

THE DOOR

YET HE COMMANDED THE SKIES ABOVE AND
OPENED THE DOORS OF HEAVEN
PSALM 78:23



ASSOCIATED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES:
WINTER 2018

FROM THE EDITOR

Things have changed since our last issue, and not just the weather. Life goes on, new life begins and still friends and family we knew and loved pass on. I recommend reading the 2nd out of three instalments from Charles Spurgeon on The Shadow of a Great Rock. In this edition he ends with the following words: But to die trusting in Christ, how blessed! - How true that is. It is great to read these writers of the past who still give us wisdom after all these years.

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THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK

Part 2

C. H. SPURGEON

Once again, our Lord is like a rock because His shadow is most refreshing. I do not know how true they are, but there are some old country notions that certain trees give an unhealthy shade. I have been sometimes warned not to sit under such-and-such a tree—if I did so, I would have a headache and I know not what evil besides! But this I do know—the shadow of Christ never hurts anyone, but uniformly blesses in a thousand ways! When a man does but come and rest in Jesus, headaches and heartaches, as far as they have to do with moral and spiritual disorders, pass away. The believing man realizes that he is forgiven and, oh, what a blessed realization is that! Hear him sing— ‘Now, oh joy! My sins are pardoned, Now I can, and do believe!’ And with that sense of pardoned sin comes a sense of perfect peace with God!

The forgiven man feels a joy which he never knew before—not the wild joy in which he once delighted, which first intoxicated him and then left him depressed and heart-broken, but a joy like the course of a great river, increasing as it flows, widening and deepening as months and years roll on! It is a blessed thing to get under the shadow of Christ. I cannot tell you all the happiness I have personally felt since I first believed in Jesus, many years ago. Amidst many struggles, and wars, and fights, I can bear my

testimony that there is no life like the life of one who trusts in Jesus! There is no happiness this side the grave that is comparable with the happiness of living by faith upon the crucified Redeemer!

I do but speak what I know to be true when I recommend all young people to come beneath the shadow of this great rock in the early part of their lives, that ever afterwards, even until life's latest hour, they may have the shelter which that rock will surely bring! Never did I meet a Christian who repented of having trusted in Christ! And never have I heard of one who, in his old age, said that he had made a mistake in relying upon Christ as his Savior. Never have I sat by the bedside of the dying to receive the recantation of a saint who told me that salvation by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, was all a deception, all a delusion! But often have these ears of mine heard expiring songs as full of melody as the songs of angels, and heard declarations of peace and joy from departing believers that have made my heart leap and my eyes flash with joy at the very hearing! So much more deep and profound have been the joy of those who uttered such words of holy exultation and delight!

I have just one more observation to make upon this part of our subject—our Lord is like 'a great rock in a weary land' because, though it gives shade to others, that is because it bears the heat of the sun itself. The rock is the interposing medium between the burning sunbeams and the weary traveler. Here is a delightful picture of the mediatorial work of Christ. He puts Himself between the wrath of God and us. The awful beams that streamed from the meridian sunshine of inflexible Justice concentrated all their fierce heat upon Christ and because they fell upon Him and were absorbed by Him, He now presents a cool and refreshing shade to all who come and trust in Him!

Jesus suffered that we may not suffer. Jesus died that we may live. He was punished in order that we may be forgiven. He was crushed to death beneath the heel of divine Vengeance against sin in order that we may be lifted up to heaven by the hands of Infinite mercy. Here, then, is the gospel in miniature set before you! You can, in your mind's eye, see the great rock and its welcome shadow, the sun shining on the rock and the traveler protected by the rock.

Oh, that all of you who know not the Lord Jesus Christ would come to Him now! As you seek a shade from the sun when his beams are too hot for you to bear, so seek a shelter from the fierce rays of the sun of God's wrath! There is no shelter but in Christ, but there is perfect protection in Him. To come to Him needs no long pilgrimage, no elaborate ceremonies—you can sit in your pew

and trust in Jesus. There is life in a single look at Him! As soon as you trust in Him— ‘The great transaction’s done!’ And beneath the shadow of that rock your spirit is secure forever!

II. But we must now pass on to notice that THERE ARE CERTAIN TIMES WHEN OUR LORD, LIKE THE SHADOW OF A GREAT ROCK, IS PECULIARLY REFRESHING. Unto them that believe, Jesus is always precious, but there are times when He is peculiarly so. This was the case with them when they were under conviction of sin. What memories that expression awakens in some of us— ‘conviction of sin!’ Why, it was to some of us a very martyrdom! I think it would have been less painful to have been burned alive at the stake than to have passed through those horrors and depressions of spirit which some of us passed through while we were seeking pardon, but seeking it in the wrong way. When God makes the conscience a target for His sharp arrows. When the ten great guns of the law are all fired at the sinner’s soul. When shot after shot goes tearing through the man’s false peace, blowing his self-confidence to pieces and leaving him wounded, mangled and maimed. When the man cries out in his agony, ‘What shall I do to find salvation? How shall I get rid of sin? God is righteously angry with me, how shall I appease His wrath? I fear that hell will be my everlasting portion, how can I escape that awful doom?’—it is then that Christ becomes ‘the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.’ sinners will never come



to Jesus while they have anything of their own to rely upon—so may the Lord strip us and bring us down to absolute bankruptcy and beggary as far as everything of our own is concerned! For then we shall look to Jesus and find everything in Him! So, in the time of conviction of sin, when the ten-thonged whip of the law falls upon a man's conscience, Christ is indeed precious! So too, dear friends, in times of trial believers find the shadow of this great rock to be most delightful and refreshing.

I suppose that most of us, if not all, have had our trials. The dear child whom we loved so fondly has sickened and died. The husband or the wife, the delight of our eyes, has been borne away to the silent tomb. Possibly we were slandered by a cruel enemy, or forsaken by a false friend in whom we had implicitly trusted. It may be that our house was burned, or our business proved a failure and that losses followed on the heels of losses like Job's messengers with evil tidings. Yes, but, beloved believer, in all these times of trial you have found Christ to be a blessed Comforter! And I will venture to say that the sharper your affliction has been, the sweeter has Christ been to you.

