

Chosen to Praise God

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE of our lives? What is the one thing we must accomplish? The Catechism tells us it is to glorify God. But how do we do that? The Apostle Peter tells us.

He writes to God's elect and tells them that they are chosen to **praise God**. The NIV translates [1 Peter 2:9,10] as *"But you are a chosen people...a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light"*. God's people are chosen to praise their God.

In God's eyes they are royalty - *"a royal priesthood"*. The blood of Christ has made them *"kings and priests to God"* [Rev 1:6]. Whatever they may think of themselves, in God's eyes, His chosen people belong to the royal family of God. They have privileges, no one else has in the very same way as our present queen and royal family have privileges - just because of who they are.

Each individual Christian belongs to a large family. That is why Peter says we are *"a holy nation"*. There is a sense in which we are not individuals. We are part of a whole unit - the Body of Christ. Christianity is a community, a fellowship. Paul says Christians are

"elected together", "joined together", "knit together", "heirs together", "built together" and will be *"gathered together"*.

It is because the church is a unit joined together, that we must not abandon meeting together [Heb 10:25]. There is no other organisation on earth, that has a condition of membership, such as the church, where we are commanded to **pray** for each other, **encourage** each other, **serve** each other, **teach** each other, **accept** each other and **forgive** each other!

We are chosen together in order to work together, in all our varied types of relationships. Real maturity manifests itself in how we handle relationships. We mature in godliness only as far as we are able to handle relationships. If we cannot get on with our own people, how can we expect to win the world over to our faith?

The dangers of isolated Christians are many. Satan loves detached Christians who are not accountable to any leadership. Satan knows such people are vulnerable and do not have the strength to resist his temptations. They are easy prey for him as he goes round looking for such individuals to devour them.

We live in an age where

many people, especially the young, have little sense of 'belonging'. Knowing that we have been 'chosen together' gives a real sense of belonging - not only belonging to the community of God's people, but to God Himself.

Much of the aimlessness and emptiness of life that many experience today, is because they lack a sense of 'belonging'. The teaching that we are only a 'chance collection of atoms' and not created by a God for a specific purpose has no doubt contributed to this emptiness of purpose.

So what exactly are we created to do? We are to praise God. *"This people I have formed for Myself, they shall shew forth My **praise**"* [Isai 43:21]. Paul as well as Peter says *"He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... Having predestined us to...the **praise** of the glory of His grace"* [Eph 1:4-6].

We are destined to praise God throughout eternity - but here on earth we are to do the same. We are to be the mouthpiece of God's praise. People are to learn from us that God is worthy of all praise and glory.

The root word for praise in [1 Pet 2:9] means virtues, excellencies, good qualities. We are to proclaim the excellencies of God. Our lives are to be a testimony to God's excellence. The Christian heroes in [Heb 11] lived and died in faith having performed heroic deeds 'declared plainly' that God was good and worth living and dying for!

Their lives 'declared plainly' that they loved God and that He was worth serving.

We are compelled to ask ourselves, 'What do our lives declare plainly about God?' Does your life and my life, testify the excellencies of God, or are our lives full of complaints and grumbles about our problems? Are you and I thankful to God for all the goodness we enjoy? What kind of message are we giving to the world about God?

Unless we Christians declare the greatness of God - how will the world ever hear the good news? The sad fact is that many in our land today do not know the first thing about God or His attributes - especially of His mercy! Many understand God to be nothing more than a kill-joy who wants to spoil our fun. They have no idea of God being a God that **delights** in mercy and forgiveness and acceptance.

Many have no conception that God created us, not only for His own pleasure, but for our pleasure also. He wanted us to enjoy the fullness of life. He placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden where everything was lovely with the express desire and longing that they would be happy for ever. And then, when we ruined ourselves, God sent Jesus to ensure that some at least would have that unspeakable joy. Jesus said *"I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly"* [John 10:10].

Let the world hear from you and I, the praises of our great God and Saviour.

APC Assembly 2004

THE ASSEMBLY OF THE APC met at Kingsview Christian Centre, Inverness on Wednesday 12 May, 2004 at 7pm
Public Worship was conducted by the retiring moderator Revd R Macrae, Edinburgh, who preached from the Transfiguration speaking of the glory of Christ and the need for reverence for the Word of God and living by faith on a day to day basis. He then constituted the Assembly with prayer and welcomed both delegates and the public to its meeting.

After the approval of the previous minutes, apologies read out and associated members added, the court then proceeded to appoint its next Moderator - the Revd John Ross, Tain. He was welcomed to the chair by the retiring moderator.

The Loyal Address, prepared by the retiring moderator, was then read and approved - see page 11.

The visiting delegates were then invited to speak. From the Free Church, Revd R G MacKay, Inverness brought greetings from his denomination and then spoke of the various encouragements they were enjoying although they were also tempered with discouragements in some areas. He concluded by pointing us to 1 Peter 3:8 which enjoins us all to live in harmony with one another.

The Revd Andrew Quigley of the Scottish Reformed Presbyterian Church in Airdrie in bringing greetings gave a very short history of his church's present situation and then encouraged the whole assembly by a most challenging exhortation from John 15 inspiring us to abide in Christ and we would see fruit.

Revd J J Murray brought greetings from the Free Church Continuing and spoke of his acquaintance with many present that evening. He addressed the assembly regarding the "high walls" of truth and holiness, but reminded us that when it came to the wall of separation it should be as low as possible so that we could still shake hands over it.

