, "*What shall it profit a man, though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*" [Matt 16:26]. How appropriate for the location! This being the 20th anniversary of the Highland Hospice, it was decided that the collection should go to support this worthy cause. At a subsequent meeting of the choir a cheque for £1,500 was presented to Dr Stephen Hutchison, Consultant in Palliative Medicine and Medical Director at the Hospice - himself a Christian. At the Market, copies of the evangelistic booklet *Just Grace* were made available for anyone to pick up after the service. Amazingly, about two hundred and fifty were taken. Please pray that these will be used as a means of blessing to those who took them, and, supremely, to the glory of God. Here's the substance of Roderick's message:

GOOD AFTERNOON and welcome to the Annual Mart Service. I hope you can all hear me! It reminds me of a story of a Minister who shouted out to almost a full church, particularly to those towards the rear of the gallery at the back – "are you hearing my voice OK back there?" And a voice came back from the back of the gallery "yes but I'm quite willing to change places with someone who isn't hearing you!"

It is very encouraging to see you all here and thank you for your

support in this way. When we consider this is the 9th such service – how time flies – and while we started off these Mart services when times were extremely difficult for Farmers we have reason to worship God not only when things are difficult but when things are good or better and we have reason to give thanks that this year has been better than a few of the recent past.

When things go better we are in danger of forgetting God and ignoring his claims and we should always note that there is a danger

that we will just focus on the present, plan to make our pile and forget about what Jesus says.

Well you know we should never ignore what Jesus says – He is God’s Son and has never been shown to speak what is not true and relevant and today He has been speaking to us again and we should listen to His words [Mat 16:26]

“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Well are you hearing?, will you listen? and will you act on what you hear? If you don’t act on what you hear it is as if you were in a house which went on fire, the fire alarm went off and you turned over and went back to sleep. You would say that that person was stupid, ----- well it is equally stupid and crazy if you ignore what you are going to hear.

The text this afternoon is as I mentioned already [Mat 16:26] – *“What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Four points

1. What is a soul
2. Many lose their souls
3. How to save your soul
4. How shall I know my soul is saved

1. What is a soul? You are and I am a soul. It is the part of you that loves, hates, understands and is often spoken of as the heart.

Our soul comes from God and once given it will never go out

of existence. It is that part of you that makes your body alive – when the soul leaves the body the body is dead.

How much is it worth? – it’s worth more than the whole world. It is worth so much in the eyes of God that in order to save one soul he gave His only begotten Son to the awful death on the cross. When one soul comes to believe in Jesus Christ and is saved – heaven rejoices.

The Bible speaks of people as “souls” – Noah’s Ark in which 8 souls were saved. SOS – Save our Souls

How to Lose your Soul – Many lose their souls. By doing nothing. By ignoring God’s Word, His invitations, warnings, and teaching. By thinking that you can cope with the issue of death, judgement and a future eternity without Christ. Remember what will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul.

How to save your Soul. First accept that you cannot save it yourself. Recognise that Jesus needs to save your soul. Accept the information given and follow the instructions.

What are the instructions? Accept that you are a sinner and confess it – and you and I have far more reason to confess than we realise. Follow the example of the publican *“God be merciful to me a sinner”*.

Remember how the Apostles answered the question put them by the Philippian Jailer - *“What must I do to be saved?”* “ *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and*

you shall be saved." Now you go and do the same – but you say I cannot – I've tried but it does not work – but this time pray to God to help you recognise that he is God who will help all who will put their trust in Him, and cry out to Him and He will have mercy on you.

Come on, does your soul need to be saved? Are you going to do nothing about it? Just like the person who heard his house was on fire and turned over and went back to sleep. You would say how stupid – please don't be as stupid as to go back to sleep when your soul needs to be saved.

Just pause and think of the words we have just sung

"See from his head his hands his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down
did e'er such love and sorrow meet
or thorns compose so rich a crown?
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small,
Love so amazing so divine
Demands my life my soul my all
Notice your soul and my soul!

How will you know your soul is saved? First can you know the answer? and the answer is clearly yes – the weight of evidence in the Bible points to this – although Highlanders in the past used to be dwelling on their doubts! For example – *"I know that my Redeemer lives"* and *"I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him"* and *"I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,*

nor height, nor death, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Your soul is saved to serve not to be a passenger – previously you were self-centred now you are God centred. And you try to follow Jesus. If you were asked who was number one in your life you would have to say Jesus. Why? – you would answer "Because He loved me and gave Himself for me".

