

# Being Thankful

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**B**EING THANKFUL to God is one of the most profitable things we can do. As well as bringing glory to God, giving thanks brings increased joy and assurance to ourselves. Praising God brings joy to the soul and strengthens faith.

Paul said that if we have received Christ, if we are rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, and if we are walking in Him, then we will abound in thanksgiving [Col 2:6,7].

Psalm 107 begins with *"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good...let the redeemed of the Lord, say so"*! Christians, the redeemed, are to praise God for His goodness. They are not to conceal their joy but are to tell God and others.

Our time at church should be filled with praise. Psalm 100 tells us when we go to the house of God we must *"Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name"* [Psa 100:4].

God rejoices at the praise of His people and it is a duty which all Christians ought to cultivate. To be ungrateful for all God's mercies to us is a great sin of omission. No doubt this is why Paul classifies the 'unthankful' with the worst of sinners, even blasphemers when he writes to Timothy about those who

will cause trouble in the church [2 Tim 3:2].

It is not just in church that we are to praise God but throughout the day we are to remember God's goodness to us. We are to declare His lovingkindness in the morning and His faithfulness every night [Psa 92:2].

Psalm 107 goes on to tell of the various classes of people who should be foremost in their praise of God. Surprisingly, it is the depressed and the downcast who are particularly singled out as a group who ought to thank God and who, as a result will find blessing. Those who *"sat in darkness and in the shadow of death bound in affliction"* who even *"rebelled against the words of God"* these very people *"cried out to the Lord in their trouble"*. Then we read of the result. *"And He saved them out of their distresses"* [Psa 107:10cf].

What an encouragement for those who are distressed today to turn to the Lord. Even those who have rebelled against God's providence towards them!

The old and familiar hymn 'Count your many blessings, Name them one by one, And it will surprise you, What the Lord has done', teaches those who who are feeling low in their spirits to look positively

at the good things God has given them, instead of focusing on the negative aspects.

Even fools, for their sin and folly are also called to give thanks to God for His mercy. They too, we are told, cried out to the Lord and He saved them. What a merciful God the Christian has.

The jet-setters of the age and the travelling business tycoons are also mentioned in Psalm 107 as those who see God's wonderful works in creation and on the seas. They may be at their "wit's end", but if they cry out to God, He will hear them and calm the storm and the waves - of whatever nature.

Five times the Psalmist bursts into a special chorus in Psalm 107 pleading that men would give thanks to God for His goodness and His wonderful works to all classes of people [vv1, 8, 15, 21, 31]. It is as if the Psalmist is so concerned that we will miss out on something if we fail to praise God.

To be able to recognise God's goodness in all events and circumstances and to rejoice over them, is a sign of true spirituality. The Psalmist ends Psalm 107 with this exact thought for he says "***The righteous see it, and rejoice***". It is the truly righteous who can discern God's hand in history and the affairs of men, and it is the truly wise who understand the love and kindness of the Lord. It is the unthankful and the spiritually blind who are the complainers, the disgruntled and the pessimistic..

The Scriptures, especially

Paul, equate prayer with rejoicing and thanksgiving. He wrote to the Thessalonians "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God*" [1 Thes 5:18].

Paul immediately adds a warning to this verse "*Do not quench the Spirit!*" We grieve the Spirit when we fail to acknowledge God's goodness. Paul instructed the Ephesians to sing and make melody in their hearts "*giving thanks always for all things to God*" [Eph 5:19cf]. He usually started his epistles by giving thanks to God. Eg, "*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ*" [Rom 1:8], but also in Corinthians, Thessalonians, Timothy and Philemon.

Jesus seems 'hurt' after healing ten lepers and only one returned to give Him thanks. "*Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine*" he asked [Luke 17:17]. It is a great omission to fail to either notice God's kindness or to fail to thank Him.

The question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we naturally feel thankful and grateful to God? All emotions, including gratitude, is not a 'decision' we make, rather it is a spontaneous reaction to a perceived reality. The child's joy and gratitude on opening his birthday presents is spontaneous. It just happens for it is a natural emotion to rejoice over good things.

When you waken each morning and see God's mercies surrounding you - does your heart well up with thankfulness?

# Praising God in 'trouble and in joy'

We have all heard of Jonathan Edwards - his wife, Sarah Edwards, is not so well known, but equally impressive

This article appeared in *Evangelicals Now* and was taken from Sharon James' book *'In Trouble and in Joy: Four Women who lived for God'*, published by Evangelical Press, and is used with kind permission.

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**W**E HAVE HEARD much this year about the great American preacher Jonathan Edwards, as 2003 is the 300th anniversary of his birth.

He wrote some of the greatest books and preached some of the most powerful sermons in all of church history. But he himself freely admitted that for a 'visual aid' to illustrate the reality of Christian love, he looked to his wife Sarah. And when he came to write a definitive treatise on how to discern between the true and the false in a religious revival, he used her spiritual experience as the example of the 'highest and purest' he had ever come across. Sarah lived out what he preached.

Born in 1710 in New Haven, Sarah experienced a sense of God's felt presence from a very early age. She was only 8 when Jonathan Edwards arrived in New Haven to study at the fledgling Yale College (of which her father had been one of the founders).

Five years later in 1723, when Sarah was 13 and Jonathan 20, he penned a description of her that has passed into history. She loves, he said, to walk alone in the country and think of God. She knew

that this Creator God loved her personally and feared more than anything else to offend him. She loved to sing to God and was always full of joy - sometimes unspeakable joy.

No wonder Jonathan was enthralled, for he had discovered a kindred spirit. From an early age he too had loved to wander alone in the woods and pray; he thought deeply about God, in fact he thought deeply about everything. Tutoring at Yale at the tender age of 20, he thought and spoke and wrote like a mature professor. No ordinary girl could have suited him.