Revd David Winch, was the next delegate to speak. He represented Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England & Wales and brought greetings and assured the assembly that they were making every endeavour to have closer links with the APC. In a short account of his own denomination, he spoke of how they were a small but growing church who sought to support mission activity.

Our own Revd A Murray spoke of his recent trip to Canada and how encouraging it was to have an application from a small group in Edmonton who wished to

join the APC denomination. A fuller account of his report is given on page 9.

The Revd Roderick Macrae, the retiring moderator gave a short report of the Scottish Presbytery's activities during 2003.

The Highland Theological College Report was given by the chairman of the Board of Governors. He spoke of the difficult year the College had during 2003 when they had to reduce the number of lecturers from 6 to 4 but how the financial situation had improved during the present year.

Mr William Mackenzie of Christian Focus Publications, spoke of the encouragements and the discouragements of running a publishing company and then recommended some books to the assembly for reading.

Mr Jeremy Ross of Blythswood, spoke in place of Mr James Campbell who was in Romania, on the many activities that Blythswood were engaged in and although they had some financial burdens during the past year these were largely overcome and they were rejoicing in their new depot opened

in Deephaven.

It was agreed that the next meeting of Assembly would be on Wednesday 11 May, 2005 at 7pm within Kingsview Christian Centre, Inverness.

The Assembly was closed with a Scripture reading from 1 Cor 1:18 to the end, singing of a psalm and the Benediction.

At an earlier meeting of the Presbytery, the Revd A Murray had written in to the presbytery intimating that he wished to demit office as from today's date. This was regretfully granted on the motion of Mr William Mackenzie and seconded by Mr William Taylor. several members of presbytery expressed their appreciation of all that Mr Murray had done for the Lord through his many years of ministry.

It was agreed that Mr Murray should continue to act as Inter-Moderator of the congregation and of all the other congregations he was Inter-Moderator over.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

"I BLESS GOD, THAT HOWEVER MUCH men may differ in other things, if they do not fall out with the cross, they are Christians. The cross has attractions powerful enough to draw and bind good men together of every name. We may not condemn men who 'follow not us', so long as they follow the cross. If they at heart believe in Christ, if they are doing His work, if they are fighting under His banner, and for the cause and truth of the Saviour...they are most surely not His enemies. The more of the true spirit of Christ we ourselves possess, the more cautious and reluctant shall we be to deny that spirit to others."

Gardener Spring

Is there such a thing as a mountain top experience or revival?

The Assembly Sermon by the retiring Moderator, Revd Roddy MacRae, Edinburgh on Mark 9: 1 - 14

WE NEED TO BE clear as regards mountain top experiences. I do believe that God periodically reveals His power and presence in dramatic ways in our lives. Here is a definition of a mountain top experience; 'A temporary, uncommon, encounter with God that is meant to give us a fresh awareness of His reality and nearness.'

A biblical mountaintop experience says one writer involves, "My mind, where you learn something new about God, a fresh insight into who He is. It involves my emotions, I feel something, I am overcome with a greater awareness of the reality of God and His nearness in my life. It is like a traumatic moment and you are very aware of His greatness as against your smallness. A mountain top experience also involves my will".

If this definition for a mountain top experience is right, I believe that not everyone who claims to have had one, has in fact had one. There is a result in a mountain top experience which includes the mind, emotions and our lives - all are affected bar none.

Let us look at the disciples when they had a mountain top experience and learn from them.

Here are four things that will help us if we have had one.

1 When you have a mountain top experience the Glory of Christ is revealed.

In chapter 8, Jesus asked the question, "*Who do you say I am?*" Peter answers, "*You are the Christ the son of the living God.*" It is as if Jesus says, "Good answer. So now that you are beginning to understand 'who I am', now I will turn my attention to the cross and what I am about to do".

But Peter stops Him, "What do You mean suffer, we are just about to take over the place and You are talking about suffering." Jesus then says to Peter, "*Get behind me Satan*" and then goes on to explain that suffering is not incompatible with glory. We are told in verse 2, this teaching on how suffering is not incompatible with glory was given over 6 days. It is as if Jesus spends some 6 days revealing this truth to the disciples.

Verse 2, "*After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.*" Sometimes we spend so much time wondering what

mountain this was. But since the Holy Spirit did not reveal it in the text, we should not be bothered about it. What is important is that he was transfigured before them.

So, the first characteristic of a mountain top experience is that the glory of Christ is revealed. Christ was showing them in a most profound way, who it was that they were now following. They were following the divine, though they still had not grasped this awesome truth. The purpose of the event was to reveal Christ and his glory.

But lest you think that this only happens when we have a mountain top experience, I want to point out that this is the reason that we as Christian live in this world. For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain. For me, to live my life is to show Christ. The trouble I face is, do I take seriously the command to be filled with the Spirit daily? Listen, to be filled with the Spirit surely means that we are showing Christ in all His glory in all we say, in our lives, in all of our actions, in all of life be it in the work place or the church or family, so that in everything we show Christ in all his glory.

Now, the trouble with so many mountain top experiences today is that we want to talk about it. Yes, for sure we are supposed to be blessed in any of these extra ordinary encounters, but the purpose of these encounters is that Christ is revealed and glorified. That has an implication for our lives. Has your life changed in the way God wants it to be changed? Is the glory

of Christ in your life an ever increasing reality?

