

Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1563



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The Light of the World – page 5
A Beacon of Hope – page 7

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OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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Discover the Bible

If you have an enquiring mind, or are just curious about things you see around you, hill tops are a good place to look. Nowadays the chances are that masts for telephone or television are located there, but sometimes there are much more interesting things to spot and survey.

Castle Hill

The tower on this month's front cover is properly called the Victoria Tower, situated on Castle Hill, Huddersfield, in northern England. If you bothered to make enquiries you would find that it was first opened in June 1899 and that it was built to commemorate Queen Victoria's sixty year reign over the British Empire, which is why it is sometimes termed the Jubilee Tower. Built of stone from the nearby Crosland Hill it is 106 feet (32.3 m) high, which, added to the height of the hill itself, makes the top 1,000 feet (305 m) above sea level. So much thought went into its design and it required a considerable effort and expense to construct it, which is why it is now classed as an ancient monument.

Visit the site, as the two young men are doing as they climb the steps, and you would find out far more about the history of the site. Castle Hill was once



a place where beacons were lit to pass on warning signals. There are marks left by people of the Iron Age, who established a hill fort there. Then, after the Norman Conquest of Britain in 1066, a small castle was built (hence the name "Castle Hill"), and early in the 14th century an attempt was made to found a town on the hill, but it came to nothing.

Passers By

Of course, none of that information would be evident if you were just passing by. You would have to stop and look, perhaps visit, then enquire and you might even need a bit of expert help to point out the salient details. That's true of many things in life. We have to choose how best to use our limited resources; what to see and do; what we really want out of life. But how would we feel if we passed by the most important thing in life in pursuit of something which was much less valuable?

All through history people have pursued the things they considered important and neglected things that really mattered, but sometimes the outcome can be tragic. In Bible history the last king who reigned in Jerusalem was named Zedekiah and with him in the besieged city was one of God's great prophets, a man named Jeremiah.

For eleven years Zedekiah failed to face up to the threat posed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon who conquered Jerusalem several times and was finally determined to destroy the city which had given him such trouble. Jeremiah gave the king the advice that

if he would become Nebuchadnezzar's servant then he and his people could continue to live in Jerusalem and not be destroyed (Jeremiah 27:12-13).

But Zedekiah and his princes would not listen to Jeremiah's wise counsel. They persisted in their resistance and eventually Jerusalem was taken and its people were exiled or killed. Jeremiah's lament for their foolishness and disobedience contains these words:

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been brought on me, which the Lord has inflicted In the day of His fierce anger (Lamentations 1:12).

Easily Missed

Jeremiah's lament is that people who did not have to suffer brought that suffering upon themselves because they wouldn't listen to the message he brought from God. Their minds were fixed upon other things: how to defend the city, what to eat, how to avoid the sickness that was going around, and suchlike. It was a mistake they paid dearly for as the Babylonians took their revenge. King Zedekiah saw his sons killed, was blinded and ended his life as a captive in Babylon.

But one man's failure to face up to God's message doesn't change human nature. For it was in Jerusalem, many years later, that a crowd shouted for the death of an innocent man and rejoiced when they saw him crucified on a hilltop near the city. His death should have been a signal to them that God's purpose had reached a conclusion. For with the death of Jesus there was a way of forgiveness and reconciliation opened up. Jesus died to make it possible for our sins to be forgiven.

By believing God's Word and by being baptized into the saving name of Jesus we can be saved from our sins. But notice what the Scripture records about people who didn't take the time to enquire, who couldn't be bothered to discover the truth about Jesus Christ and about God's plan for them:

Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:29-30).

Those who passed him by failed to recognise the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God; nor did they realise that he was dying for them. But there were others who stayed long enough to marvel at the way he died and the gracious things he said during his ordeal. The Roman centurion who supervised the crucifixion was one who stayed and marvelled and the crowd who lingered left the hilltop very sorrowfully:

"the whole crowd who came together to that sight, seeing what had been done, beat their breasts and returned" (Luke 23:47,48).