Sarah was extraordinary. She was not disturbed by the profundity of his religious experience, for she shared it. On the 28th July 1727, 17-year old Sarah married 25-year old Jonathan. In the years to come many people would stay in their home. All spoke with one voice - the deep love and mutual respect of these two individuals was inviolable.

Earlier in that year, Jonathan had commenced ministry in the congregational church at Northampton, a town of just over 1,000 inhabitants. The following year, Sarah's first child was born:

she then had 10 more children at more or less two-year intervals until she was 40.

As well as her ministry as a wife and mother, Sarah excelled at hospitality. She created a warm, relaxed and happy atmosphere in their home, and stamped her own delightful personality upon it. Her gift was to make every visitor feel special, drawing people out in spiritual conversation when they visited the parsonage.

By the spring of 1735 Jonathan Edwards reported that he was seeing 30 conversions a week. 300 people were converted altogether in a six-month period in this, the first revival of his ministry. Excitement in the town was intense, and talk was of little else. Jonathan and Sarah found their home crowded with people wanting spiritual advice. Northampton was not the only town affected: similar scenes were taking place in towns throughout Connecticut, and further afield.

The revival caused bitter division among the ministers of New England: around a third of them dismissed it as merely hysteria. Jonathan Edwards was realistic enough to understand this reaction. He agreed that a dramatic 'conversion experience' meant precisely nothing unless it was followed by a lifetime of obedience. It could be worse than useless, because the excitement of the 'experience' could lead individuals to believe that they were infallible.

'Revival' could overflow into fanaticism. Heightened excitement

could lead people into actions that were misguided, while they claimed it was the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Uneducated people were thrilled by the notion that God would speak directly to them, and make claims that were ineffably silly. Newly converted individuals denounced mature leaders as lacking the Holy Spirit.

And yet the presence of the false did not negate the presence of the true. The revival contained both good and bad. And when Jonathan went out to analyse the unusual scenes that had resulted from this phenomenon called 'revival' he had a case study right by him. For Sarah too had had an extraordinary experience. Indeed, when he returned from a preaching engagement early in 1742, the whole town was wondering whether she would even survive until his return.

She had been prostrated physically with religious ecstasy, she had been so taken up with a sensation of the love of God that she had leaped for joy, she had sometimes been unable to stop talking, and at other times unable to speak.

Typically, Jonathan did not rush to conclusions on way or the other. He was willing to face the possibility it could be due to nervous instability. But he wanted to analyse what had happened. He asked Sarah to sit down and describe every detail. She gave him a precise account of her spiritual experience which lasted for 17 days from January 19 to February 4, 1742.

It was, concluded Jonathan,

the most intense, pure, unmixed and well-regulated of any he had seen. He went on to explain that the long term effect in Sarah's life was remarkable. She was now entirely resigned to God. She had given over to God the choice of life or death, for herself and her loved ones. She let God choose comfort or pain. Jonathan lived with Sarah. He, of all people, would know if this was just a passing phase. It was not. He could testify to her continual peace, cheerfulness and joy in the coming months and years.

The reality of Sarah's 'resignation of all to God' would be tested all too soon. While carried away with a sense of the love of God, she had visualised the worst-case scenarios which could befall her. What if the townsfolk turned on her and she was thrown out into the wilderness in the midst of winter? What if her husband turned against her? What if she had to die for Christ? More to the point, what about living the difficult day to day routine uncomplainingly? She was only 32. Having already had 7 children, there were 4 more confinements ahead with all the pain, danger and exhaustion that involved. If God loved her, Sarah could honestly say that she did not care about the rest.

But the remaining years of her life presented her with some challenges she had not imagined. War. Slander and intrigue. Bereavement. Poverty. A move to an isolated Indian settlement. Continued poverty and continued

intrigue. How would she respond? This would be the ultimate test of her professed security in the love of God. It was if every earthly prop were being removed, so that it could be proved that if she had God, she had everything.

Her serenity and poise in the face of these challenges demonstrated that her experience had been a reality: 'The whole world, with all its enjoyments and all its troubles seemed to be nothing: My God was my all, my only portion: no possible suffering seemed to be worth regarding: all persecutions and torments a mere nothing.'

Finally, in the space of a few tragic months, Sarah's son-in-law Aaron, husband Jonathan, and daughter Esther all died. There could be no more painful test of her 'resignation of all to God.'

When she heard the shattering news of her husband's premature death, Sarah, crippled with painful arthritis responded with towering faith. In a brief, almost unbearable poignant note to one of her daughters she wrote: 'The Lord has done it: He has made me adore his goodness that we had him so long. But my God lives and he has my heart.'

She had lost the one she loved more than any other: but still she loved the God who had given him - and taken him. Shortly afterwards, Sarah herself succumbed to illness and died, aged only 48. Her life has proved that the Christian can continue praising God 'in trouble and in joy'.

# Acceptable Worship

*"Worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth!" [Psalm 96:9]*

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**O**NE PREACHER recalls, 'A man in our church said to me, "I come every week. I sit in the right seat, hold the right book in my hands, sing the right words to the right songs but I am just going through the motions. God is not showing up in my life" '. Ever feel like that?

Sometimes we struggle with God's silence. Can I say that sometimes God is not silent, but that we are not listening? There are other times when He is silent. These times can be very hard but yet very productive in our faith if we keep running the race. But there are also times when God is silent because of our spiritual condition. So as you attempt to draw near to God he may well not be drawing near to you.

That is sore but there are reasons for that and in the following there are four reasons why God may not be drawing near to you. Someone once said, 'Sometimes the pain of surgery is the only way to find healing'. Why would God ignore our worship? The prophet Isaiah helps us understand.

Reason 1: God ignores our worship when we're selfish.

*"Behold, on the day of your fast you find your desire, and drive hard all*

*your workers."* [Isaiah 58:3].