2. When you have a mountain top experience the fear of Christ is renewed.

"And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus". Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters-one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)"

Moses and Elijah appear and before Peter, James and John and as they spoke to Jesus, then Peter turns to Jesus in his usual masterful way and says, *"Rabbi, it is good for us to be here."* This is an understatement if ever there was one. Here, the very glory of the second Person of the Trinity is being revealed, two of the greatest men in the history of the world spiritually speaking are standing there in front of them, and Peter turns round and says, it is good for us to be here!

But he said what he said because he was terrified. So we need to ask ourselves what effect this experience had on Peter, be it here or when he really began to understand the uniqueness of the Christ of God by looking at what he said himself under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1: 16 - 18 reads, *"We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honour and glory from*

God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

Perhaps now we can understand why he said that about the shelters. He was basking in the majestic glory and he did not want it to end. It is likely that he did not want to entertain the idea about this teaching about suffering because he thought to himself, we cannot let someone who is filled with this majestic glory die.

But right here we see that this extra ordinary presence of God experience that Peter had terrified him. Many people who say that have and had mountain top experience, suggest that it is a lovely, 'mushy' sort of thing. But if you look at the overwhelming biblical accounts of these extra ordinary moments of God's presence, you will see that the people who have them are on their faces, they fall before the Lord, they are overwhelmed by the greatness of God and with biblical fear.

Remember Isaiah. No doubt he felt the redeeming love of God, but he was overwhelmed with the fear of God, he felt ruined as God's glory was revealed to him. When you are bathed in the glory of God, you develop a biblical fear of God. Scripture says, *"it is the fool who has no fear of God before their eyes."*

Many of us yearn for revival. I do, but you have to realise what that means to be so overwhelmed by

the presence of God, it is not something to be taken lightly. Biblical fear is revealed throughout the scriptures: Psalm 25: 9, *"The LORD confides in those who fear him"*. Psalm 33: 8, *"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him."* Psalm 33:18, *"But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love"*.

Scripture makes it clear that to fear the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. To seek revival, to have a mountain top experience is to discover the fear of God.

3. When you have a mountain top experience the word of God is revered.

One writer said, 'probably the most subtle form of spiritual atrophy (ie, wasting away) is the gradual reduction in the authority of God's word in our lives.' When we are spiritually on fire and at a good place with God, we respond quickly to the Word of God. We do what it says.

But when we begin to back-slide and compromise and grieve the Spirit, the word of God and its influence of our lives is reduced.

Perhaps you can reflect on a time in your life when someone opened the word of God and your response was, it says it, I will do it. But now over a period of time, you know that there are things that God's word is teaching and you are not doing it. You have known it for some time. Now you say, 'Ah well, 3 out of 5 sins is not bad.' Now, you are indifferent about the truth of

God's word. But a close encounter with God changes that attitude away and you begin to realise you are not right with God.

There are people, and I include myself, who say we revere God's word but our actions are at odds with his word. Verse 7, *"Then a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and a voice came from the cloud: This is My Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!"*

The voice of heaven tells the disciples to listen to the words of Jesus Christ. The word of Christ is to be revered. Moses and Elijah were there to symbolise the importance of the OT as the Law and the Prophets were revered by the Jews. Moses was the one who wrote the Pentateuch and Elijah was considered to be the greatest prophet. To a Hebrew person, the sight of the cloud, and the appearance of Moses and Elijah was an affirmation of the Word of God and its importance.

But as important as these OT figures were, the voice said, *"This is My beloved son, listen to Him."* Are you listening to him? Do what He says, if you are His follower. When you have a close encounter, an overwhelming sense of the presence of God, you will develop a reverence to His word and you will do it.

Some people think that when they have a mountain top experience that they are moving beyond the Bible to a direct feed. That is false and foolish because everyone who has a biblical mountain top experience has a heightened reverence for the word of

God. How much power does God's word have over your life? Can God's word change your opinion or attitude on a subject? You have not had a mountain top experience if you have not had an increase in reverence for God's word.

4. When you have a mountain top experience, you always come back down to earth.

Verse 8, *"Suddenly, when they looked round, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus."* Now it was time for them to get back to live their lives in faith. This experience of the overwhelming sense of the presence of God was gone, now it was back to daily routine and living by faith.

One writer speaking about Mountain top experiences said, 'The joy, the emotion, the victory, the enthusiasm must always fade into disciplined, purposeful obedience. As great as these mountain top experiences are, they are not where the Christian life is lived. We may draw some fuel on these special times of the nearness of God, but we cannot always live on the mountain.'

We have to come down and live our lives, but we can be fuelled by these glorious experiences to bring all the glory to our awesome God. Here the Lord had given them a glimpse of glory, the veil was lowered for a moment, but note it was down the mountain to live and follow Christ with the knowledge that we follow an awesome God who is greater than anything we can comprehend. He lives!

Canadian Visit

By Revd Alexander Murray

9th April to 4th May 2004

IT WAS FOR ME a real privilege, accompanied by my wife, Marjory, to complete the time of our visit to the Canadian Congregations.

A genuine bonus in the situation was the opportunity to have the hospitality of Marjory's nephews (her late sister Dolly Fraser's children) - James and Diana in Toronto and Hugh and Cathy in Vancouver and to meet the grandchildren again.