I wonder how some people who have many troubles can get on without Christ? I marvel at you, consumptive young woman, and you, hard-working man with a growing family, trying to do without the consolations of our blessed Savior! I know that some people have the notion that religion is not meant for the poorest of the poor, but if there are any people whom it suits best, surely it is these! If it does not fill the cupboard, it makes the heart content with what it has! If it does not put broadcloth on the back, it makes the wearer satisfied with fustian! There is no one like Christ for the poor, and the needy, and the sick, and the sorrowing. He is, indeed, as 'the shadow of a great rock in a weary land' to all such poor tried souls.

Let me also remind you that we shall know more about the refreshing shade of Christ when we come to die. Not many weeks hence some of us must die. When there is such a large number of people gathered together, some of them must soon die. But all of us must, before long, gather up our feet in the bed and die— 'Our fathers' God to meet.' What must it be to die without a Savior? A shiver runs through my frame as I think of it. To die without a hope, how sad! But to die trusting in Christ, how blessed!



MISSION UPDATE: DWELLING PLACES

Dwelling places is a Christian Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) based in Mutundwe, Kampala in Uganda that envisions a society where every child has a chest to rest his head on and a place to call home. Since inception, 1,040 children have been reintegrated back into families and 1,509 children have received various forms of support in their families, including educational support and provision of basic health care and psychosocial support.

Founders: Dwelling Places was founded by Rita and William Nkemba. Born and raised in Uganda and a social worker by profession, Rita found inspiration in the Book of Isaiah and started a series of initiatives towards helping the most vulnerable and needy in society as a way of serving God. These initiatives came together as Dwelling Places in August 2002, a name they decided on after this verse: Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Isaiah 58 v 12

Local contact: Marasali Campbell - sent from Smithton Free Church, Inverness

Marsali serves with Dwelling Places, providing healthcare for children living on the streets in Kampala and Karamoja. Marsali was raised on the Isle of Lewis and then in Skye. She trained as a general nurse in Glasgow before working with children in a mission hospital in South India. She then studied Paediatrics in London and specialised in Oncology and HIV at Great Ormond Street Hospital before moving to the Paediatric Emergency Department in Glasgow Yorkhill

Hospital. She then felt God calling her to full time mission, and after joining AIM in 2000 was sent to serve at Dwelling Places in Uganda in 2001.

Dwelling Places works to rescue street children, rehabilitate them in the organisation's home, and then resettle them back into their families and communities. Marsali says: 'The health work is a vital aspect of outreach to the children living on the streets. We develop relationships and trust, assist in emergencies, comfort and encourage where possible, teaching about health and life skills. Our social workers work with the children who come off the streets, are part of our rehabilitation programme, family tracing, home visits, and resettlement. For those who have no existing relatives, we pioneer in adoption and foster care, and for some of our older adolescents, they continue into independent living.'

While at Dwelling Places, Marsali developed the medical work within its holistic ministry. Medical work is an amazing tool in reaching out to the lost, and Marsali has a heart to see street-connected children come to know God as their Father as they experience his love through Dwelling Places' medical ministry.

Evangelism and discipleship continue to be integral to life and work in Africa, whether it's within the team, or with ex-street-connected children and youth. Besides this, Marsali will be involved in training and mentoring members of the Dwelling Places team and others involved in healthcare, counselling and child protection. She also continues to be a member of AIM's Child Safety and Protection team, which ensures high standards of child care and safeguarding within our organisation.

Websites: www.dwellingplaces.org
eu.aimint.org/pray/peopleandplaces/marsalicampbell





READING REVELATION: PART 2

John Ferguson

In our second and final part to our series on Revelation we can explore some of its applications for Christian life. This time we look at how the Book of Revelation is given to shape our views, how it can be a help to us in trying circumstances and what it teaches us about reading the Bible as a whole.

CHRIST'S RETURN SHAPES HISTORY

The events depicted in Revelation lead to the climactic event in world history – Christ's return. The book forms the way we should view history, so that we see it as leading up to and culminating in Christ's return. In the last edition of *The Door*, we looked at how the last times are described in Revelation from a number of vantage points. According to the book there is a definite shape to history that points us to Christ's return. So when we think about the events of the day, we should try to think how they are preparing for this climatic day in world history. Revelation encourages us to tell present day events in terms that anticipate the future. The way Jesus describes the events in Matthew 24 is an example to us – he sees them as leading up to his return. There should always be anticipation among Christians of Christ's return. We have to take care not to be distracted by the day's events from the more fundamental reality that Christ is going to come again, judge the living and the dead and take his people into glory.

When thinking through difficult theological questions that Revelation is often associated with – such as the thousand years of Revelation 20, we must also keep the book's basic plot in view. Within the Christian church there are various understandings of how Christ's return relates to this period of a thousand years. There are several views: premillennial (Christ returns before a thousand years reign on earth), postmillennial (Christ returns after a thousand years of the church prospering on earth) and amillennial (the thousand years refers to his current reign over all things). Even within the APC's history, taking into account the Free Presbyterian and Free Church traditions, differing views have been taken on this question! Difficulties are experienced not so much in there being

different views, but rather when they lead to speculation, or when the millennial question is treated disproportionately.

THE ONGOING BATTLE AGAINST EVIL

Revelation shows us Christian life in detail. One aspect of this is facing up to evil, which is an ongoing spiritual battle. For the church there are and will be periods of suffering. Strange things happen that make little sense at first. We struggle with the difference between the way things are and the way we believe things should be. Revelation helps to crystallise the spiritual realities that underlie the experiences we have.

An example of a troubled situation is in Revelation 13. The monetary system is corrupted so that none can buy or sell without the mark of the beast (v. 17). In such circumstances Christians experience curtailment of freedoms.