That phrase ***find your desires*** means that you already have pretty much everything you want. When you come to church intent on worshipping God, you're fed up, rested up, leisured up — basically satisfied with everything your heart desires. Then you rush into church almost as an after-thought and say, "God, it is your turn now." And He is like, 'Sorry it doesn't work that way'. You cannot have everything your heart desires and God!

One writer said, 'If you doubt that, try this experiment. Right now you're reading this piece about how to connect with the Lord. Now, go eat a big meal. In fact, eat it in front of the TV while you watch your favourite video. When you're done stuffing yourself, lay down on the couch as the movie continues. When you are done, come back here and see how much energy you have to finish this. The answer will be little or none. Deep down we know that we cannot have God and the constant satisfaction of every earthly whim.'

Sin is not the only thing that hinders your relationship with God. That's why Isaiah focuses on fasting. Fasting, as prescribed in Scripture, elevates your hunger and passion for God. (Do we even fast in our day?)

Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled*" [Matthew 5:6]. As you struggle with apathy in your life of worship, this truth from Jesus gives amazing insight on the attitude of the Christ follower, selflessness, and a hunger for God's righteousness. See what it says, you prepare yourself, leave room for God's righteousness in your life, God will fill you.

Reason 2: God ignores our worship when we're strife-filled.

This attitude is quite astonishing. Some Christians are consumed with the vertical and think they can ignore the horizontal. Notice Isaiah said, "*Your fasting ends in quarrelling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists*" (you seek God in a worshipful way) [v4]. In other words, people fuss, fume, and fight all week and then come to worship.

Instead of leaving church determined to get right with people and be an instrument of reconciliation in this world, they growl at the kids all the way home. In the middle of that, they try to fold in some genuine, personal connection with God. God is like, "What? You want Me to connect with you when you're like this?" God doesn't meet with us when our lives are filled with strife.

One writer said, 'God has taught me the hard way that you can't have the vertical thing right

with Him if you haven't at least done your part to make the horizontal relationships right." [Romans 12:18] says, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*" Jesus said in [Matthew 5:23] that if you come to worship God and while you're at the altar you remember a problem you have with somebody, you should leave your sacrifice and go make the relationship right. Just get up and walk out, get on the phone or write the letter or get in your car and get over to that house.

Too many Christians do not take this seriously enough. We are playing at religion, what Tozer called "the most universally played game". If we are strife filled, God will not hear us. If this is so, why are we playing at religion pretending that everything is right when in fact it is not all right?

Reason 3: God ignores surface worship.

We may look the part. We may make all the right moves, but God ignores our worship when we're focused on externals. You can see it in [Isaiah 58:5], "*Is the kind of fast I have chosen?*" "*Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed?*" "*And for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord.*" In other words, God says, 'Is that what I'm into?'

One commentator says, "In Isaiah's day, people who wanted to show that they were really serious with God wore this abrasive, rough

sackcloth against their skin as a symbolic expression of their heartfelt brokenness. To make themselves even more uncomfortable, they would dump ashes on their head. They were acknowledging how completely disinterested God is in externals and how entirely focused He is with our heart — our thoughts, our attitudes, and our motivations.'

As with most symbolic expressions of worship, over time people became guilty of offering God the symbol and not the reality. They came to worship decked out in the right gear but they failed to let the reality of their sinfulness penetrate their own heart. God was saying, 'Don't give Me the symbol, give Me the reality!' This is very serious.

Too many are playing at church as a thing they do every Sunday at the same time, and they somehow assume that doing this is what God wants as worship. The time we spend in public worship is a public expression of what our heart and lives should be like the rest of the time. Again, congregational worship is a game and God does not

want that. He wants your heart in the gathered worship as well as the whole of your life. God does not appreciate surface worship.

Reason 4: God ignores our worship when we regard sin in our hearts.

I call this, the 'Are you talking to me?' Scripture says that if we regard sin in our heart, God will not hear us. [Psalm 66:18]. So as we wrestle with an area of disobedience and sin in our hearts, if we do not confess it and turn away from it, God will not hear us. You might even hear God say, 'Are you talking to me?'

Lets not fool ourselves, if we do not confess sin in our heart, he will not listen to us. If we treat sin in a casual way, the Lord will not hear us. Isaiah states that our iniquity has hidden God's face from us. Take it seriously.

These are just four examples of when God does not receive our worship. We have plenty to work on in our lives so that our worship of God is the way God wants it. Plastic Christianity means plastic Christians. God isn't fooled.

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## CHURCH SERVICES

WE SHOULD GO TO EVERY church meeting thinking not just 'What can I get out of it?' But also, 'How can I contribute?' Let us get into the habit of praying before we attend that God would use us in some way to encourage others. And then let us look out for opportunities to do that. Is there a new-comer we could welcome? A lonely person we could listen to? Someone who is discouraged whom we could urge on? We should not think that church begins with the opening song and ends with the last one. The time we have for interaction with one another before and after is just as important.

*Vaughan Roberts*

# Pray for Young people who Run Away from Home

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**F**OR THE PAST six months Catherine MacCuish has been involved in an action research project about young runaways in the London area. All the young people are aged between 11-16 years.

The project is sponsored by the Government and aims to track and monitor the progress of young people after they run away from home. Catherine has been meeting the young people and finding out about their lives. The idea behind the project is to look at how these young people can be better supported and protected from danger.

Catherine writes: All the young people whom I have been talking with have spent some time at a 'safe house' in London but they can only remain there for thirteen nights before they have to move on. Most come to the 'safe house' after being picked up by the police or as a result of phoning Childline at a point of desperation because they have no where to sleep. Those who do attempt to return home to their families after living for a few nights at the 'safe house' often run away again.

Practically all the young people come from families where relationships have not just broken

down once but again and again; a number are from professing Christian families where relationships have disrupted.

Kate is 13 years. Her greatest struggle is that her mother has recently taken in a lesbian partner and she is petrified that her friends at school might find out. When she completed details about who lived in her home she point blank refused to write her mother's lesbian partner's name on the form.