Between these visits we were able to stay 3 nights with my youngest brother, Tommy, and his wife in the Olympia Peninsula near Seattle USA . From Vancouver I also made one day and night visit to Edmonton to be most graciously looked after by Revd and Mrs John Dyck and family.

TORONTO

On Lord's Day, 11th April I kept both services at Victoria Park, 30+ in the forenoon with 8 in the evening where distance from church makes a return visit virtually impossible. It was a genuine pleasure to be assisted by Revd John Bodner, a graduate of Westminster, who has been the stated supply preacher in

Toronto over a number of years and to renew acquaintances with Wilma Kling and family, Catherine Macdonald, Mrs Jack, the de Grootes, McGills, among others; and later in the week with Mrs Thompson in the care home.

On the weekend of 17/18 April a Communion was held with a Saturday service at 11 am and 11 and 6 on the Sabbath. Hugh Fraser, assessor elder had come through from Vancouver and a business meeting was held Saturday pm.

19 communicants celebrated the Lord's Supper and the evening also saw a good turnout and I was able to identify friends of former visits in the congregation. Over the weekend I preached with a measure of liberty from John 14:2, Mat 27:46 and Acts 16:25.

VANCOUVER

The visit here began with a meeting of the Canadian Presbytery at the home of Gerry Epp, Elder on Saturday 24th when the main business was "Presbytery Exams" for the Student, Jerrold Lewis. It was done with commendable thoroughness and the candidate proved equal to the task. Next day the 25th I took both services at Fraser/15th Avenue church with 30+

in the forenoon and around the 20 mark at 5 pm. Again, it was a pleasure to meet up with old friends Rina, Libby Mackay, Mrs Beattie, Mrs Macdonald (daughter-in-law to Dr Macdonald), Mrs Mackay to name some.

The Canadian Presbytery held a formal meeting at 8 am Saturday 01 May, being joined by tele-conference by Revd Malcolm MacInnes from Scotland. On Lord's Day, the 2nd May, and again, after a preparatory service on the Saturday, we had the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Text was John 19:30 when 17 persons sat at the table. At the evening service the Sacrament of Baptism was dispensed when "Daniel Bryson", seven day old son of Mr and Mrs Jerrold Lewis, joined the visible church.

EDMONTON

A small group of some 5 families in Edmonton had petitioned the Presbytery to join with the APC denomination and on that account I was present to meet these families in one of their homes on the evening of Wednesday the 28th April.

I kept a Bible Study and discussed with them their petition. The upshot is that on the following Saturday the Presbytery passed a motion to grant the "crave" of the petition and that the Edmonton Group be received for "Mission Work".

Our abiding impression of this recent visit to Canada is the warmth of the welcome given to us. Another thing most gratifying was to witness the appreciation expressed by the congregations of the men who are currently caring for their needs, -- Bodner in Toronto, Lewis in Vancouver and Dyck in Edmonton, as along with affection for the memory of the late Mr Beattie.

Exclusive psalmody congregations require, in my opinion, to be able exponents of their art, and I can testify that this is indeed true in Canada with Messrs Bodner and Bill Walsh, both so qualified in vocal song, leading in the respective congregations.

Our nephew, Hugh Fraser, Clerk to the Canadian Presbytery remains truly indefatigable in his work for the cause of the Lord and His church in these parts.

WHEN WILL THE CHURCH BE BUILT?

"IT IS WHEN MEN AND WOMEN take their stand on God's Word before the watching world, living in holiness and ready to suffer for the sake of our Lord, that our church today will have the power of God that is able to cast down strongholds and crash open the gates of hell. It is when we take seriously the cross of Jesus Christ and its claims upon our lives that the world will stand up and take notice....Then Christ will build His church in our midst and cast down even the gates of hell, all to the praise of the glory of His name."

Richard D Phillips

Loyal Address

May it please Your Majesty,

We, the General Assembly of the Associated Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Canada, met at Inverness this 12th day of May 2004, desire to express our sincere devotion to Your Majesty's Person and Throne. Since we are subject to the supreme authority of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we assert our loyalty to Your Majesty as Queen of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is certainly the case that our nation has enjoyed, under Your Majesty's long reign, many years of civil and religious liberties. We thank God for the heritage from which this great nation has benefited and also been used to be a blessing to many other nations, we believe because of such good foundations.

In these days of change, we continue to give thanks for your own expression of Faith in Christ and the way in which Your Majesty has walked with Christ in the world with honour. That is why in the words of the Apostle Paul writing to the Church at Ephesus, we continue to pray for Your Majesty so, "that Christ will be more and more at home in your heart as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvellous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God." (NLT) We trust that from such wonderful blessings, Your Majesty will be given strength and wisdom to continue Her Reign with dignity and honour.

We realise that Your Majesty will have great difficulty in not causing offence in these multi-cultural times, but we assure you, we pray that God would give you extraordinary courage and wisdom and love to be able to do what is right with honour before the Lord and in society. We would like to express our sorrow in the decline in morality in our country with the recognition that politics will always fail when it rejects the foundation of truth, God's word. This is particularly so when the church is weak in this respect. When there is a rejection of the truth of God's word, we will always face ironies such as people protesting over animal rights and at the same time espousing the right for every woman to abort her child if she so pleases. These days are days where many cry out for good, honourable and clear leadership and we continue to urge Your Majesty to encourage political leaders to seek the wisdom of God's word. We also express concern at church leaders under your Majesty's authority who are unwilling to submit themselves to the word of God, which is foundational to the faith.