Our Challenge

We weren't there of course and there won't be another such occasion for Jesus died "once for all" (Hebrews 7:27). But we have the choice whether or not to pay the Bible any attention. In a world that offers much, we can easily choose to ignore God's message to us. Don't be a passer-by! Discover what the Bible really teaches by reading it and find out about the marvellous message it contains. It's a life changer!

Editor

The Light of the World

John's Gospel records a saying of the Lord Jesus Christ which is full of meaning. Speaking to people who challenged his teaching, he said:

"I am the light of the world" (John 8:12).

It was not something his hearers immediately understood but it would have reminded his disciples that earlier he had told them something similar:

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14–16).

Better than the Sun?

Jesus knew just as we all do that the sun is what lights this world, so what did he mean? This is another example where Jesus, who was a master communicator, used everyday things to teach very powerful lessons. In what are known as his parables, he spoke of sheep, goats, and shepherds. He mentioned seed, vines, and farmers. He talked about coins, wealth and poverty, and all sorts of things that the people he lived amongst could relate to. And, of course, the sun was and still is a daily presence in the lives of all humanity.

It is the sun that makes all life on this earth possible. It gives warmth to land and sea; it is the driving force behind the clouds, the wind and the rain. It nourishes the trees and plants,



giving us the very air we breathe and the food we eat. Without the sun there would be no life.

But the sun is a very powerful force; it doesn't just provide light, it emits all sorts of radiation, which in other than small doses can be very harmful. So no one should look directly at the sun with the naked eyes; it is so bright it could blind someone.

Life-Giver

The light Jesus was talking about is not that fierce or that destructive. It is the light of wisdom, the enlightenment that shows men and women the way to salvation. That becomes clear when we read his saying in full:

Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

At the beginning of John's Gospel we are told that from the beginning the purpose of God is to give life to mankind and that eternal life would be possible because of the coming of God's Son: *"In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).* Long before Jesus was born the

prophet Isaiah had spoken about a coming Messiah who would bring enlightenment and he too used the picture of a dark world being transformed by a new light:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined (Isaiah 9:2).

Discover the Light

Whether we know it or not, all of us live in what Isaiah called “the land of the shadow of death”. By nature we are distanced from God and we need the message that Jesus brings to lead us to a right relationship with Him. God sent His Son to make that possible and if we allow His words to affect the way we live, then He promises us a better and more enriched life now, and the hope of life everlasting in the kingdom that Jesus will establish on earth when he returns. Speaking of this great hope and the power of God the Apostle Paul says that God:

“has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to



us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:9–10).

Even before God gave that great command: “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3), when He created the heaven and the earth, it was His plan and purpose to send His Son to bring enlightenment into all our lives. Jesus is the true light of the world. We can all look at Jesus without fear of damage for he is a light that will lead us to the Kingdom of God. What we have to do is to open our Bibles and our eyes, and then follow him.

Kevin Charlesworth



Castle Hill, Huddersfield showing the fire beacon (shown opposite). Photo: Richard Harvey

A Beacon of Hope

Communications are part of everyday life. We send and receive messages almost without a second thought because the electronic age has brought almost instant communication with people around the globe. From America to New Zealand and all points in-between we can not only hear about, but actually see, events as they happen on our small but powerful electronic devices.

Warning Devices

Fifty years ago or so we used to talk about ‘the 4 minute warning’ of a nuclear attack. We were assured that Radar could pick up the sign of impending disaster from an air attack, to allow people to take shelter quickly. Before the invention of such electronic devices other, much slower but still effective, methods were used to give warnings. For instance, in some parts of the world the jungle drums beat out a warning message and that drum beat could carry sound long distances and relay messages of importance. The need to warn the public of danger was obviously important to save lives.

A rather effective method of communication in this country was the fire beacon. These simple constructions were established on high hills to enable messages to be sent through a relay system, warning people of an impending event. Castle Hill, photographed on the front cover, was often used for this very purpose. This method was used effectively in 1588 to warn of the Spanish Armada, when Spain had assembled a large fleet of ships to invade England. Now falling out of use these constructions can still



be seen throughout the country on hills telling of a time gone by and reminding us of particular events.