*Simon (13)* arrived at the 'safe house' after running away from home many times, over a period of six months. He had been living with his mother and her partner but mother's partner was very cruel to him and he was very frightened of his leather belt. Some nights, Simon would escape and board a London bus with a 24 hour pass and spend all night getting on and off different buses; on other nights he would sleep in a lift or even on the street.

Occasionally he managed to persuade his teenage sister's 34 year old boyfriend to have him for one night but this boyfriend's house is already under surveillance because of drug problems. Simon arrived at the 'safe house' in such a dirty state, that members of staff were suspicious that he had been sleeping

in a hole in the ground. When a member of staff telephoned Simon's mother to announce that he had been found safe and well she simply responded coldly and curtly 'I wondered where he was. I thought I hadn't seen him for a while'.

*Dawn* is 13 years. Her parents divorced when she was 2 years. She lives with mother and her mother's boyfriend. Her mother's partner has been very cruel to her. Dawn has been running away for about eighteen months. Often she will sleep in a nearby park or join up with a 'street gang' for the night. She says she always wears black because that describes how she feels. Dawn talks openly about feeling like ending her life. She says 'I'm convinced that someone is going to pick me up in alley way one day'. When I talked to Dawn about God she burst out 'If there is a God, - and it's a big 'If'- then why has he left me in this dreadful family? It doesn't make any sense'.

When *Mandy* (15) was

staying temporarily at the 'safe house' her mother sent her text messages to her mobile phone which said 'I wish you had never been born to me'; 'I wish you weren't my daughter'. These powerful messages are heartbreaking and ones that Mandy says she 'can't get out of her head'. Other parents have described how they have completed formal 'divorce' documents in an attempt to wipe their hands of their children.

There is much more that could be said but I trust that this is enough to encourage you to pray for vulnerable young people like Simon, Dawn and Mandy. Meeting so many needy young people is exceptionally sad and can at times be completely overwhelming.

In our society today, the rejection of the Bible has had very serious consequences for family life and for so many young people whose lives have been devastated by the disintegration of family life.

*Catherine MacCuish*

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## The Church and the Needy

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH is a caring and helpful part of society or it is nothing. From the beginning of our history, when the early monasteries looked after the needs of those around them, down to Barnardo's Homes and the Salvation Army, the Christian church and its institutions have been a place of refuge for the needy. It is this Christian care in a brutal world which converted the Roman Empire and, after it fell, the Goths, the Franks and Saxons, the Danes and the Slavs, until the church spread right across Europe...The most disastrous periods in the Christian church have been the centuries where the political class have taken over the powerful offices of the church and in the spirit of Antichrist, imposed their own ideas...Political correctness had a long and oppressive history even before anyone thought of Fascism or Communism.

*Sir Frederick Catherwood*

# Lunarians, Venusians, and Martians

Fashions in Alien Beliefs

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**H**OW OFTEN HAVE you heard a secular scientist express contempt for Christian belief in a supernatural Creator, or angels and devils? "Where's the evidence?" they scornfully ask.

Well, if we go back a few centuries, we see evidence of an amusing phenomenon: We find eminent scientists making bizarre claims that are hard not to laugh at today - beliefs, backed by no evidence whatever, about creatures who are "out there" on faraway stars and planets.

For example, Sir William Herschel, the astronomer who discovered Uranus, claimed that the moon boasted buildings, canals, roads, and pyramids — all built by industrious lunarians. And just where were these clever moon people? Herschel's son, William — also a scientist — had a ready answer: The lunarians had taken up residence on the dark side of the moon, where no one could see them.

Religious leaders often proved just as gullible. For instance, in the eighteenth century, Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg claimed that during visions, he actually spoke with lunarians —

creatures who, he said, talk loudly "from the abdomen."

Ellen Harmon, the founder of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, described the inhabitants of Jupiter as "a tall majestic people, so unlike the inhabitants of Earth. Sin," she concluded, "has never entered here."

Of course, modern science has proven these beliefs badly mistaken, if not a bit loony. But as Benjamin Wiker notes in *Crisis* magazine, "If belief in solarians, lunarians, jupiterians, venusians ... and martians seems madness now, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was taken to be the only rational, scientifically grounded view." So theologians of the day tried to integrate aliens into their belief systems.

Thus, we have seventeenth-century Anglican Bishop John Wilkins insisting that "the existence of extraterrestrials would not contradict Christianity," Wiker writes. William Hay, an eighteenth-century rector, "argued for multiple modes of salvation entailing multiple modes of Christ's incarnation." Beilby Portus, the eighteenth-century Bishop of London, claimed that "the

Incarnation actually extends to all extraterrestrials."

By the start of the nineteenth century, many prominent evangelicals had incorporated alien life theories "as an essential element of evangelical orthodoxy."

The utter absurdity of this reveals that Christians have fallen for science's absolutist claims. We're so afraid of looking backward and unenlightened that we try to force-fit the latest cultural and intellectual fashions into our theology.

A few hundred years ago, it was fashionable to believe in Martians who built canals. Today, some theologians try to mold their doctrines around cultural fashions like evolution or same-sex "marriage."

Christians ought to take a lesson from the foolishness of our spiritual forebears. We must never be afraid to challenge the latest claims from secular "experts" — scientists and sociologists. Remind everyone: Science is not.

I hope you'll stay tuned for the rest of this BreakPoint series. You'll learn why, even today, millions believe — despite a complete absence of evidence — that somewhere out there, E.T. is waiting.