The recent Ashers Baker case serves as a warning. The case was an example of business demanded as a 'right'. The bakers' right to refuse business was challenged. Thankfully the favourable ruling in the Supreme Court protected their right to refuse to enter into a business contract. This was a win not only for Christians but for free trade. Revelation 14 tells of a situation where Christians lose their freedom. The system is corrupted to the degree that only those 'with the mark of the beast' can buy or sell. It is speaking of a society where a Christian's conscience is not protected by the state, and following conscience the Christian suffers for not being able to enter into business. The fact that Christians have recently been challenged in their right to act freely in business is enough to remind us that we do not have a lasting home here, but our citizenship is in heaven.

Revelation tells of situations where the church is cornered and seems defeated, yet in the end it is the church which is victorious. One example is in chapter 11. The prophets are struck down. To the human eye they are powerless and what they stand for is proven futile. But after three and a half days they rise from the dead, everyone who sees them is filled with fear, they are taken into glory and there is a tremendous destructive shaking of the earth.

G. K. Chesterton says, 'At least five times in history the faith has to all appearances gone to the dogs; in each of these five cases it was the dog that died.' But how does the church overcome? Revelation answers. Not by drawing on its own strength, but through faith in Christ. Consequently the Christian path is one of weakness and vulnerability. The church is called to follow Christ and his example. He was crucified in weakness and died. He thereby destroys the works of the devil and overcomes the world.

Today there are Christians who face intense persecution. It has been said that there were more Christian martyrs in the last century than in all the previous nineteen centuries of the church combined. Revelation 20 records the severity of some of these persecutions, speaking of those who have been beheaded for Christ. We are filled with admiration for Christians who have paid such a price. Their enemies believed they were causing them to perish from the earth. Yet they rule over their enemies with Christ (20:4-6).

Vern Poythress comments that this passage, 'answers a pressing question during times of intense persecution. When Christians are a weak minority, when great imperial powers are arrayed against them, is there any hope for victory? What happens when Christians are viciously put to death? It appears to the world that they have been decisively defeated. The persecuting authorities are very much alive and as powerful as ever, while Christians have been simply wiped out. Christianity appears to be a hopelessly weak religion. Does God not care? Is he really in control? Can anything undo the defeat that Christians have suffered through their martyrdom? Revelation 20:4-6 answers that heavenly realities must be included in assessing the situation. And when we see these realities the tables are 'completely' turned. It turns out that it is impossible to defeat Christians. Even when demonic forces are ravaging the church, they are only establishing Christians in positions of real and permanent power!' (The Returning King, p. 181)

Revelation and the Bible as a whole is essential for us, so that we may observe that indeed, 'to live is Christ, and die is gain'.

Without the Bible, however, it necessarily follows that we no longer perceive final outcomes. We only see one side of the story, and that never is the full story. Revelation helps us with spiritual sight to see and understand how Paul could say, 'For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Corinthians 12:10). May we receive the grace needed to help us live in this way of faith in Christ.

THE BIBLE IN REVELATION

A valuable feature of Revelation is what it communicates to us about the apostle John's knowledge of the Bible. Evidently he knew his Bible exceedingly well. The way he describes the revelation is in biblical terms. He constantly draws from the language of scripture to write scripture. The Bible has become his language. Charles Spurgeon spoke of John Bunyan, referring to his familiarity with and use of the Bible in Pilgrim's Progress, 'prick him anywhere and he would bleed

Bibline'. The book of Revelation suggests the same about John. Different parts of the Bible feature significantly in his descriptions, especially from the books of Moses and the Prophets. For example, Exodus features prominently in the account of the plagues from heaven in chapter 16 and Ezekiel in the description of God's throne room in chapter 4.

A final observation follows and concerns our reading of the Bible. Often we may think of how Old Testament books anticipate Christ and find their fulfilment in him. This is right and true. Perhaps what comes to mind most immediately is his earthly ministry, yet the Book of Revelation shows us their meaning and application also extends to include his current heavenly ministry. The relevance of these books therefore extends to the period of the last times – the times that we are in, between Christ's resurrection and return. Revelation teaches us that the victory belongs to Christ and because it belongs to him we who have faith in him shall also overcome 'by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony' (12:11). By that 'word' is meant the whole word of God. The last book of the Bible is written, not so that we would put the Bible down afterwards and say 'we have read it', but rather to inspire us to keep reading it and become more familiar with the whole of the Bible, which is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.



The World's Largest Puzzle and Its Infinitely Wise Creator

Rachel Golias

This summer, my family and I stopped by America's biggest puzzle store during a family adventure. Inside, puzzles covered tables and shelves, were fitted in special cases that lined the entire ceiling and were tucked in every nook and cranny. There were beginner toddler puzzles with two pieces, kids puzzles with firetrucks and princesses, 1000 piece puzzles of historical events, and 3000 pieces puzzles of beautiful nature scenes. Then we saw the big puzzle...32,356 pieces. The finished puzzle measured 17 feet by 6 feet and weighed more than 40 pounds. Many people have said a puzzle this size takes six months to a year to complete.

To me, attempting a puzzle that size is, well, puzzling. But, what if the whole world—dirt, mountains, oceans, trees, flowers, sky, animals, birds, insects—was a puzzle you had to put together? Oh, and it is not a normal puzzle. It is one of those 3-D puzzles with moving pieces. You have to add layer upon layer to your puzzle to piece together each person along with every circumstance they will ever face. That is unimaginable.

O LORD, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom have you made them all;

—Psalm 104:24a

In *The ABCs of God curriculum*, Jill Nelson asks children:

What does it mean that God is wise? It means that He causes everything to work out perfectly. It is as if the world is like a giant puzzle with millions of



pieces. God made each piece, and all the pieces fit together in order to make the world just as God planned it. God doesn't make any mistakes. Because He is wise, EVERYTHING turns out exactly as He has planned it.