Trumpet Blasts

Sometimes messages of celebration are sounded out with trumpets to commemorate such events as the beginning of a new year. In Bible times trumpets were used to good effect to sound out warnings in battle as well as to signal celebrations such as the coronation of a king. One particular incident recorded in the Scriptures used to be a puzzle to Bible students, wondering how it might be fulfilled. It concerns the return of Jesus to the earth.



These words in the book of Revelation speak of Jesus' return and indicate that this will be an event which will be seen worldwide. Now, because of modern communications, we can understand that this will be something that everyone will be able to see:

Behold, he is coming with clouds, and every eye will see him, even they who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of him. Even so, Amen (Revelation 1:7).

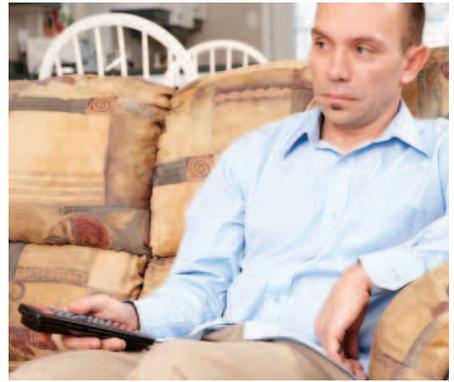
Discovering Jesus Christ

It may come as a surprise to someone who is new to Bible teaching, but the great news is that the Lord Jesus Christ is to return to the earth to take over the government of the world and make the world a beautiful place in which to live. This was what the disciples were told when Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, where he now lives:

Now when he (Jesus) had spoken these things, while they watched, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

The apostle Paul is one of many New Testament writers who pick up the same theme:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present



age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

Beacons were sources of information and often brought messages of hope and celebration. The Bible – like a beacon – spreads this message of hope and encouragement around the world. The promise of Jesus' return to the earth is great news. He will come with all the authority and power of God to establish God's Kingdom on earth and bring again that state of peace which the world surely needs. Our prayer should be "Come Lord Jesus".

Martin Spencer

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www.gladtidingsmagazine.org



Hidden Treasure

The possibility of finding buried treasure appeals to most of us, if only we knew where to look!

It might require sailing the seven seas in search of a desert island or following some ancient map where X marks the spot and digging to reveal a hidden chest full of coins and jewels. It could be that we inherit a fortune from a long lost relative or buy a vase or a painting from a charity shop, or find something thrown away in a skip that turns out to be worth a huge sum of money.

Unlikely Places

Huddersfield may seem an unlikely place to find treasure, but in 1897 a man discovered 81 coins dating from 1440 to 1550 at Netherton and they now reside in the Tolson museum and are on their list of 10 top treasures. More recently, in 2011 a metal-detecting club discovered jewellery in a field at Emley, which an inquest has declared to be treasure.

The word 'treasure' means things we value and need not mean things of monetary value at all, for there are plenty of things that are far more important and of much more value than financial gain. We treasure friendship and the love of our children and families. We have treasured memories, which are of no financial value. A cure from a serious illness would always be preferred to any amount of money, or gold or precious jewels.

The Bible is like a treasure chest for it contains pearls of wisdom and precious things that money cannot buy. Jesus told parables that explain some of these treasures.



Discovering Treasure

Parables are stories with a moral lesson or teaching and one of the parables Jesus told was about a man who found treasure hidden in a field. He was so overjoyed with his find that he sold everything he had to buy the field so that he could own the treasure.

What did this parable mean? It was the fifth of seven parables that Jesus told in Matthew chapter 13 and they caused his disciples some confusion. They came to Jesus privately and asked him why he was telling these stories instead of just communicating a direct message and this is what he said:

Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given (Matthew 13:11).



Jesus explained the meaning of some parables to his disciples, but he explained that the meaning would be hidden to others unless they searched it out diligently and found it – like the man who found the hidden treasure in the field.