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*BreakPoint with Charles Colson*

*Commentary #040112 - 01/12/2004*  
[www.christianity.com/breakpoint](http://www.christianity.com/breakpoint)

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## Predicting the Future

IN THE JANUARY 21st issue of The Wall Street Journal, Pete DuPont observes, "In 1958 liberal economist John Kenneth Galbraith's best-selling *The Affluent Society* assured us that living standards had risen so far they couldn't rise any further. In 1960 Prof. Paul Erlich concluded that 65 million Americans would perish from famine in the 1980s and food riots would kill millions more. *Scientific American* predicted in 1970 that in 20 years the world would be out of lead, zinc, tin, gold and silver. And Jimmy Carter's 1980 "Global 2000" report forecast that mass starvation and superplagues would ravage the globe in the final year of the millennium. They all more or less agreed with English philosopher Thomas Hobbes that our lives would be 'solitary, nasty, brutish, and short.' And they were all dead wrong."

Such observations serve as a reminder that it is dangerous to predict the future. Let's just rest in the assurance that whatever the future holds, it is securely in God's hands.

*Michael Duduit*

# The Soldier of Fort George

Taken with kind permission from Pastor Jack Seaton's web site <http://www.tomnahurich.co.uk/soldier.html>

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**W**HEN JACK HEYWOOD was a soldier at Fort George the Fort was a very different place to what it is nowadays.

Stretched along the shore just below the Fort were rows of stalls that served as a meat market for the soldiers and their families, and the ferry-boat plied its course between the Fort and the Black Isle on the further side of the Firth.

As Hector McPhail, minister of the Church at Resolis on the Black Isle, waited for the ferry to arrive to carry him and his white pony back to the other side, Luke Heywood, a soldier from the Fort, approached the market and stopped to buy some meat from the stall at which the Resolis Minister was waiting.

'How much for a quarter of mutton?' he asked the keeper of the stall. When told the price, the soldier cut loose with a string of oaths and blasphemies that cut through the air. He finished up by saying that he would sooner see his soul in hell than pay the price that the butcher was asking. After some argument, however, the price was paid and the soldier turned away from the stall with his purchase.

'A fine day, soldier,' said Mr McPhail, who was now determined that he must speak to this man.

'A fine day, sir,' replied the soldier. 'That seems a fine bit of mutton you've got there.' 'So it is, sir,' said the soldier, 'and cheap too.'

'What did you give for it, may I ask?' The man told the price. 'Oh, my friend, you have given more than that,' said the Minister. 'No sir, I gave no more. There's the man I bought it from, and he can tell you what it cost.'

'Pardon me, my friend' said the older man, 'you have given your immortal soul for it! You prayed that God would damn your soul if you gave the very price that you have just named; and now you have given it, and what is to become of you?'

As Hector McPhail stepped onto the ferry, Luke Heywood made his way back to his army billet. The Minister's words were still ringing clear in his ears: 'You have given your immortal soul for it, and now what is to become of you?'

The words grew louder in Luke Heywood's mind until they drove him right out of the barracks and back to the water's edge again. 'Where is that man that spoke to me?' he asked the butcher. 'Oh, you mean Mr McPhail,' said the butcher; 'he is the minister at Resolis, and you will have to go far enough before you catch him, for he has crossed more than an hour ago.' But no

distance would be too great for Luke Heywood at this particular time in his life, for those words had shown him that he had damned his soul indeed, and now, as the minister had said, 'What was to become of him?'

The words remained with him on what seemed to be an endless crossing on that small ferry-boat; and they didn't leave him over nine miles of bracken and moor that then separated him from the minister's home at Resolis.

It was a short distance to travel, however, for all the peace of mind that Luke Heywood received at the end. For two whole days he stayed with the man who had awakened him out of his sleep of death, and as the way to peace with God and salvation for his soul was

gradually explained to him, Luke Heywood saw that the God who would, indeed, have condemned his soul to hell, would now save his soul for heaven, if he would call upon His Name and see His forgiveness for his many sins.

No more would the barracks and the market at Fort George ring with the blasphemies of Luke Heywood. Christ had died that he might live, and live he did to the glory of Christ's Name.

'Soldier! You prayed that God might damn your soul....and now, what is to become of you?' But the God who heard his oaths and curses also heard his cry for forgiveness and salvation through Christ the Saviour.

The same God answers such cries this very day.

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## Strive to Enter in!

**L**EO TOLSTOY HAD A tremendous insight into God's Ideal and tried to live a better life. He failed miserably but earnestly desired to live up to Christ's commands. He would say to his critics 'Don't judge God's holy ideals by my inability to meet them. Don't judge Christ by those of us who imperfectly bear His name.' A summary of his spiritual pilgrimage can be seen in one of the passages he wrote "It is true that I have not fulfilled one thousandth part of them (Christ's precepts), and I am ashamed of this, but I have failed to fulfil them not because I did not wish to, but because I was unable to. Attack me, I do this myself, but attack me rather than the path I follow and which I point out to anyone who asks me where I think it lies. If I know the way home and am walking along it drunkenly, is it any less the right way because I am staggering from side to side! If it is not the right way then show me another way; but if I stagger and lose the way, you must help me, you must keep me on the true path". Philip Yancey says about this passage that it was 'a ringing affirmation of the truth that he believed with all his heart and a plangent appeal for grace that he never fully realized'. The answer to Tolstoy's dilemma - see John 6:28,29.

# Congregational News

## HARRIS

The congregation still has several of its number quite ill including its elder Sam Morrison. Due to unusually bad weather, the services has had to be cancelled on a few occasions over the winter. The congregation looks forward to having Revd A M Cattanach for its Communion at the end of April.

## STORNOWAY

After a rather long break at New Year time, the congregation were encouraged when all those who were doing the "Christianity Explored" Course returned to continue the sessions. The Course is due to finish during March. The Course is continuing to challenge us all and the congregation would love to be able to continue offering it in forthcoming years.

The congregation also had a rich season of blessing when it enjoyed the preaching of Revd Mark Johnston from Grove Chapel, Camberwell, London and Revd Tommy McNeil from Barvas Church of Scotland at its February Communion.

The European Missionary Fellowship is due to address the congregation on the first Thursday of March. Sunday evening Fellowships are continuing every fortnight.