When we look at our lives, often all we can see is a mountain of puzzle pieces that do not seem to fit together. It is not our job to determine how each piece of our life fits together or why we were given certain pieces. We need to trust that God is infinitely wise in each detail of our lives, especially when bad things happen or circumstances do not make sense.

In his sermon, *The Great Work of the Only Wise God*, Pastor John Piper defines wisdom this way:

Wisdom is knowing what the greatest goal is in any situation, and what the best way is to achieve it. It's different from knowledge, but it assumes knowledge. They overlap. You can't exercise wisdom without knowledge; because in order to figure out the best way to achieve a goal, you have to have knowledge of many factors. On the other hand, you can have a lot of knowledge and not have wisdom. There are many brilliant fools. And many less-educated sages.

But we are talking about God's wisdom, not ours. The difference is that he always knows the best goal in every situation, and he always has total and perfect knowledge of billions and billions of relevant factors in every situation that enable him to know the best way to achieve the goal.

Next time you sit down with your child to work on a puzzle, take time to discuss who is the master puzzle-maker who creates and fits together diverse pieces to reveal His perfect plan in creation and achieve his goals.

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YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL William Mackenzie

Attack by blow fly is a real concern to a shepherd. It causes weakness and death in affected animals. The fly lays its eggs on the sheep and within twenty-four hours the larvae penetrate the skin, multiply, and soon the sheep is poisoned. Working with our own flock, I would see a sheep distressed by this affliction but, thankfully, there is a treatment: Backlining. An appropriate ointment is poured on the animal's head and along its back.

We often think of David, the shepherd, in relation to Psalm 23's green pastures. David, however, needed to treat disease in his flock. He would also have seen how larvae or maggots were like his own sin ... leading to death. David needed the Divine remedy. So do we. How wonderful that Jesus tells us in John 10 that the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep; He has provided the remedy at an incalculable cost. Acts 20:28 tells us that the church is 'purchased with his own blood'.

A shepherd struggles not just with disease and illness – there are the sheep themselves. In Psalm 51 David pleads with the Lord, 'Let the bones that you have broken rejoice'. As a Jewish shepherd, walking ahead of his flock, David would have noticed when a lamb strayed. At first, he would have thrown a little stick at it to bring it back but if the lamb wandered away again David would have broken its leg. He would then bind up the leg and carry the lamb in his arms; eventually placing the lamb at his feet where it would stay – close to its shepherd. This hard experience was done for the good of the lamb. What a beautiful picture of chastisement. When God admonishes us, his children, we must recognise that he is good in all that He does.

Anointing oil also signifies gladness. Isaiah 61:1-3 reminds us of this. Who brings good news to the poor? Who binds up the broken-hearted; proclaims liberty to the captives; giving 'the oil of gladness instead of mourning'? Surely this is the anointed one, the Lord Jesus. As we consider Him, we have joy and gladness. If not we are weary and faint in our minds.

Psalm 133 likens unity to a precious oil poured over the head of Aaron the priest. Unity is precious. We need to love and wish well for 'all those in every place who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:2). How can we exclude from our love and prayers anyone who Christ includes in His? Oil can smooth troubled water. Oil nourishes. My mother used to say, 'William, be more concerned with your own faults than those of your brothers'. The last time I heard John Stott preach he finished by holding up his hands and saying 'Ten fingers ten words: "Love God love one another because He first loved us"'.

MY CUP OVERFLOWS

I remember an African pastor presenting the picture of God holding a cup of cursing and a cup of blessing. Surely the blessing would be for the Son for whom he had eternal affection and the cup of cursing would be for his creatures who had sinned against Him. But no, the Son took the curse so that sinners would have the blessing. We need to drink from that cup over and over again. And as our Lord delights in mercy, we love to meet Him there. The psalmist asks an important question in Psalm 116:12 'What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts to me?' The answer is sweet. 'I will have more of the same.' This world's goods or recognition will never meet our need for satisfaction. Stephen Charnock, the Puritan, expressed it well when he said, 'Nothing less than Christ can satisfy and when you find him nothing more could be desired'. My wife and I met with a recently-retired pastor who spoke of his frailty and inability to travel on holiday or to church events but he repeated to us, with joy in his heart, the verse from John Newton:

From Pole to Pole let others roam and search in vain for bliss
My soul is satisfied at home the LORD my portion is.

Margaret was the quietest member of Alec Motyer's Bible study. When asked, 'How can we make an impact on the world around us?' Margaret simply said, 'Peace.' When asked, 'Tell us more.' She replied, 'There are eleven flats in this block. They are all facing difficulties, challenges and trials of life. What my neighbours need to see is that we are facing the same issues but enjoying an unshaken peace.' Margaret's cup was overflowing. This distinctiveness would make our testimony magnetic to a troubled society. On the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ suffered untold agony and rejection. This was not because of anything wrong that he had done but rather out of love to his Father and for those whose sin he was bearing. Yet his cup was overflowing, he had unshaken peace. The centurion saw this and exclaimed, 'Truly this was the son of God' (Matt. 27:54). May that be our profession today as we recognise the anointing of our head with oil and the overflowing of our cup.



AI WEI DE, 'VIRTUOUS ONE': Gladys Aylward,

DIANNA LYNN SEVERANCE

Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. ~ PSALM 5:8

TAKEN FROM HER STORY; PUBLISHED BY CHRISTIAN FOCUS PUBLICATIONS; USED WITH PERMISSION

At the age of fourteen, Gladys Aylward went to work as a parlor maid for a wealthy family. When she was eighteen she attended a service where the preacher taught about giving your life to the Lord. The message began to awaken in Gladys a desire to be a missionary, and she began reading books on China. In her mid-twenties Gladys applied for a position with China Inland Mission (CIM), but she was rejected. CIM did not find she had the educational background expected, and thought she was probably too old to begin learning the difficult Chinese language. Nevertheless Gladys, feeling called to serve God in China, began saving money to go there. Though she could not afford passage by ship, she was eventually able to buy overland train transport across Europe and Russia to China. On 15 October, 1932, Gladys left the Liverpool train station for the Orient.