Kingdom of God

From the outset of his ministry the whole teaching of Jesus centred on the kingdom of God, as can be clearly seen in Mark's account of the gospel:

Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14–15).

Thus in Matthew chapter 13, six out of the seven parables shown there begin with the words *"the kingdom of heaven is like"* and the seed that is sown in the parable of the Sower is *"the word of the kingdom."*

Clearly then, all these parables are about aspects of 'the kingdom of God' or 'the kingdom of heaven' as Matthew terms it, these being interchangeable terms (compare Matt 4:17 with Mark 1:14-15; Matt 5:3 with Luke 6:20; and Matt 13:31 with Mark 4:30-31).

Hidden Treasure

Here's the parable about the man who stumbled across hidden treasure:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field (Matthew 13:44).

Notice that the treasure was hidden. It was not lost or mislaid; it had been deliberately hidden. This matches per-

fectly with the explanation Jesus had given for speaking in parables (Matthew 13:11). In this instance (unlike the next parable Jesus told) the man appears to have stumbled across the treasure, perhaps when he was working in the field. When he found the treasure he immediately recognized and appreciated its great value and realised that to possess the treasure he needed to own the field.

It is a mark of how valuable this treasure was to him that he went and sold everything he had in order to buy the field and possess the treasure. It was clearly the most important thing in the world to this man, so he gave up all to obtain it.

Seeking Treasure

The next parable is similar except the treasure is a pearl of great value and the finder is a man who made it his business to find precious things:

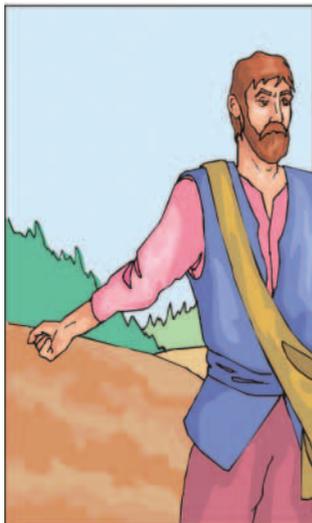
Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45–46).

This man was a merchant seeking precious pearls and upon finding this *"pearl of great price"*, like the other man he sold all that he had to buy it. When he found it, he knew its true value and, just as the disciples had done (Mark 10:28), he gave up all that he had to make that pearl his own. But what was so valuable about the hidden treasure or the discovered pearl that caused the finders to abandon all else to possess their finds?

Key Parable

The first parable Jesus told on that occasion is identified as a key to all the

subsequent ones (Mark 4:13) as Jesus gave his disciples a step-by-step guide to its interpretation. In the parable a farmer sows his seed which lands on different types of ground (some good and some bad) and the crop it yields varies accordingly. This is the explanation Jesus gives:



- ❖ The **Sower** is Jesus
- ❖ The **Seed** is the word of the kingdom – (what Jesus taught)
- ❖ The different **Soil** types are the hearts and minds of those who hear his message and the fruit is how the recipients respond to that word.
- ❖ The **Treasure** then is the word of the kingdom – the gospel: the good news of the kingdom of God.

What makes this news so valuable and such a precious treasure is that the gospel of the Kingdom of God is the answer to all mankind's problems. Jesus will return to earth with all of God's power which has been given him to enable him to rule the world and put everything right. The world will then be changed to a world of peace and righteousness and those who are judged worthy will be given everlasting life.

No wonder there have been people in all ages, including the present, who were and are willing to give up everything that they might possess this great truth and have hold of this great treasure. The treasure we see in the Bible – the Word of God – has a value

which is so great it is incomparable. There is nothing more valuable than having an understanding of this message hidden in the Bible.

It gives the opportunity to become a follower of Jesus and to have the promise of being part of God's future plan for Jesus and for the world; it is a treasure beyond value.