We recognise our own failings Your Majesty, so we wish, along with Your Majesty and all churches in our land to continually seek the wisdom of God in all things and live by the grace and power of God to His honour.

We wish to communicate to Your Majesty that we will continue to pray for Your Majesty, and His Royal Highness Prince Philip and all of Your Majesty's Family so that they may all know the wonder and love of the Lord Jesus Christ and the remarkable freedom He bought with His life and death on our behalf.

On behalf of the Assembly,

Rev Roderick Macrae

Angels

THESE ARE AT least two extremes when it comes to angels, the first, not to believe in them, and the second, to worship them. Both are wrong. We have to guard against any extreme.

It is highly dishonouring to God to neglect any part of His word. Angels are mentioned many, many times in the word. Let's think for a moment about them.

We should never forget that the angels are sent to this earth to serve those who are saved. This should be a great encouragement to us when we feel afraid, or are very aware of the global opposition and hatred there is to the gospel and to the people of God.

Satan wants the Church of Christ totally destroyed, and little doubt but he has plans regarding the destruction of every individual Christian. We are not meant to be ignorant of Satan's intentions.

How comforting to know that the good angels are on our side and they are mighty. Protection by angels, is awesomely illustrated for us in the story of Elisha and his servant, when Israel was being attacked by Ben-hadad the King of Aram (Syria AV).

The king of Aram was in a great rage, because his secret plans

to attack Israel were thwarted when Elisha revealed them to Joram the king of Israel. This happened time and again. Ben-hadad very naturally thought one of his officers was informing the Israelites, but he was wrong. He was assured that the problem was the prophet Elisha, who was able to tell Israel's king the very words spoken in Ben-hadad's bedroom.

Subsequently, Elisha's servant was terrified and probably thought himself and Elisha doomed. One morning he was astonished to discover the city of Dothan surrounded by horses and chariots. A strong force had been sent by Ben-hadad to capture Elisha. Elisha reassured his servant, *"Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* In the final analyses this wonderful statement is true for every one of God's children. Hold on to it.

Then Elisha prayed, *"O Lord, open his eyes so he may see."* Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hill's full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." [2 Kin 6:16, 17]. What an amazing scene. So calculated to dispel the young man's fears. What could the Arameans do

against such heavenly angelic forces. How could they defend themselves let alone destroy or defeat them.

Following this, the Arameans were struck with blindness, then led captive to Samaria by the prophet. They were in real danger of being annihilated. Mercifully they had their eyesight restored, were then treated to a feast and sent back to their master.

This whole incident teaches us the power of the angels. No earthly army can begin to match this power. The angels are there for our protection. We need the eyes of our understanding opened to see the clear teaching of God's word.

It is not necessary (even though we might wish) to meet an angel or even see one but it is very important to believe what is written and to remember they can be sent to our aid whenever God chooses. Who would doubt but that they have already done us service many times.

How wonderful to know a reliable friend is keeping an eye out for us or for one of our loved ones. It is of greater wonder to know, that there are millions of sinless angels more powerful, knowledgeable and wiser than us, and they have been commissioned by God to help us

through the dangers and difficulties of life.

I recently heard a minister say, that great and all as the angels are they do not know the amazing thrill - the astonishing and humbling experience of having their sins forgiven because they have no sin.

Similarly they cannot say Christ died for their sin. Yet these angels serve sinners who are saved by grace. It is humbling to be graciously served by a fellow Christian who we regard as superior to ourselves. We should also feel humbled to think of angels, who are more superior still, serving us.

The angels, with all their superiority to us, long to look into the mysteries of the gospel. How pompous for even the most able men, to think they are too sophisticated for the "old, old story". Those of the angels who rebelled are eternally lost. Satan himself is the prime example.

We are not to worship the angels but neither are we to be ignorant of them.

This and much more regarding the angels is recorded in scripture so that we would give thanks to God, take courage and be more adventurous for God.

Angels, both good and bad, have a greater influence on this world than men are generally aware of. *Increase Mather*

An angel is a spiritual creature created by God without a body, for the services of Christendom and of the church. *Martin Luther*

Angels will never be kings. They will always be servants. *Andrew Bonar*

Congregational News

SKYE

Presentation - The Skye congregation of the APC met in the church at Portree on Saturday 1 May 2004 at 7.30pm to make a presentation to Mr Jan van Woerden, marking his retirement as a missionary. This was an occasion of joy with a full church.

Mr Jan van Woerden has been an assessor elder, session clerk and a home missionary, taking services on a regular basis since the congregation's inception in 1989. The proposal to make this presentation came spontaneously from the people themselves in Portree and Dunvegan as an expression of their appreciation, love, respect and thanks for Mr van Woerden, whose unstinted care and attention for them over the year, had been way above the call of duty. Mr van Woerden will continue in his duties God willing, though now retired and all were very glad to hear this.

It was observed that since its foundation, the Lord has prospered this congregation in His providence with a pastor, a church building and a manse.

Mr van Woerden was presented with a cheque from the Portree congregation by Mr William Byers, a suitably inscribed Bible by

Revd A M Cattanach, a bouquet of flowers for Mrs van Woerden by Mrs Chrissie MacSween and an envelope of cash from the Dunvegan congregation by Mr Peter Macaskill. The minister brought proceedings to a close by prayer and praise, afterwards light refreshment was provided and the happy occasion was concluded.