## INVERNESS

The regular mid-week Prayer Meeting/Bible Studies, both in Dingwall and in Inverness, are focusing on the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5. The character of God is so richly revealed, and it becomes a challenge to us to seek conformity to the image of his Son.

Many people in the congregation are also involved in Bible Study groups which are proving very helpful. We are at the early stages of planning a Christianity Explored course, and hope to run it within the congregation first, although any others who come will be most welcome. Hopefully, we can later use it as a Bible Study tool in outreach.

The King's View, our Centre bi-monthly magazine, has just been distributed in the area. If you do not receive it and would like to, please let us know and we can place you on our mailing list.

The building work on the Annex is nearing completion, and, the Lord willing, we plan on having 'Open House' on Saturday 27 March, from 2pm to 4 pm, when we will be pleased to welcome anyone who wishes to join with us in celebrating the Lord's goodness.

We ask that you pray for us

that we have vision and wisdom to use the premises to God's glory. We have some plans afoot ourselves, and are encouraged in the fact that people in the community are expressing interest in using the Centre.

The Highland Preaching Conference is also in the planning stages, and there should soon be a mailing with information on the event, which is being held on Thursday and Friday 6-7th May, with Guest Speakers Dr Ralph Davis and Dr Jamie Grant, plus four Seminars, one each led by Bart Buell, Alistair Wilson, Donald Macaskill and Eric Parker. If you have not received the Brochure and Booking Form, do get in touch with us and we will send you one. In all of this and everything else, we say: 'Pray for us'.

## DUNDEE

The congregation continues to be encouraged with regular attenders from the community coming each Sunday. The Sunday Club is also maintaining its numbers with a range of ages from 4 years to 13 years. The 'Go Teach' material from Scripture Union is being used.

Kevin has begun his six-week Course called 'Lost for Words' instructing us how to share our faith. The first night was well attended and emphasised the need for a natural 'witnessing' rather than a challenging confrontational approach. Sharing our faith is something that should be done

during the normal course of life in our daily contact with people, rather than at a special designated time. There are plenty of opportunities to talk of God in the common events and circumstances of life. We all felt we benefited from the first lesson and look forward to the remainder.

The Gotterstone Monthly (a meeting in the home of Kevin and Sine in the congregation for their neighbourhood) is still running. There is a 10-minute 'word' from the minister - then pizzas!

Andy our evangelistic worker, is continuing to go round the doors in our area and is gathering notes from the different kinds of replies he receives from the locals regarding their view of the church.

'The Alternatives' (Crisis Pregnancy Service) still use our premises from time to time to counsel girls needing help who are going through trauma. This is an excellent way of introducing our young to the love of Christ and it is a privilege to be able to share this with them.

The Saturday Lunches still operate and a new leaflet has been designed to leave on each chair with a message and Scripture text.

As well as the questionnaire that Andy is handling, we have been circulating the area with a new leaflet designed to arouse interest in coming to church to worship God.

Do please pray that all these and other efforts made to extend Christ's kingdom would bear fruit to the glory of God.

# Revd Alexander Murray

## - 50 years of Ministry

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**A**LEXANDER MURRAY was ordained and inducted to the Overseas Mission of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland; and, in particular, to the Winnipeg Congregation in Manitoba, Canada.

The ordination took place in the Bonar Bridge Church, Sutherland, Scotland on Wednesday 2nd February 1954. The Moderator of the Northern Presbytery, the Revd Finlay Macleod (Dornoch), preached from [Revelation 3:8] *"...behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:..."*

Mr Murray was born at Aultnagar, Invershin, Sutherland on 1st November 1925. He was educated in the one-teacher primary Public School at Invershin, followed by secondary studies at Bonar Bridge Higher Grade School.

From October 1943 to July 1947, he undertook military service in the R.A.F.V.R in the UK and also abroad; and which began as a matriculated student at Selwyn College, University of Cambridge till March 1944.

From 1947 to 1951 an MA degree was obtained from Glasgow University and, among other disciplines, Latin, along with some Greek and Hebrew, was studied. Now a "Student" in the Free

Presbyterian Church of Scotland it was time for Divinity training!

Along with the late Revd Angus Mackay (Tarbert), as fellow-student, he studied under the Revd Donald Beaton in Mr. Beaton's last year of teaching Systematic Theology. His Hebrew year was the first of Revd Malcolm Macsween's tutorship and his Greek one the last of Revd D.A. Macfarlane's.

Call to the Gospel Ministry came in terms of a sermon preached by Revd D N Macleod (Ullapool) on the Monday of a Communion in the old Church of Scotland church building in Plockton in July 1948 from the well known words of [Mat. 28:18-20].

CANADA. Newly married to Marjory Graham of Lochinver, they sailed from Glasgow on 6th February in the "Anchor Line" M.V. Elysia (10,000 tons) to New York in 11 days. After visits, including church services, in New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Toronto they were welcomed to snow-bound Winnipeg in the Canadian prairies. This was to be home till the Autumn of 1955 with several visits being made to the Calgary and Vancouver congregations. English, Scots and Dutch families comprised the congregation and their eldest

daughter, Morag, was born in November 1954.

The Church Elders were Tom Macdonald and Alan Macleod but present at Winnipeg only at Communion times. The long winters provided every opportunity to renew study which now included Gaelic. It was a good apprenticeship although, as Mr Murray, on hindsight, accepts, -- youthful enthusiasm might have needed a degree of restraints!

Uncle John Murray (of Westminster Seminary), holidayed in Winnipeg during the summer of 1955 and again accompanied the family home by boat from Montreal to Liverpool in November of that year. Toronto and Detroit had again been visited on the way eastwards.