If your soul is saved– you want to share that fact with others and just think about it – if everyone here this afternoon had their soul saved and served Jesus by encouraging others to come to know the gospel, what a blessing it would be and what a crowd would be here next year!

Finally – think of the incident when a minister spoke to the young children at the front of the Church and asked them "Hands up all of you who have a soul" – All put their hands up except one little girl . Then he said– "have you not got a soul my dear? How is that possible?" She replied "No Sir, I haven't got a soul because I gave it to Jesus to take care of a little time ago."

You and I could do nothing better than that with our soul, Come on, your soul needs to be saved, don't turn over and do nothing and please listen to the next piece we sing and take special note of the last line AND ACT ON IT ! "I gave myself for thee, give thou thyself to me"

Thank you for your attention and may God bless His word to us all and may our souls be saved.

Getting Our Priorities Right

By Revd George Macaskill, Stornoway

WHEN TONY BLAIR first took office in 1997, the outgoing Prime Minister, John Major, stated: "This incoming government will undo in 1,000 days what took a 1,000 years to set up."

What ever we may think of the Conservative Party or of John Major, these seem to have been prophetic words. Legislation based upon the Christian foundations of our nation, have almost all been destroyed by our present government, led by 'New Labour' to the extent that Britain is now not merely multi-faith and pluralistic, but effectively anti-Christian.

In his constituency acceptance speech, at the beginning of his 2nd term of office, Tony Blair said, in the early hours of 8 June, 2001: "The message from the British people is clear, they agree with the direction in which we take this country but they want us to get on with the journey." The solemn fact is, that in essence, the British people said to Tony Blair, "We know what you are doing, and we love to have it so."

Every Christian who voted for the present government, must now feel very uneasy, to say the least, when they consider just exactly what this government has enacted, since coming into power. Especially so as the government has gone on record

as saying: "Christianity is not part of the culture of British people".

Since the last election, our present government have increased legislation that practically silences freedom of the Christian voice; advanced the pro-abortion lobby; opposed a private member's bill to stop euthanasia by starvation and dehydration; supported human cloning and endorsed the promotion of the "morning-after" pill among teenagers (this pill is much more than a contraceptive, in many cases it causes an early abortion).

Worst of all, and to their disgrace, this government have invoked the old-established Parliament Act to drive through the Sexual Offences Bill against the will of the Upper House and the majority of British people.

This Act was an instrument only to be used in times of National Crisis and never intended to be used for personal or ethical issues, and it is to the Prime Minister's shame that he revealed both his character and his desperation to push through such anti-Christian legislation, which has been described elsewhere as a paedophile's charter.

Much more could be added, such as abolishing the Married Person's Allowance - one of the key signals a government can make that

it supports the family, Britain is now the only nation in the EU that does not have a Marriage Allowance!

Sufficient has surely been pointed out to demonstrate that our present government is a machine to destroy the concept of the Christian Family - yet it has the gall to say it supports family values!! The above legislation has led to the escalation of social problems in our nation and is costing the British taxpayer billions of pounds per annum.

The recent foisting of the Sexual Orientation Regulations in Northern Ireland is just another example of ungodly politicians determined to enforce laws which are not acceptable to the people and against the teaching of the Bible.

If these regulations, due to operate in April throughout the rest of the UK, are not removed, it could mean that Christian ministers will no longer be able to state that 'Christ is the only way to God'. Similar Laws in Australia and Sweden have resulted in pastors being fined and even imprisoned.

Christians who have voted for members of parliament who will not uphold Christian values, must now feel guilty and accept their share of responsibility in failing to elect godly people. Party allegiances must now be forgotten in order to save our nation from the inevitable judgment God will send. We have a corporate responsibility for the leaders we have ruling over us. We are, and will be judged for electing the people we have chosen.

It is not only New Labour who have no agenda for Christian values - none of the main political Parties regard or respect Biblical teachings. According to their own proposals the Conservatives, Liberals and SNP are not likely to be any better once they get into power, although it is hard to imagine how they could be worse. It is serious and sad that there is currently NO Political Party which is prepared to stand up on moral or ethical issues.

It is important that Christians vote for candidates who will stand and vote for Christian principles, regardless of their political party.

The main parties are desperate for power and all of them will adopt whatever the public want, and sadly, the public want more licence to sin. There is no principle of ethics or morality driving any of the main political parties.