New Elder - On the Lord's Day 2 May 2004 at 12 noon the Kirk Session met with the congregation in the Portree Church to induct and ordain Mr Malcolm G Faulkes a member in full communion and an unanimous elder elect, to the eldership in the congregation. There was a full church for the historical even, the first ordination of an elder in the APC in Skye. The moderator preached a most apposite sermon from Exodus 17:12. The hands of Moses being held up by Aaron and Hur. He then inducted and ordained the elder elect to the eldership in this Church, giving him the right hand of fellowship, followed by all the elders present.

At the close of the service the new elder went to the door with the moderator and shook hands with all the congregation as they left the church.

The Kirk Session continued to sit and Mr Faulkes took his seat

on the court for the first time. All left the building with joy and gladness and thankfulness of heart to the Lord for His goodness and favours to us over the past years and over the past two days.

The Kirk Session and congregation would value your prayerful interest and support.

DUNDEE

The congregation continues to be encouraged with some locals, especially children, coming into the meetings. The Saturday lunches has brought in one elderly lady for the last four occasions. She was a Roman Catholic but who no longer 'believes all that stuff' and no longer believes in any religion. She is very pleasant and seems to be delighted that we welcome her in although she is an atheist. She brings up religious matters and it is a wonderful opportunity to present the gospel to her. She looks forward to the Saturdays when she can come in and have a chat. Do please pray for her and that we might be used in bringing her to know the Saviour.

Andy Burns our worker is now returning to the people who responded to the questionnaire he gave out. This second visit has been much more interesting with many folk wanting to know some of the details of the survey.

Our Sunday Club has had over 20 young folk in it during the last few Sunday and we ask that you pray for more helpers as the wide

range of ages requires more leaders to control the children. Some of the children come back to the service in the evening and enjoy the welcome they receive. Eileen does a wonderful job with them but there is need for more helpers.

Andy is organising a Holiday Week for the community and we hope to have the annual barbecue on the Saturday with a Weekend Away for the children and the parents and others in the community. Please do pray for the Special Service on the Sunday that all present will be challenged and that God would be honoured.

We have had another 'break-in attempt' on the front door! The door has been badly damaged and needs to be replaced at a cost of over £500. We are thankful that no other damage was done and that the minister's books were not destroyed!

The congregation spent a Saturday painting the railings, door and recovering the graffiti marking on the side of the building. We are grateful to those who gave up their precious Saturday to do this work!

The Indian family, the mother is a Christian, continues to come and the husband has successfully completed his studies and now needs a job! They would love to stay in Dundee and continue to worship with us - so please do pray that God would provide suitable employment for him so that they may still be able to attend and enjoy our fellowship. We look to the Lord to help us meet our financial obligations.

Jesus, Work & Stress

ARE WE DOING TOO much today? Do we feel we are always on the run, never quite able to catch up? How often do we just sit back and think about our lives and what is really important?

Jesus Christ was the ultimate in efficiency. His use of time was perfect. He never wasted a moment. Yet the Bible never portrays Him in a hurry. Indeed, on two occasions, (the raising of Jairus' daughter and the raising of Lazareth), His miracles were performed precisely because he took so long to go to scenes of sickness. Christ seemed to be quite happy to be distracted from His present 'case' to attend to another, as the incident of the haemorrhaging woman clearly demonstrates. He had plenty time when journeying to stop and attend to blind beggars and others in need.

One cannot imagine the Saviour making out a list in the morning, of things that just had to be done that day. There is nothing near the equivalent of Jesus looking at His watch to see how the time was passing. It was the disciples who had to keep reminding Him that 'the day was well spent'.

It would appear that Christ would not be impressed with our present day emphasis on punctuality and precise scheduling - as when a half-hour's delay cries down the wrath of our young executives on

British Airways, EasyJet or ScotRail! Jesus made time to spend days at wedding feasts, while many of us today have hardly time to rush out and buy a card to say 'Sorry, unable to attend due to pressure of work'!

Someone pointed out that there is all the difference in the world between something done speedily on the one hand, and something done in a hurry on the other hand. Speed implies efficiency, while hurry implies that something is out of control.

We do things in a hurry when **our** agenda is not being kept. We panic when **our** agenda is falling behind. If we are following God's agenda, nothing is falling behind. Much of our trouble lies in the fact that we think we are following God's agenda when in fact we are only following our own agenda. According to the Epistle of James, we should make plans, for up to one year in advance, but we must always subject our plans to God's overruling plan.

How do we get stress obeying God, if God always gives us the strength to obey Him? God will never ask us to do something which will give us a mental breakdown. Most of our troubles arise because we **set ourselves** agendas, time-tables, schedules and objectives according to **our own** blueprints, instead of waiting upon God for **His**

timetable to unfold. If we are not getting the strength to fulfil our targets and are threatened with physical, mental or emotional collapse, then we should ask ourselves are our targets God's targets? It is possible to do work **for** God that may not be the work **of** God.

Jesus Christ, our supreme example, did not do everything he could have done. We often see the amount of need and the amount of work to be done, and get depressed over its size, or we take on far too much work ourselves. Let us learn from Jesus.

He, kept His eye on His Father for direction and guidance. For example, in John 5, where Jesus went to the pool of Bethesda, He

healed one man and then walked away from all the others leaving them unhealed! We might ask, why could He not have stayed and healed all the others also?

When the Jews objected to what Christ did, His answer was that He was keeping His eye on His Father, and as His Father was not healing any more that day, He wasn't able to work apart from the Father [John 5:19].