APPLECROSS. Mr Murray's induction to the pastoral charge of Applecross was in September 1956. The Western Presbytery had stipulated that, before this could take place, an acceptable sermon in the Gaelic language be preached to them. This duly took place in August on a day at Kyle of Lochalsh when Her Majesty Queen Elisabeth II was arriving on the Royal Yacht Britannia for a visit to the Island of Skye!

More importantly for the interests of Mr Murray the Church Court, convened in Church Street, was comprised of Revds J Colquhoun, DJ Macaskill, A Beaton, JA Macdonald and a number of elders, all native Gaelic speakers. Nevertheless, the outcome was positive! Thus, there began a twenty eight year ministry in a beautiful,

but particularly remote, part of the Scottish Highlands.

The physical challenge was real, with access to the area only by way of a sea-ferry crossing of 6 miles from Kyle, or over the "Bealach" mountain road which rose to 2,045 ft above sea level and was often closed by snow. For some half of the congregation on the 'Coast' there was only a foot-path which the minister "must needs" negotiate by motorcycle in all weathers day or night.

Elders over the years were,-  
- Donald J Gillanders of Arrina, Colin Gillies of Culduie and Roderick Maclean of Toscaig, -- each of differing dispositions and experience, but all fine Christians of sterling worth and of real help to their minister. There are many others, women as well as men, that might be mentioned, with whom a deep acquaintance was established on the basis where "Immanuel's Land" will alone see its consummation.

Although remote in itself, Applecross stands (in a manner) central to the chain of congregations which comprises the FP/APC denomination. From the ferry terminal at Kyle lay to the West; Skye and the Outer Isles, to the South via Mallaig; Oban and Glasgow, to the East; Dingwall and Inverness, and to the North; Gairloch, Ullapool and Kinlochbervie. In all these places and more, the "Applecross Minister" was to preach on Communion occasions, and, now proficient in the

understanding of Gaelic, had the particular pleasure of hearing and understanding the testimonies of the "Men" speaking to the "Question" on Fridays.

Otherwise, ministerial duties embraced responsibility for both mainland and island vacant charges from time to time. The Murray family of 4 girls and 3 boys made the Camusteil Manse a place full of activity!

LAIRG. In July 1984 a call was accepted to the pastoral charge of Lairg- Bonar- Dornoch- Rogart and Helmsdale in East Sutherland. In February of that year tragedy had struck! The eldest child, Morag, now 29 years of age and an Art Teacher, died of a malignant brain tumour after a brief illness. With the words "A good man's footsteps by the Lord, are ordered aright; and in the way wherein he walks he greatly doth delight" [Psalm 37:23 Metrical Version] in mind, a new field of labour was entered upon. That this period should now have extended to almost 20 years, seems quite amazing and a tangible expression of the Lord's faithfulness to His servant.

Though services are now confined to Lairg and Rogart and the numbers depleted; due, in large part, to the difficult events of 1988-89, the Minister can rejoice that he still has a nucleus of faithful members to whom he may administer gospel ordinances. The elders who remained with their minister and whom, incidentally, he ordained to office, are worthy men,

-- Jackie Macleod and Hugh Lobban.

The oversight of Wick/ Strathy, Kinlochbervie and Poolewe congregations makes for a busy life; as, also, does Chairmanship of the Board of Governors of the Highland Theological College from 1994!

*"But by the grace of God I am what I am: ..." [1 Cor. 15:10a].*

A congregational dinner was to be held for Mr and Mrs Murray in Golspie at the end of February.

Mr Murray was asked for his opinions on several questions and we print below his reply.

Question 1: *What was the greatest encouragement you received in your ministry?* Reply: "Probably the formation and continuance of HTC".

Question 2: *What was the greatest disappointment?* Reply: "Suspension by a body which I had tried to serve for 34 years".

Question 3: *What would you change if you had your ministry all over again?* Reply: "Not a lot, although I , perhaps, stayed too long in Applecross when I had calls available".

Question 4: *What advice would you give to minister's today?* Reply: "Hold-on to the task although numbers are low; and to know and act by the principles we profess as Biblical".

# The Great Banquet

by Roderick MacKenzie

The text of an address given by Roderick MacKenzie of the Gospel Male Voice Choir at the Dingwall Auction Mart on 7th December last year.

The address is based on [Luke 14:15-24].

See our last issue for other details of this meeting.

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**T**HIS AFTERNOON I'd like to raise four points about this parable in Luke's Gospel about the Great Banquet.

- 1) There is a feast to which we are invited
- 2) Excuses are made
- 3) There is a further invitation
- 4) Yet there remains room (*"make them come in"*)

The feast to which we are invited: Jesus describes a great banquet, with wonderful provision on the table such as: mercy and love, peace with God, forgiveness of sin, companionship through life, companionship through death, and security in the knowledge that at the end of it all, it will be heaven.

The banquet is offered to us for free, without money or without price, and, as we have been singing, there is 'Room at the cross for you and for me' - but you need to choose. You have to choose to be for Christ or against Him. Again, we were just singing 'O happy day that fixed my choice on Thee my Saviour and my God'.

Friend, do you know that happy day? Remember, 'Burdens are lifted at Calvary', and, on this banquet table, you will be pointed to the fact that as a sinner your sins are being washed away when Jesus shed His blood on the cross at Calvary, taking the punishment that we all deserve, but you need to believe in Him and accept His invitation to His banquet table.

Notice everything is *now* ready, so that there is no need to delay – *"Now is the accepted time"*, *"Now is the day of salvation"*.

There were excuses made: The first person had bought a piece of ground and was going to see it – now ask yourself, would you actually buy a piece of ground without seeing it first? Wouldn't you rather go and see it first and then buy it? This was a poor and crazy excuse.

The second excuse was – *"I bought a yoke of oxen, I'm going to try them"*. Once again, would you not try them out first, and have a good look at them, before you would buy them? – another poor excuse.