The situation in the UK is now so serious that political allegiances, although a right in itself, is a luxury we can no longer afford. It is time to show where our priorities lie - in political parties or in God's Word! God or Caesar!

If we love our Jesus Christ, if we love our nation, then surely, we must vote for those who will stand up for the teachings of Scripture. *"righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"* [Pro 14:34] then and we will leave an awful inheritance to our children. *"Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children"* [Hos 4:6].

The Divine Prescription

By Revd Calum MacInnes

OFTEN A VISIT TO the doctor can prove to be a 'life-changing experience'. You find out things about yourself that you wish were not true, and yet it is better to know the fact than to live the lie. The doctor prescribes the treatment and we take the tablets trusting the better judgment of those who know.

Years ago I was told by a doctor that I needed to 'rest for a while'. Sounds enticing, but when you are told to do it, and your metabolism is fast, the suggestion is not so attractive. Shortly after that, a friend met me and having asked where I was going, then challenged me with this rhetorical question. 'What is the point of going to the doctor, if you don't do what he says?'

How often have you been to church, read parts of the Bible and heard sermons? Where is God in all your religious busy-ness? Did you know that you are on his doctor's list, and that you have likely failed to turn up for many of the appointments he made for you? Will this year be any different, and if so, how? God wants to be involved with you to improve your health, and for that reason he has written out some prescriptions for you. You would be wise to pick up the medicine. What are these notes? Unlike the scribble of many medical doctors, God's handwriting is easily read. If you

read in Luke 14, verses 25-33, you will see what God prescribes for your life.

Three times in a small space, Jesus said "*you cannot be my disciple*". It does not sound very inviting and is hardly the stuff for an altar call in much of present day evangelism. What was Jesus saying.? If we try to find the answer to three questions, we will get close to what each of these "*cannot*" sayings is about.

In verses 25-26, we need to face the question which Jesus would put: **How much do you love me?** The scene looked as if it would be a very encouraging one for any preacher or teacher. There was a great crowd of people gathered, but Jesus knew that spiritual health is more than physical attendance on church. Was it not Chesterton who said: '*Let your religion be a love affair?*' Your physical presence in church is in many ways the simplest and most robot-like aspect of the whole event.

To highlight the point he was to make, Jesus said something that sounds both strange and unsettling. Earlier on in the chapter, we read that he was inviting people to come, in a scene that bursts with welcome. Now he requires that we "*hate*" family. Seems hardly likely does it? In keeping with His Father's law, Jesus

requires us to love the Lord our God and our neighbour. What does He then mean here? It is a linguistic way of making the point of supreme loyalty. What is natural must give precedence to what is supernatural, and there will be no conflict between the loves, each in its own place. Love Jesus first and your love for your family will be enriched.

Our Creator God has made us capable of loving husband or wife, parents or children or grandchildren with loves that are different and yet perfectly compatible. So also in my relation with God, my love for Jesus will make my love for my wife, children, grandchildren all the richer. So, the answer to the first question about loving Jesus is that I love him first and foremost, and all other loves benefit from that.

In verse 27, we need to find an answer to another question from Jesus. This time we are asked **How ready are you to live for me and to die for me?** The reference to the 'cross' gives this a painful dimension. When we think of the cross, we think of some form of suffering, strictly, although not always so, associated with our belief in God. Notice too that Jesus makes it very personal. He talks about 'your cross' - not just his or someone else's. Each of us needs to consider our own special involvement with 'a cross'. It goes further than that. The cross was an instrument for death. A man did not go out carrying his cross and expect to come back alive. The cross points

in one direction and to one goal - DEATH.

In a talk he gave to a large group of university students, John Piper, the American preacher, started with a gripping prayer in which he said 'It is a fearful thing to call a generation to die. That is reminiscent of Boenheoeffler's words. 'When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. Is your life about Christ and living? If your life a life without Christ, it is a mere unreal existence, from which you will wake one alarming day.