Food For Thought

What this world has to offer us here and now may seem to be so secure and may make us feel secure. But the things we enjoy now can be lost or taken away in a moment. These are things that Jesus described as *"the deceitfulness of riches"* (Matt 13:22) and this is the advice he gives to all who would follow him:

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

If all our hopes and desires are in the Lord Jesus and the Kingdom of God then those hopes are stored (safe and absolutely secure) with Jesus. He is now in heaven waiting for the time when God will send him back to earth to set up God's Kingdom and to reward his faithful followers with the gift of everlasting life.

Kevin Waterhouse

God is Always Right!

*When things go wrong for us we might think that God has got things wrong for us. But He never does that and His purpose is always designed to achieve the best outcome, as **John Woodall** now explains.*

Why Animal Sacrifices?

Throughout Old Testament times, the worship and service of God involved the sacrificing of animals. God is the King; He can forgive anyone He wants to forgive, but we humans are in this mess of failure and death because we have broken His laws. We can understand therefore that God is right to insist that we realize this: that we admit that He is right and we are wrong. This is the lesson that the sacrificing of animals was meant to teach.

People have misunderstood this. They have thought that God wanted to be appeased by a gift, or that He wanted to vent His anger in some way so instead of killing the sinner He had an animal killed instead. This is a big mistake because the Living God is not like that. The facts are the other way round. The sacrifices were not killed to change God's mind or attitude; they were killed to help the sinner admit that he or she was doing wrong and needed God's forgiveness. Just as a child who has done wrong tells his parents that he (or she) is sorry and is then forgiven, so it is with us and God.

Sacrifices – Their Meaning

The animal was brought by the person who had sinned, and was usually killed by him for it represented himself. He pressed his hands on the animal's head, confessed his sin and then killed it by shedding its blood (as described in Leviticus 5:5-6 & Numbers 5:7-8).



It was a sad and solemn moment. For the worshipper was showing that he knew he was wrong and, like Adam in Genesis 2:17, he did not deserve to live any longer. He was acting out his own death, which would of course come to him sooner or later in the ordinary way; and he was admitting that God was right in that judgement and that he was wrong.

When the person's attitude was right, he was forgiven, just like the repentant child. But if his attitude was not right, the sacrifice had no value at all, because what brought forgiveness was not the sacrifice itself but the state of mind of the person who had sinned:

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is His delight (Proverbs 15:8).

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; how much more when he brings it with wicked intent! (Proverbs 21:27).

Life Out of Death

In some Old Testament rituals there was the idea of giving up the old life and starting a new one. When a leper was healed, two birds were used: one was killed and the other flew away free – the first bird showed that the old diseased life was ‘dead’: the free bird showed that a new healthy life had begun (Leviticus 14).

Once each year, two goats were used: one was killed and the other was sent into the desert – it was a symbol or picture of the fact that death was due to the people because of the sins committed in the old year, but their sins were ‘carried into the wilderness’ by the living goat so they were given a fresh start (Leviticus 16).

Again, there were ways for individuals to give their lives to God in a special way, but then some mishap could occur that would spoil that special relationship with Him. In that case they shaved off all their hair and let it start to grow again – the spoiled life was ‘thrown away’ and a new life began (Numbers 6:9).

Circumcision

From the time of Abraham onwards, all Jewish male children had a small piece of flesh cut off (Genesis 17:10). Indeed, if it was not done, that man himself would be “*cut off from his people!*” (verse 14). This was meant to teach them that if they truly were to be the people of the Living God there were things in life that they must give up, ‘cut off’ or ‘sacrifice’.

Of itself, circumcision didn’t make them superior at all; in fact it was meant to teach the opposite, that unless they cut ungodly ways out of their lives they were not God’s people at all. Moses tried to teach them this by telling them to: “*circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer*” (Deuteronomy 10:16). See also Jeremiah 4, verse 4. But it was not a lesson they readily accepted and there was a great deal of prejudice about people who were described by Jews as “the uncircumcised”.

Admitting that God is right

In these different ways, God was encouraging people to accept that they were wrong and He was right: they must change, come back to Him and be forgiven. Most people would not do that, but in the Bible (the Old Testament as well as the New), we can read the encouraging stories of those who really did want to belong to God.