Gladys went to Yangcheng, where an elderly missionary, Jeanie Lawson, needed assistance. Yangcheng was a stopping-off point for the mule caravans, and Gladys and Mrs Lawson decided to open an inn for the mule teams. While providing food and shelter for the mule drivers and the mules, they also told Bible stories to the men after dinner.

Gladys easily adapted to Chinese dress and culture, and, in 1936, became a naturalized Chinese citizen. She was well respected by all, including the governor, who made her a foot inspector. The Chinese thought very small feet in women were beautiful and bound the feet of girls to keep them small. Laws had recently been passed, however, forbidding this practice. Gladys' job as foot inspector was to travel to the villages, educate the people on not binding the feet, and see the new law was complied with. Gladys was amazed she was being paid to travel to the villages, where she could also tell the people about the gospel of Christ. Gladys also served as a spy for the Chinese as the Sino-Japanese War intensified. In her travels she encountered many unwanted children and orphans, whom she took to herself and cared for. In time she had one hundred children in her care. The Chinese gave her the name 'AiWeiDe', which sounded somewhat like her name 'Aylward' and meant 'Virtuous One'.

As Japanese bombings intensified in 1940, Gladys was forced to leave Yangcheng for a safer haven in Sian province. Gladys led the one hundred children across mountains and the Yellow River, a journey of over one hundred miles. Singing hymns to keep up their spirits during the twenty-seven days, Gladys collapsed when they reached Sian safely. She was ill with pneumonia, typhus, and exhaustion, but all the children had been brought to safety. In her incredible journey leading the children across the mountains, Gladys had trusted God's guidance and protection as she had on her journey from England to China.



PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

TERRY JOHNSON

'THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A MERCHANT SEEKING FINE PEARLS,' (13:45).

... As was true of the hidden treasure, the emphasis is on the exceptional worth of what was found. It is a pearl of 'great value,' says Jesus. Unlike the previous parable, here the discoverer is actively pursuing the pearl prior to finding it. He knows its value and wants it. As in the previous parable, the emphasis is also upon the magnitude of the sacrifice that the merchant makes to obtain it. The merchant demonstrates that 'no cost is too great when it is a matter of gaining the kingdom'. He is seeking 'fine pearls,' says Jesus.

'and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it' (13:46).

What does he do to obtain the 'one' pearl of salvation? He sells 'all that he (has),' though he is a wealthy man and has much to lose. In other words, he too will do whatever he must do. No cost is too great. No burden is too heavy. It is worth all he has. It requires all he has. Ryle says that, 'men really convinced of the importance of salvation will give up everything to win Christ, and eternal life'. Carson says that the kingdom of God is 'worthy of every sacrifice,' it is 'worth much more than the price paid,' and 'worth infinitely more than the cost of discipleship.' Those who understand this 'joyfully abandon everything else to secure it'.



To understand this, one must comprehend that the kingdom of God is worthy in itself, as we have seen. One must also come to understand that it is good compared with other things, even other good things. This is true, whatever costs are involved.

Some time ago our little Jack Russell terrier (named 'Jack,' of course) died suddenly. We were swimming at a friend's pool when he started to act strange, and then keeled over. We hurried him home, not sure what was wrong, suspecting overheating or dehydration. Instead, the opposite was the case. His lungs had filled up with water and he had suffocated, or drowned. He died before we could get him to the vet. The Johnson household grieved for months, even years. Jack was not just a pet. He was a member of the family.

Well, his death has been the occasion of much discussion. Naturally we asked and tried to answer the question, what should we learn from this? We said a number of things –

1. God is sovereign – He has a plan.
2. God is good – His plan is a good plan.
3. God is to be trusted in everything – even when the goodness of His plan cannot be perceived.

But the main point was this – nothing in this life lasts. We must not set our affections, our dreams, our hopes on anything in this world. Everything in this world will decay and return to dust. We must not lay up treasures upon earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal (Matt. 6:19 ff.). This world is passing away (1 John 2:17). This is why we can put the question in such absolute and categorical terms – what have you gained if you have managed to obtain the whole world, this whole world that is passing away, and lose your own soul, the one thing that is eternal (Matt. 16:26)? The only thing that lasts, that endures, is the knowledge of God. Only His kingdom is eternal. Therefore, if I am thinking sensibly, I will do whatever is required, and lose whatever I must to know God. When the Apostle Paul speaks of the 'surpassing value' of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord, he admits that for this privilege he had indeed 'suffered the loss of all things' but counted these things as 'rubbish' (Phil. 3:8). In other words, there was no comparison between what he got and what it cost him. He may have had to forego worldly reputation and recognition. He may no longer have been a bigshot in leadership circles in Jerusalem. He surely had to renounce the sinful pleasures of the flesh in which others seemed to indulge

with impunity. He also had to suffer persecution and loss. But he says, it is as nothing. Elsewhere he says, 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18). These losses are as nothing. There is no comparison. They are barely worth mentioning.

What is the key? Placing supreme value on the spiritual and eternal. This is what I must perceive. God's kingdom is a treasure. Salvation is a 'pearl of great price.' For it I would gladly and joyfully relinquish everything if I might gain Christ. If I will not do that, then whether I be 4 or 40 or 84 years of age, I have failed to grasp what life is about.

There is a great irony at the center of the Christian life. Salvation is a 'gift of God' (Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 6:23). On the one hand, it costs us nothing. There is no prior religious or moral work that we must perform in order to receive it. There is no price that we must pay in order to secure it. We receive salvation by faith alone and apart from works. On the other hand, salvation costs us everything. We relinquish all, forsake all, commit all, believe all. We hold back nothing. We pursue salvation without regard for cost. The kingdom of God is free. But it costs us everything.