The Peace Corps had a slogan which said: If you are not doing something with your life, it does not matter how long it is. The significance of your life is not its length, but its love. Is your death about Christ and dying? So what is your life? It is one of two things - the end to a Christless existence here, or the transition from enjoying Christ here to a fuller enjoyment of him in heaven. It is worth remembering that you are not ready to die for Christ if you are not ready to live for him here. So, the answer to the second question about being ready to live and to die for Jesus must be that I can say with Paul, *"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain"*

In verses 28-33, we need to face the third question. This time Jesus is asking, **How much will you give up for me?** Jesus used what might seem to be disconnected illustrations - a contractor building a tower, and a king going off to war. What is he getting at? The reference

to the tower is very significant, because the tower was important part of the vineyard. On the lower floor, the workers in the vineyard would find shelter and also a place in which to rest and recover strength for more work. The upper floor provided a vantage point from which to look over the vineyard for its protection.

Now, if the builder cannot complete the tower, he will find himself being mocked by others. Is that not what the Gospel, the Lord's provision and warnings are about. In Jesus Christ there is shelter, there is refreshing, and there is wholesome view of life. Without that we will have shame in the end. Give up hoping in your own attainments, and get your resources in Jesus Christ. In verse 31, the king finds himself at a serious and life-threatening disadvantage. Life

has many conflicts, and the enemy of our souls has much more than we have. We cannot handle, sin and Satan and ungodly culture. King as I am, watched by my subjects, I need to put my pride in my pocket and admit I cannot go life alone.

There are terms of peace offered to me in Jesus, and I need give up my notions of self-sufficiency and my arrogant pride and come to him. Jim Elliott, the martyred missionary once summed up the life that is given over to Christ, in these memorable words, *'He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose'*.

The answer to the third question must be that I give up all, whatever it may be that would come between me and Jesus, so that He is my Chief Possession and I am His property. Life then is worth living, because He lives.

Why No Revival?

THESE MARKS [of Revival] are only produced by the Spirit of God. So why don't more evangelicals seek true revival [today]? Why don't we often hear the call to pray for revival, to confess our sins, to humble ourselves and beg God to visit us with His Spirit? Why don't we hear the clear cry, 'We're in a period of decline; let's ask God to visit us again.' That was the common attitude of the church until 1860 or 1870. But that's not the common perspective today. Why?

We've adopted the thinking that success depends on our activities, our methods, our techniques, our leaders, our education and our training. We see the church as merely a human institution, seeking human techniques. When this happens we lose zeal for God's glory, and become tolerant of sin and error. We act like we can succeed without the superhuman power of God. We devise our own ways to impress the world, and to cause the church to grow. We create new methods to bring unbelievers to hear our message. We try to do the Lord's work in the world's way.

David Eby

Finding Out God's Will

THE COMMON IDEA OF divining God's will is either a pagan notion that we Christians need to let go of, or a mode of administration that God no longer uses. God has given us a programme of guidance that involves getting to know Him through His Word and letting Him shape our character, our hearts, and our desires.....He never in the New Testament calls us to 'seek His will', but rather to seek His kingdom and do His will.....

God honours obedience. He is in your life, ready to lead you according to His programme of guidance. But He cannot lead a person who does not listen to Him, who is not close to Him. If you are struggling with a specific question..... spend time drawing close to Him. Then your character, and perhaps your perspective, will change. Then God will shape your desires. Then you will have the mind of Christ.

Ask yourself if your motivation in life is to glorify God. Often the struggles we have with situations do not grow out of love for God, but out of selfishness and pride.

Not long ago I had a long conversation with a young man who had all sorts of questions about 'God's will for his life'. He wanted to know which job he should have, which school he should attend, which neighbourhood he should live in, which car he should purchase - his list went on and on.

My response to him was simply, 'What's your motivation?' He didn't understand my question. He wanted a simple answer, a magic formula for divining the mind of the Almighty. I told him that did not exist, but that if he would examine his motivation, he would see that his perspective was all wrong. All of his questions were about how he could benefit; none were about how he could obey.

I encouraged him to think about what the Bible had to say about God's will. It tells us clearly that God wants us to be holy. The Lord wants us mature. That is clearly the most important lesson given to Christians in the New Testament. I asked that young man who his god is. Is it the Almighty God, who created us and in love sent His Son to die on the cross for us? Or is it personal success, with the right car, the perfect home, and the ideal job? God is more interested in my holiness than in my success. That young man wondered out loud how God would lead us if we didn't ask Him to reveal His will. So I described God's pattern for guidance to him, and I could see he finally was beginning to understand. It takes a whole new frame of reference to think this way, and it means letting go of a philosophical construct most of us have grown up with in the church....[It] takes hard work, total devotion, and a commitment to serve God's purposes rather than our own.

Bruce K Waltke

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