They tried to make sacrifices in their lives because of their love of God, and in return they received blessings out of all proportion to anything they gave up. Jesus said:

Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:29).

In the future, by God’s mercy and grace, such people will be equal to the angels (Luke 20:35,36). The good news is that we can be among them. What a remarkable discovery that is!

John Woodall

The Letter to the Galatians

Galatia was a region in the centre of present-day Turkey. Paul and Barnabas visited Galatia on their First Journey, and made many converts there. Some time after their return several Jewish Christians from Jerusalem travelled to Galatia, and began to teach the new disciples there that to be saved they must all be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. These men were not sent out by the apostles: they were expressing their own point of view.

Paul's Response

When the Apostle Paul heard of this development, he was deeply disturbed. He had already had a brush with these preachers (they are sometimes called Judaisers) at Antioch. He could see his work of preaching to the Gentiles being undermined, and Christianity being reduced to an offshoot of Judaism. Unable to leave Antioch to visit his friends, he wrote them the Letter to the Galatians.

All his skills as a trained lawyer come into action to present logical and powerful arguments to prove these travelling preachers were wrong – that salvation comes by faith in Jesus, not by keeping the Old Testament laws. Paul begins his letter with the warning that there is only one gospel. The truth about Jesus and his Kingdom is not open to modification. What the apostles preached, he says, is what we have to believe. Maybe this is a valuable reminder in our own day, when so many groups all claim to be Christian. We must go back to the Bible to discover the original gospel.

Paul now presents seven arguments in support of his case. Firstly, he insisted, the gospel he had preached to them had not been taught him by other men, but had come by direct revelation from Jesus himself. (This was probably during the time he spent in the wilderness after his conversion – Galatians 1:15-18.) When he met the apostles in Jerusalem 14 years later, they listened to his preaching, and gave him their blessing for his gospel was the same as theirs.

At that visit to Jerusalem he took the young man Titus with him – a Gentile believer. The other apostles had accepted Titus as a brother. They had not insisted he should be circumcised. So circumcision was not part of the apostolic gospel.

Peter's Actions

Simon Peter had been convinced after the conversion of Cornelius that God wanted Gentiles to be saved, and from that time had sat down at the same table as Gentiles in perfect fellowship. But when visitors from Jerusalem came to Antioch, he had gone back to keeping himself apart from the Gentile Christians in the congregation. Paul had to publically rebuke the apostle, in spite of his seniority, and Peter had graciously accepted the rebuke. So Peter agreed that Gentiles were acceptable without circumcision.

The believers in Galatia had been blessed by the amazing gifts of the Holy Spirit to help their work for God. Did these gifts come because they had obeyed the commands of the Law, or because they believed in God's grace?

There was only one answer.

Then there was the case of father Abraham. Reading his story in Genesis, do we find the promises God made to him conditional upon his obedience to lots of commandments? No, says the apostle, the blessings God promised to Abraham and his Seed (offspring) were made long before the Law came along, and they were unconditional. It was Abraham's faith that commended him to God, and by the same faith we can be counted as Abraham's offspring, even if we are Gentiles.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:28–29).

Analogy and Allegory

In a powerful analogy, Paul likens the Law to a 'pedagogue' – the slave in an important household whose duty it was to make sure the children went to school and learned their lessons. The Law was intended to teach people about the coming of Jesus the Saviour, who would fulfil in his own death the signs and sacrifices of the Law. Now he had come, and taken away sins by his death, it followed that the Law was redundant. It had no more purpose. To go back to it would be like going back to the irksome timetables of school after you have moved on and started work.

Paul's last argument is a beautiful piece of Bible exposition. It is an allegory, beloved of the Greeks. Abraham, the apostle reminds us, had two sons. The first to be born was Ishmael, son of Hagar, Abraham's wife's slave. Ishmael was ousted from his position

as favourite son after Isaac was born to Sarah herself – by a miracle – in her old age. God himself had decreed that Isaac was to inherit Abraham's promises, and that the slave girl and her son must be sent away into the desert of Sinai.