Will our contemporaries ever come to understand this? Will we? Can a world so in love with the present, so addicted to the flesh, so habituated to temporal things, ever grasp the worth of God's eternal kingdom? May God give us the grace to understand what life is about, what we are here to do and what our aim in life ought to be.

Taken from: The Parables of Jesus, published by Christian Focus Publications; used with permission

WAGING THE WAR AGAINST BITTERNESS

Janice M. Cappucci

Can the Cross really help someone dig up the root of bitterness? Absolutely. Here's a first step: Challenge your expectations: Do you know you were created to glorify God? That statement, if we have even the slightest sense of entitlement, is a shock, a stinging slap in the face. Because every utterance of the world, the flesh and the devil conveys the complete opposite – that God's job is to give us a good life as we define it. And don't we know perfectly well what's best for us?

Here's where the mistakes of others might help us grow in humility. Think about Jesus' first followers on Good Friday. Can you imagine what the events of that day did to their expectations? Imagine their shock and sense of utter defeat. Surely his tortuous death wasn't part of the picture. Since they knew nothing of God's purposes in the Cross, if it were in their power, their expectations would have led them to stop everything. In their sorrow and confusion, they could've been easy targets for bitterness. But in just three days they'd grasp how much higher are God's thoughts than their thoughts.

What about us? Have sorrow and confusion made us easy targets too? A target, yes. But with humility and faith, not an easy one.

What have we learned so far about bitterness? In a nutshell: Humility

kicks bitterness to the curb, declaring 'Since I have been created for God's glory, I can no longer relate to Him as if He's a genie whose job it is to 'come through' on my agenda.' Humility enables us to say, 'Thy will be done,' and respond to hardship with faith in God's perfect wisdom, power and love.

And now for step two: Determine, with God's grace, to be trained by hardships. Hebrews 12 exhorts us to respond correctly to God's discipline. Specifically, we mustn't shake our fists or stubbornly dig in our heels.



And we can't fall into despair. Both responses grow out of an attitude of entitlement – not humility – and both cultivate bitterness.

Instead, let's pray along these lines: For God to reveal how He wants to use hardships to refine us; for grace to be a moldable, teachable piece of clay in His loving hands, for grace to loosen our grip on the things of this world (especially our expectations); and for grace to keep our eyes on the prize: a harvest of righteousness and peace.

The Puritan John Flavel puts it this way: 'Afflictions do not happen by chance, but by counsel.' (Job 5:6 ; Ephesians 1:11) They are 'ordained as means of much spiritual good for saints. They are God's workmen on our hearts to pull down pride and earthly security. And being so, their nature is changed. They are turned into blessings and benefits. (Psalm 119:71) So you have no reason to quarrel with God. Rather you should marvel that God should concern Himself so much for your good that He will use any means to accomplish it.'

(Quoted in Tim Chester's book, *God's Discipline: A Word of Encouragement in the Midst of Hardship*, Christian Focus Publications, 2018, p. 79)



THE CROSS OF CHRIST

John Stott

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? the old negro spiritual asks. And we must answer, 'Yes, we were there.' Not as spectators only but as participants, guilty participants, plotting, scheming, betraying, bargaining, and handing him over to be crucified. We may try to wash our hands of responsibility like Pilate. But our attempt will be as futile as his. For there is blood on our hands. Before we can begin to see the cross as something done for us (leading to faith and worship), we have to see it as something done by us (leading us to repentance). Indeed, 'only the man who is prepared to own his share in the guilt of the cross', wrote Canon Peter Green, 'may claim his share in its grace.'

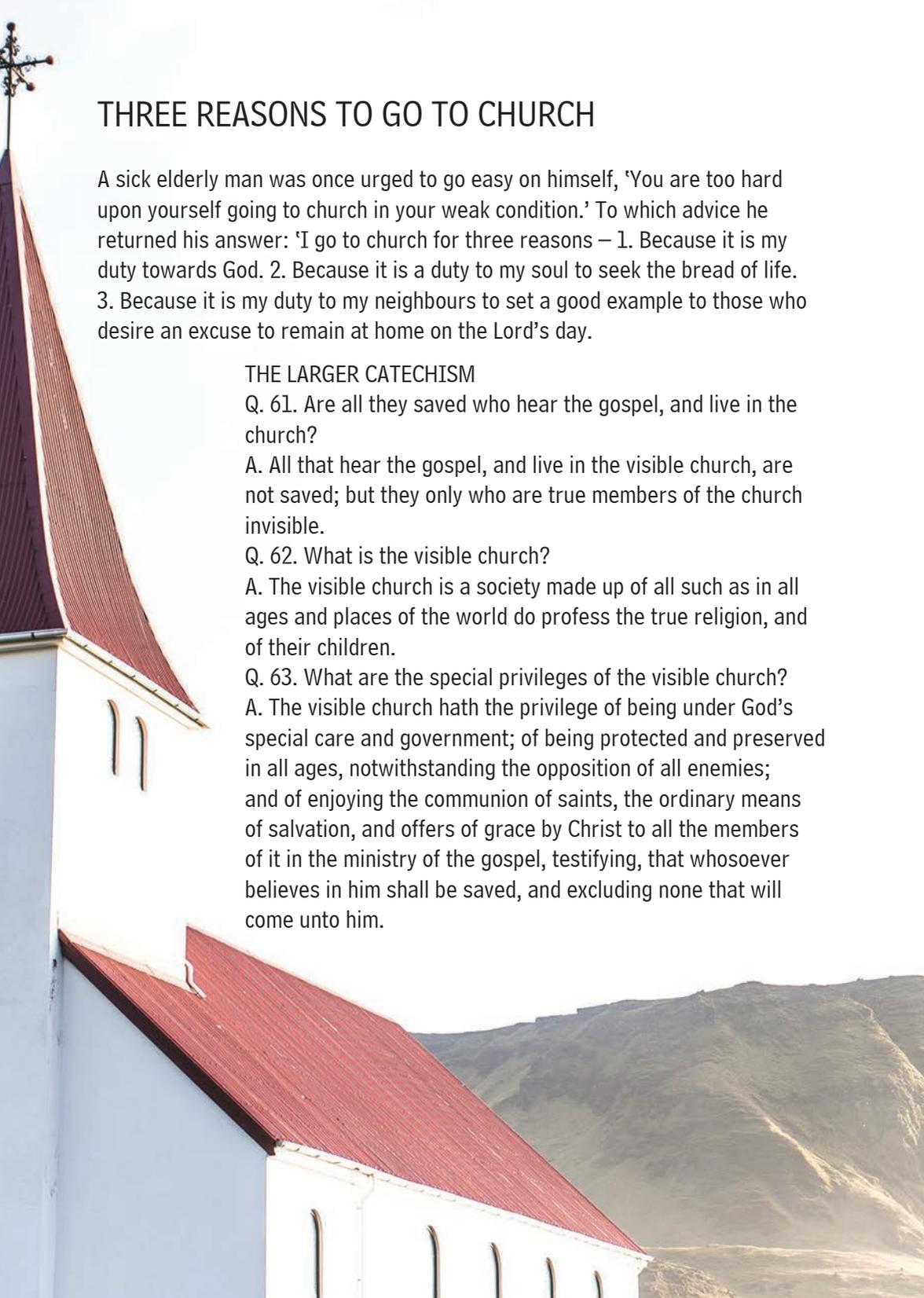
Horatius Bonar (1808-89), who has been called 'the prince of Scottish hymn-writers' expressed it well:

'Twas I that shed the sacred blood;
I nailed him to the tree;
I crucified the Christ of God;
I joined the mockery.

Of all that shouting multitude
I feel that I am one;
And in that din of voices rude
I recognise my own.

Around the cross the throng I see,
Mocking the Sufferer's groan
Yet still my voice it seems to be
As if I mocked alone.

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THREE REASONS TO GO TO CHURCH

A sick elderly man was once urged to go easy on himself, 'You are too hard upon yourself going to church in your weak condition.' To which advice he returned his answer: 'I go to church for three reasons – 1. Because it is my duty towards God. 2. Because it is a duty to my soul to seek the bread of life. 3. Because it is my duty to my neighbours to set a good example to those who desire an excuse to remain at home on the Lord's day.

THE LARGER CATECHISM

Q. 61. Are all they saved who hear the gospel, and live in the church?

A. All that hear the gospel, and live in the visible church, are not saved; but they only who are true members of the church invisible.

Q. 62. What is the visible church?

A. The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children.

Q. 63. What are the special privileges of the visible church?

A. The visible church hath the privilege of being under God's special care and government; of being protected and preserved in all ages, notwithstanding the opposition of all enemies; and of enjoying the communion of saints, the ordinary means of salvation, and offers of grace by Christ to all the members of it in the ministry of the gospel, testifying, that whosoever believes in him shall be saved, and excluding none that will come unto him.

Q. 64. What is the invisible church?

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the head.