Christ could have continued working there in the Pool, but He would have been doing so without His Father, and therefore following His own agenda and therefore carrying the full burden all alone.

Revd G I Macaskill

Blaise Pascal on Happiness

"ALL MEN SEEK HAPPINESS. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of man, even of those who hang themselves."

"There was once in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself."

"Without Jesus Christ man must be in vice and misery; with Jesus Christ man is free from vice and misery; in Him is all our virtue and all our happiness. Apart from Him there is but vice, misery, darkness, death, despair."

I was There

HOW DO YOU KNOW that God exists? How do you know that God loves you?

These questions, upon the hearts of so many, have answers as real as the formative moments in your life.

As I have aged I seem to grow more and more prone to nostalgia. Many of us do this instinctively, clinging to memories past, perhaps looking backwards with the hope of seeing a purpose for our lives. When I travel to India, I make it a point to revisit time and again those significant marking points of my own life. As I recall these moments past but not forgotten, I hear the gentle voice of the God very much in the present. And He says, "I was there." "When you were on your bike contemplating suicide, I was there. When you were but 9 years old and your grandmother died, I arranged for her gravestone to hold in time the very verse that would lead you to conversion. I was there."

It is in these harrowing moments—your parents divorce, your child's birth, the death of a loved one—where God leaves a defining mark. There is a reason you remember such moments so vividly. We have a choice to hear or to ignore, but regardless his voice cries out in our memories, "I was there." He has been in our past. He is here today. He will be there in our future.

God exists, as Lewis worded

it well, in the "Eternal Now." And the psalmist, always writing with feet firmly planted in time, but arms ever reaching for the eternal, beautifully explains, "Thou art God from age to age the same." We need not be intimidated by the peril of the moment. As we look back on these markers in time, there is a sense of the transcendent, a glimpse of a reality greater than this. Beaming from this reality is the eternal love of God. He was with you then. He is with you now. And He loves you.

William Shakespeare once reasoned, "Love sought is good, but given unsought is better." How do you know that God loves you? While you and I were yet sinners, still lost in realms of selfish time, Christ gave His life for us. And that sacrifice stands the greatest marker in time. It is the point at which eternity itself entered into the fullness of time to reach you and me, right now, and forever.

On this day, as we look upon some of the harrowing moments of our country's history let us receive the gentle reminder of God's presence. For in these formative moments, too, God has left a defining mark. He was there. And He is with you now.

05/31/04 "I Was There"

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Something of Value

DURING A SPEAKING engagement at the University of Illinois, I was handed a question scribbled on a note card from a student who hesitated to come to the microphone. It read, "The state of humankind as we know it is on a serious downward spiral, and from my perspective, it's only getting worse. Do you have any hope in the future of humankind and specifically our generation, and if so, why?"

I was both saddened and heartened to read his question. Overwhelmed by the maze of conflicts facing humanity, this young heart seeks a way out. And I believe he represents large numbers of young people in the world. Contrary to the "couldn't care less" image we are often given of university students, he revels how close to cynicism—and pessimism—many of them actually are.

Students today are not easily taken in; they do not trust readily. But their questions show a depth and an understanding of our world that is lost in the shuffle of postmodern cynicism and hopeless pessimism.

Here, G.K. Chesterton makes a significant point — there is a world of difference between sorrow and pessimism. He explains, "Sorrow is founded on the value of something, and pessimism upon the value of nothing."¹ In terms of hope for the future, this makes all the difference.

I once had breakfast with an atheist who repeatedly insisted that there was no evidence for God—absolutely none.

At one point during our meal he told me how much he loves his wife, and painfully recounted the details of her battle with disease. His wife was dying and he could do nothing.

After all the intellectual arguments had run into a headstrong willful resistance, I asked him why he loved his wife. He stared at me.

"Don't you see her as a unique woman of intrinsic value to you?" I asked. "Yes," he answered. "But how can she have such value," I replied, "if all life is nothing more than chemicals?" Suddenly, the conversation took a turn. As we got up from the table, he said, "You just keep doing what you're doing in life. You are bringing back common sense into our heads."

What thoughts occupy my mind as I ponder the world at this present time? Above anything else, I, like the young man from the university, see that the hour is dark. Hope, like character, takes years to build and minutes to shatter. But friends, hope, like character, can also rise beyond the moment to reinvest in what is of ultimate value—God's eternal Word. This hope points in cumulative strength to the person and power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will not let you down.

(Footnote 1: G.K. Chesterton, *As I was Saying*, Ed. Robert Knille, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985. pp. 267.)

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05/28/04

Ravi Zacharias

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Police Constable Murders Christian

PAKISTAN 10 June 2004

A YOUNG CHRISTIAN man died from severe head trauma after three days in a coma following an attack by a Muslim police constable who struck him with a hammer while he lay defenceless in hospital.

Samuel Masih was hospitalised on 22 May having contracted tuberculosis in prison. Samuel had been detained since August 2003 under Pakistan's controversial "blasphemy law" for allegedly defiling a mosque. In the early hours of 24 May police constable Faryad Ali entered Samuel's hospital room and despite the presence of a police guard assaulted Samuel with a brick-cutter's hammer. Faryad Ali sought to kill Samuel because of the accusation of blasphemy. Samuel went into a coma from which he never recovered. He died on 28 May.