The third excuse was – “*I married a wife and therefore cannot come*” – what nonsense! - the invitation would have been for the wife as well – yet another poor excuse. What Jesus is saying is that there are many and varied excuses given to refuse what He offers us in the Gospel, but none of them hold any water; no one can produce a good and valid excuse to refuse the outstretched arms of a welcoming Saviour.

It is a solemn truth – it's tough – it encroaches upon the mind and conscience of everyone of us here this afternoon, but it is so true that there is no good excuse to refuse this invitation which is so genuinely given and so seriously conveyed.

There is a further invitation: The effect of these excuses was that the master of the banquet saw to it that invitations would be conveyed to the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame - and that is a good description of us as well. We are poor, with no valid currency that will sustain us when it comes to facing God, the Judge of all, on the day of judgment.

Our good works will not save us; they are corroded by our motivations, and overwhelmingly outweighed by our sins. We have no righteousness which will suffice to get us into heaven, therefore we are poor, needing God's rescue plan – the perfect Christ, the only Son of God, who takes the penalty of our sins on His shoulders.

We are crippled by sin, and unable without God's intervention to make progress to heaven. We are blind, and how blind we must be, to fail to see the beautiful suitability of Jesus Christ to our every need.

So please see this as a further emphasis on the invitation addressed to yourself; it fits everyone in this place this afternoon without exception. And Jesus Christ, who was dead, is alive and alive for evermore and is present by His Spirit in conveying this message to you.

Yet there remains room, (“*make them come in*”). The servants reported back to the master of the banquet – “*it is done as you have commanded and yet there is still room*” – and we say again this afternoon – there is room at the banquet for you and room at the banquet for me.

The master's instructions on hearing that there was still room was “go out into the road and country lanes and make them come in” – the Authorised Version says, “*Compel them to come in*”. Here we are in Dingwall Auction Market speaking about Jesus and His love for sinners, His provision for sinners, His care for sinners and He is asking us all to come in – it is all ready – the Master is come and calls for you.

We have been told, “*make them come in*”; so, as with one voice, those who already know the sweetness of this banquet and have come to know the joy of sitting at

this table, are saying 'welcome – come on in – you have no excuse – you are genuinely welcome – it is entirely free – the price has been paid – the opportunity is real – the need is genuine'.

Why refuse? – remember you have no excuse. Blessed is he or she who will sit at the feast in the Kingdom of God. And if you are looking for that destination for your life, then you must accept the invitation to come to Jesus, and you will find that the half has not been told you.

As I have said before, no one has ever said to me, 'I have been disappointed with Jesus Christ'. So may it be that all of us in God's mercy, and according to His will, will come and accept this invitation while there is time, before it is too late.

So that when it comes to death we will sit down at His table above, enjoying His fellowship and company, and the knowledge of sins forgiven and eternal life beyond our imaginings.

May God bless you all.

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# Christians, Note - and Act!

From: The Christian Institute - contact [www.christian.org.uk](http://www.christian.org.uk)

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**C**HRIStIANS COULD be criminalised for saying homosexual practice is wrong, following new 'hate crimes' being considered by the Scottish Executive. Planned new laws on aggravated offences will cover 'sexual orientation'. This means stiffer penalties can be applied for crimes motivated by hostility towards 'sexuality'.

It is feared this planned new offence could be used in conjunction with the laws covering harassment to gag Christians who publicly oppose homosexual practice.

The Police in England have already investigated comments made by the Bishop of Chester. In that case, the authorities decided not to press ahead with the charges because "...current public order legislation does not provide specific offences based on sexuality"<sup>1</sup>.

Westminster has just passed new laws for England and Wales that make hatred towards sexuality an aggravating factor to an offence. The new laws have not yet come into effect. 'Aggravated offences' are only supposed to add stiffer penalties to behaviour which is already criminal. But, in practice, the new offence could widen the criminal law to outlaw behaviour which was not previously illegal.

It is important to stress that Christians completely oppose criminal acts against anyone - regardless of 'sexual orientation'.

Nevertheless there is a well-grounded fear that the proposed law being considered by the Executive will be used against anyone who publicly opposes homosexual practice. The Executive has said it would bring forward a consultation paper on ways to tackle 'hate crimes'. But there are some reports that suggest the Executive may already be preparing to extend existing powers to cover 'sexuality'.

The Criminal Justice Bill, which became law in 2003, classed crimes that were motivated by sectarian hatred as aggravated offences. Race crimes have been so far treated for some time. One Christian from the south coast of England has already been found guilty of 'harassment' for merely holding a sign that said "Jesus is Lord...Stop homosexuality". The High Court in England recently rejected an appeal against this conviction. Permission is being sought to appeal to the Lords.

It is important that Christians do not 'keep their heads down' over this issue. Christian liberties are being stripped away because of past silence. The Christian Institute advises Christians to put their heads far above the parapet - it's the safest place to be.

The Christian Institute, tel 0191 281 5664

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.cheshire.police.uk/scripts/search2.cgi?> As at 24 November 2003.

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**for APC News**

The APC News is published 9 times per year, beginning with the August/September issue. The cost is £7 per year including postage

**Note for Congregations**

Congregations please note that the minimum charge for bulk copies of APC News to congregations is £20. This is the minimum amount for 10 copies or more, and should be considered as a donation to the APC News Fund.

Congregations can, if they so wish, charge for their own distribution of the magazine, or give them away free.

Cheques should be made out to 'APC News'

and sent to the address below.

Please state if acknowledgement of donation is required.

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**Publication Details**

'The APC News'  
is published 9 times per year  
in the months of

January/February

March

April

May/June

July

August/September

October

November

December

All the views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editor or the denomination.

The articles are meant to stimulate and provoke a serious study of Holy Scripture. All articles not attributed to an author are by the editor.

Articles can be sent by email (preferable), or on disc in Microsoft Word.

Clearly printed manuscripts, double spaced in one column is also acceptable.

Photographs can be sent by post or by e-mail in .jpeg format.

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