Now, says Paul, these events, though true, serve as an allegory. We have two mountains, and two women. Mount Sinai, where God gave the Law to Moses, is in Ishmael's country, Arabia. It represents Hagar the slave. It stands for the Law, which brings an endless slavery to a list of rules.

By contrast, Isaac, son of Sarah, represents Jesus, the son God sent to save us. And Sarah, alias Mount Zion (Jerusalem), represents the grace and freedom God has given us in Christ. Jerusalem, not Sinai, is the true mother of the Christian.

Good Outcome?

We can assume that Paul's arguments worked, because we hear no more about the travelling preachers and when, not long after, the great Council was held in Jerusalem to discuss the position of Gentile believers, they were neither obliged to be circumcised nor to keep the Law.

But Paul has one last word. Just because we have been set free from the onerous rules of the Law, this does not mean we can do what we like. Rather, we must reach up to a higher standard still. It is not good enough just to control the bad ways of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-23). We have to aim to produce the fruit of the Spirit, the qualities that God looks for in the garden of our lives – love, joy, long suffering, peace and kindness.

David M Pearce

How Do We Praise the Lord?

Many years ago I was told that I was to accept a new assistant. He came in, a pleasant broad shouldered man, who had been a prison warder. I soon found him to be honest, trustworthy and an excellent worker. He told me that he worshipped in a small church on the edge of the town, with a congregation of six.

One day he was quite excited as "Songs of Praise" was to visit the church. In Britain, this is a television programme that tours the country and features congregations singing a variety of different hymns each week. He told me on the Monday following the broadcast that the church was full to overflowing.

A week later, however, he came in rather saddened as, on that Sunday they had returned to the original six members of the congregation. He said that he felt the programme was a good idea, but that many people attended just so they could be seen on the screen. He thought that they must have failed to understand that they were singing to the mightiest Being in the universe. A few weeks later his bungalow was burgled, and a month later he died.

Praise

I always remembered my assistant with gratitude, but his experience left me wondering how best we should praise God. Do we come with full-hearted thankfulness to praise God for all the wonderful things he has done and still does for the children of men? Are we grateful that God so mercifully



gave His Son that we might have the opportunity of eternal life? I like a hymn that starts:

*Praise, O praise our God and King;
Hymns of adoration sing;
For His mercies still endure,
Ever faithful, ever sure.*

We can only sing it if our heart is given willingly in service, to the One True God. Note that word 'One'. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that God is other than One. So when we sing, we are offering praise to the great Creator of the universe, and when we offer prayer, we do so through His dear Son, who is our mediator.

*For there is one God and one Mediator
between God and men, the Man Christ
Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).*

Appreciation

We cannot be half-hearted when a further hymn has us singing:

*Lord, Thee I'll praise with all my
heart,
Thy wonders all proclaim;*

*In Thee, Most High, I'll greatly joy,
And sing unto Thy Name.*

Christianity requires that all our life should be given willingly in service to the Father. We are not just asked to be Christians for a special day in a week or month. Each day should be full of the knowledge that God is gracious and that we experience so many blessings from His hand. Any words that we sing should reflect our appreciation and thankfulness. They should not be sung out of a sense of duty, but joyfully, recognising our great privilege.

Sing Joyfully

King David once said that it was essential to praise God in song and to glorify Him. He put the thought so clearly in one of his Psalms:

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms (Psalm 95:1–2).

There is no way that we can hide from God what we are thinking, as another hymn says:

*Lord Thou hast searched and seen us
through;
Thine eye commands with piercing
view,
Our rising and our resting hours,
Our hearts and minds with all their
powers.*

We can only stand in amazement at a Creator who knows our every thought and action. Time and again in the Bible it is emphasised that no-one can hide from God. Do we really want to? Our every desire should be for God to rule our lives each day.

King Solomon emphasised that our lives are overruled by heaven, or we choose our own way which can only result in death and no more. If we bring God into our hearts and praise and thank Him every day, it can make a big difference in our present lives, and for evermore in the future.