Q. 65. What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

A. The members of the invisible church by Christ enjoy union and communion with him in grace and glory.

Q. 66. What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.

Q. 67. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.



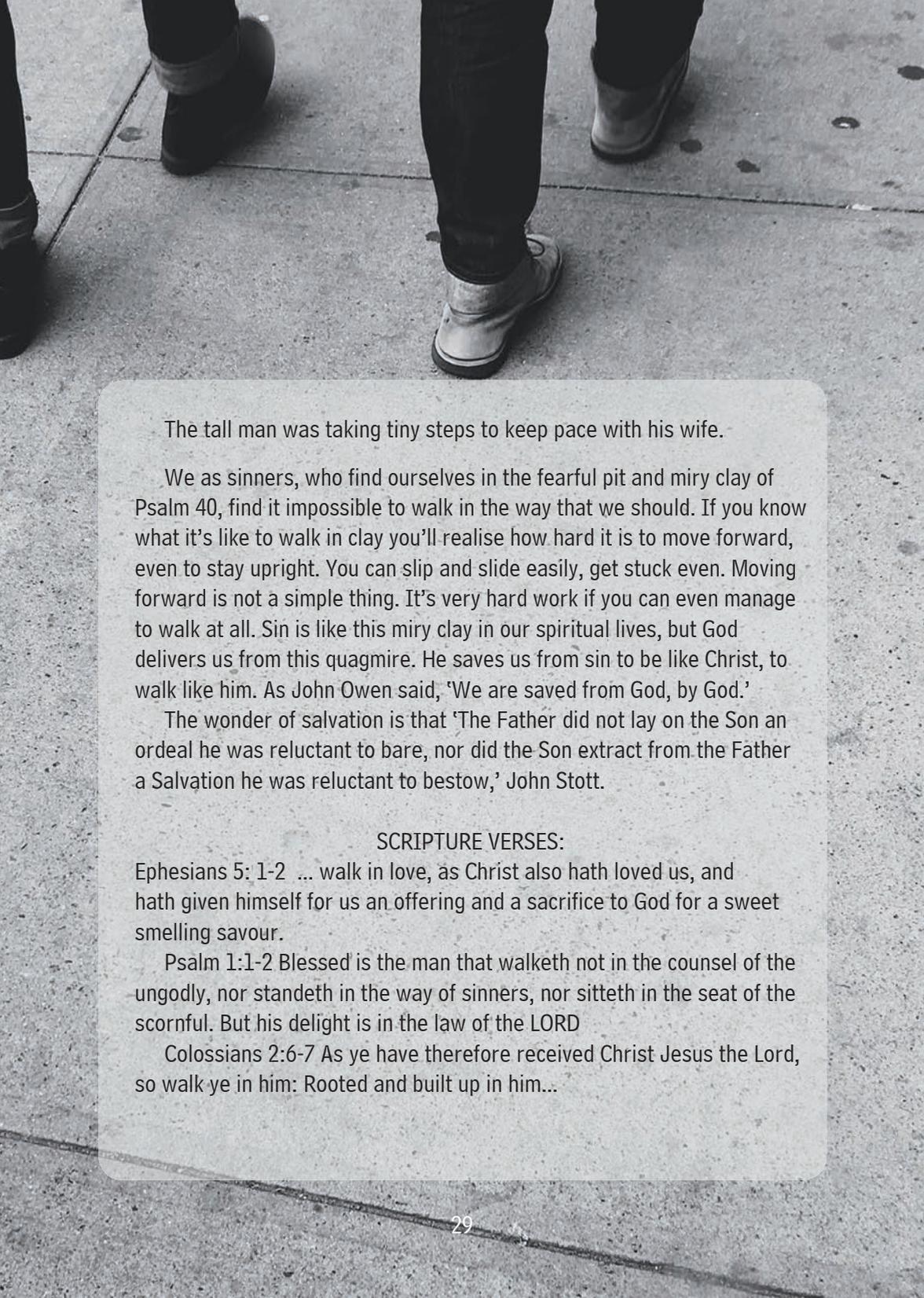
WALK THIS WAY

Taken from sermons by A.I. MacDonald and William Mackenzie

You can tell a lot about a person by the way they walk. For example, a man from the isle of Skye may walk slowly and deliberately lifting his feet higher than most people would. That's because he has spent his life traversing the heather clad hills of his island. He needs to lift his feet high to stop them getting tangled in that tough hardy plant.

Then go a couple of hundred miles to the North-east and you come to the island of Orkney. The people there have sometimes been observed walking with a stoop. This is because they have spent their lives crossing that wind swept land – continually straining against the blast of the North sea.

Rev. A.I. MacDonald once observed a member of his congregation who was a man of 6 foot or more taking very tiny steps. He couldn't understand it. Shouldn't a man of that height take large long steps? It was a mystery until he saw this gentleman walking out of church one day with his wife who was four foot something.



The tall man was taking tiny steps to keep pace with his wife.

We as sinners, who find ourselves in the fearful pit and miry clay of Psalm 40, find it impossible to walk in the way that we should. If you know what it's like to walk in clay you'll realise how hard it is to move forward, even to stay upright. You can slip and slide easily, get stuck even. Moving forward is not a simple thing. It's very hard work if you can even manage to walk at all. Sin is like this miry clay in our spiritual lives, but God delivers us from this quagmire. He saves us from sin to be like Christ, to walk like him. As John Owen said, 'We are saved from God, by God.'

The wonder of salvation is that 'The Father did not lay on the Son an ordeal he was reluctant to bare, nor did the Son extract from the Father a Salvation he was reluctant to bestow,' John Stott.

SCRIPTURE VERSES:

Ephesians 5: 1-2 ... walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD

Colossians 2:6-7 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him...

THE MYSTERY OF THE TRUE VINE - THE FRUIT

Rev Andrew Murray

**EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT BEARETH NOT FRUIT.
HE TAKETH IT AWAY – JOHN 15: 2**

FRUIT: This is the next great word we have: The Vine, the Husbandman, the Branch, the Fruit. What has our Lord to say to us of fruit? Simply this – that fruit is the one thing the branch is for, and that if it bear not fruit, the husbandman takes it away. The vine is the glory of the husbandman; the branch is the glory of the vine; the fruit is the glory of the branch; if the branch bring not forth fruit, there is no glory or worth in it; it is an offence and a hinderance; the husbandman takes it away. The one reason for the existence of a Branch, the one mark of being a true Branch of the Heavenly Vine, the one condition of being allowed by the Divine Husbandman to share the life of the Vine is – bearing fruit.

And what is fruit? Something that the branch bears, not for itself, but for its owner; something that is to be gathered and taken away. The branch does indeed receive from the vine sap for its own life, by which it grows thicker and stronger. But this supply, for its own maintenance, is entirely subordinate to its fulfilment



of the purpose of its existence – bearing fruit. It is because Christians do not understand or accept of this truth, that they so fail in their efforts and prayers to live the Branch life. They often desire it very earnestly; they read and meditate and pray, and yet they fail, they wonder why? The reason is very simple: they do not know that fruit-bearing is the one thing they have been saved for. Just as entirely as Christ became the True Vine with the one object, you have been made a Branch too, with the one object of bearing fruit for the salvation of men. The Vine and the Branch are equally under the unchangeable law of fruit-bearing as the one reason of their being. Christ and the believer, the Heavenly Vine and the Branch, have equally their place in the world exclusively for one purpose, to carry God’s saving love to men. Hence the solemn word: Every Branch that beareth not fruit, He taketh it away.

Let us specially beware of one great mistake. Many Christians think their own salvation is the first thing; their temporal life and prosperity, with the care of their family, the second; and what of time and interest is left may be devoted to fruit-bearing, to the saving of men. No wonder that in most cases very little time or interest can be found. No, Christian! The one object with which you have been made a member of Christ’s body, is that the head may have you to carry out His saving work. The one object God had in making you a Branch is that Christ may through you bring life to men. Your personal salvation, your business and care for your family, are entirely subordinate to this. Your first aim in life, your first aim every day, should be to know how Christ desires to carry out His purpose in you.

Let us begin to think as God thinks. Let us accept Christ’s teaching and respond to it. The one object of my being a Branch, the one mark of my being a true Branch, the one condition of my abiding and growing strong, is that I bear the fruit of the Heavenly Vine for dying men to eat and live. And the one thing of which I can have the most perfect assurance is that, with Christ as my Vine, and the Father as my Husbandman, I can indeed be a fruitful Branch.

Our Father! Thou comest seeking fruit. Teach us, we pray Thee, to realise how truly this is the one object of our existence, and of our union to Christ. Make it the one desire of our heart to be Branches, so filled with the Spirit of the Vine, as to bring forth fruit abundantly.

GENESIS

The Creation of the World

1 In the "beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was ^bwithout form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the water. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first