Faryad Ali said that he felt it was his duty as a Muslim to kill Samuel. He told police, "I wanted to earn a place in heaven." He had previously expressed hatred for Samuel to his colleagues. He was arrested for attempted murder, which was changed to formal murder charges after Samuel died.

The "blasphemy law" is often misused by Muslims in Pakistan to get revenge in personal disputes, especially against Christians who are particularly vulnerable because the testimony of a Muslim in court is valued above

that of a non-Muslim. Librarian Muhammad Yaqoob of the Idara Darusalam Jinnah Garden Mosque in Lahore, who filed the charges against Samuel, claimed he saw Samuel spit on the wall of the mosque near the library. Before his arrest Samuel had worked as a painter and whitewasher.

Devout Muslims often feel they should kill alleged blasphemers, whether convicted or not. Four Christians accused of blasphemy have been murdered between 1992 and 2002. Most Christians who have been accused and acquitted have had to leave Pakistan and come to the West after their release because anyone even accused of blasphemy is considered by Muslim extremists to be guilty for life.

PRAY

1) Pray for Samuel's family, that God would give them His peace and grace at this time. 2) Pray for the safety of Christians in Pakistan, as they always face the possibility that someone will try to bring a charge against them under Pakistan's blasphemy legislation..3) Pray that the Pakistani police and judiciary authorities will examine this case honestly and not drop the charges against Faryad Ali..4) Pray that the Pakistani government will repeal or amend the "blasphemy law" to make it less easily abused; praise God for some of the positive moves they seem to be making in this direction..

The Growing Crisis of Drink

SENIOR HOME OFFICE officials have finally admitted that drink-fuelled violence is spiralling out of control in town and cities throughout Britain. The Government is concerned that the epidemic of drunkenness has made it impossible for the police to control the situation.

Here is the bleak picture which demands Government action - NOW.

The binge-drinking culture costs Britain £20 billion a year.

More than 1.2 million acts of drunken violence places an enormous strain on the NHS.

Over indulgence costs firms billions every year through absenteeism.

Under-16s drink twice as much as they did ten years ago.

47% of people attacked by strangers believed the assailant had been drinking.

The explosion in the number of pubs in city centres make it impossible for police to enforce the licensing laws.

The drinks industry seems to be ignoring the social consequences of alcohol misuse.

One in four under-16s will have had a drink during the last week.

The amount they drink has almost doubled from 5.3 units in 1990 to 10.5 in 2002.

One in three 15 year-olds

have been drunk at least once.

Alcohol related crime, including drink-driving and domestic violence, costs taxpayers £7.3 billion every year.

Alcohol imposes an annual burden of £1.7 billion on the Health Service.

Around 1 in 26 NHS beds is occupied by a patient with a drink related disease. A third of accident and emergency cases are linked to alcohol.

As many as 17 million working days every year are lost through alcohol related absences at a cost to business of £6.4 billion.

There has been a 64% increase in violent crime since 1998/99, a significant proportion of which is alcohol related.

Despite all this, Government action has not only been ineffective, but their intention to introduce round-the-clock opening has escalated the problem. It is amazing that the number of people charged with drunk and disorderly behaviour is down, and just five pubs have had their licences revoked in recent years.

It is time the Government took decisive action, not to relax licensing laws but to strengthen and enforce them. That includes reducing the hours of opening, particularly at weekends.

We plead with the Government to act NOW.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Marriage, Forgiveness

On her golden wedding anniversary, a grandmother revealed the secret of her long and happy marriage. "On my wedding day, I decided to choose ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," she explained. A guest asked her to name some of the faults. "To tell the truth," she replied, "I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made me hopping mad, I would say to myself, 'Lucky for him that's one of the ten.'" No one is perfect. So marriage is the union of two imperfect people, with their individual faults, bad habits, and undesirable qualities. As Christians, marriage should be a place to practice grace. When you can look past the faults of your spouse and concentrate on encouraging them, you will find satisfaction and peace. (Turning Point Daily Devotional, 5-18-04)

Greed

Do you know how monkeys are trapped in India? A hole is drilled in a coconut and rice is poured inside it. Monkeys like rice very much. A monkey will come along, stick a paw into the coconut, grab a fistful of rice, and then be unable to pull its paw back through the hole. He is trapped by his own greed. All he would have to do is to turn loose of the rice and he would be free but he can't bring himself to let go. There are higher life forms than the monkey that fall for the same trap. Many people can't get free to be all they could be because they are clutching in their hands some penny ante false god. It could be drugs or alcohol or money or resentment or prejudice. God wants to help you escape from bondage and to become free indeed. (Bill Bouknight, "Just a Thought")

Christian Life

Ben Kingsley starred as the main character in the motion picture Gandhi. He spent months preparing for the role, visiting the various Indian locales Gandhi had frequented. He even learned to spin cotton thread on a wooden wheel while holding conversations as Gandhi did. The physical resemblance between Gandhi and Kingsley was almost startling. After filming a scene in a village south of Delhi, Kingsley stepped out of a car, and an elderly peasant knelt to touch his feet. Embarrassed, Kingsley explained that he was merely an actor playing Gandhi. "We know," replied the villager, "but through you he will surely live again. "Let me ask you, "Does the Son of God live again through us? You see, that's also part of Jesus' prayer for us. That the world will see Christ in us; through our unity and through our love. (Billy D. Strayhorn, Sermon: "One In Christ," eSermons.com)

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