Favourites

A favourite hymn that expresses the Christian's one desire has these words:

*Lord, impart to us Thy wisdom,
Zeal and strength and courage too;
Let thy grace and help be near us,
In all things whate'er we do.
May Thy blessing,
Keep our every action true.*

The Lord Jesus extends to each of us a glorious invitation:

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels (Revelation 3:5).

What more could we want? No one on earth can promise that! How we should praise the Lord!

Ken Clark

Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD! (Psalm 150:3–6).

Is Your God Dead?

This sounds like a ludicrous question, as surely no-one would want to trust in an unconscious God. However, it is not as stupid as it seems.

Jemma was a four-year old girl with a vivid imagination. Tragically her mother had died at her birth. Jemma's father was doing a wonderful job of bringing up the little girl, but Jemma was acutely aware that she did not have a mother. One day Jemma's father overheard her talking to one of her dolls. "You are my mummy" she said, hugging the doll "and you look after me. You are beautiful and I will always love you."

Man-made gods

We can attribute Jemma's behaviour to her young age. However, before doing so we should maybe think more carefully. Adult behaviour is sometimes very similar. For example, the book of Exodus tells us how God worked great miracles to enable Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness on the way to their own land. Not long after witnessing these great events the people started to complain.

Assisted by Aaron they made a model of a calf, out of gold melted down from their own ornaments. This is what they said about the calf: "*This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!*" (Exodus 32:4).

In this day and age it seems silly to attribute supernatural powers to something that you have made, especially giving it credit for things that happened before it was even created.



This is not, however, an isolated example. The Bible prophets warn against the stupidity of making an idol out of wood and then worshipping it. In Isaiah 44:9-17 the prophet mocks the person who cuts down a tree, makes a fire of part of it to warm himself and also to cook his food, and makes the rest into a carved image saying "*Deliver me, for you are my god!*" Similar actions are deplored in Jeremiah 10:2-5 and Psalm 115:4-8:

"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands, they have mouths but they do not speak; eyes they have but they do not see; they have ears, but they do not hear; noses they have but they do not smell; they have hands but they do not handle; feet they have but they do not walk; nor do they mutter through their throat."

The divine verdict is:

“Those who make them are like them; so is everyone who trusts in them.” (v. 8)

One True God

The Bible consistently states that there is only one God. For example in Isaiah:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts; ‘I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God’ (Isaiah 44:6)

The Jews were forbidden to worship other gods (Exodus 20:1-5) and this was re-iterated by Jesus (Matthew 4:10). In fact, we are asked to put God first in our lives with nothing at all higher than God.

You may not worship idols of wood, metal or stone, and you may try to put God first in your life. There is, however, another important aspect to this. When the Bible teaches that there is only one God, it does not mean that all religions are ultimately worshipping the same God and that it does not really



matter which one you follow. It means the exact opposite: there is only one God and it is essential to find out what He wants and to try to obey Him. Even doing the right things for the wrong reasons can be unacceptable (see Proverbs 21:27; Jeremiah 6:19-20; I Corinthians chapter 13). Jesus warned that enthusiasm and commitment are not enough (Matthew 23:15).

Discovering God

How do you decide what your God is like and what he asks of you? Some people do this by their own reasoning and intuition. So we hear statements like these:

- ❖ “I can’t imagine God disapproving of that if He is a God of love”;
- ❖ “I’ve never hurt anyone so I’m sure God will protect me”;

rather than:

- ❖ “The Bible teaches that ...”.

If you personally are defining your God then you are creating an idol just as much as the man who carved out a shape from a tree. Your God might be appealing to you, but is no more the immortal creator of the universe than Jemma’s doll was her mother, and your God – effectively a figment of your imagination – is powerless, and unconscious. You are fooling yourself.

It is a matter of life and death to read the Bible to try to understand who the one true God is, how He defines right and wrong, and what He expects of us. This is the only way to ensure that your God is the living God of the Bible (I Thessalonians 1:9). Then discover God’s plan for you.

Anna Hart

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