

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1590



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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge
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Lonely?

Sometimes we may identify with the polar bear on the front cover. We can feel isolated and cut off from other people, maybe even feeling that the situation is getting worse, as though the 'ice floe' of our life is shrinking. It is often rightly said that we can be lonely in a crowd. Sometimes the sheer activity of others, the amount of human contact going on around us, can make us feel worse as we find it missing in our own lives.

Some people are happier being alone than others, but anyone who has experienced real loneliness will tell us that it is heart-breaking.

Where to Turn?

If you are experiencing this right now, then I'm sorry. There are professionals to help if you cannot find personal friends to lift you up, and I hope you can deal with that immediate need.

The good news is that God has the cure. Not a temporary 'lift', and not a 'quick fix', but a full and permanent cure. The Bible lays out the matter for us, and in praising and thanking God for His care, the Psalmist could write:

A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families (Psalm 68:5-6).

A Personal Relationship – with God

The answer begins with a wonderful truth, that we can have a personal relationship with the living God. He reaches out to us in the pages of the Bible, to tell us about who He is, what

is His plan for the world, and how men and women can relate to Him. There is no better place to start, to forge a connection with the Creator of heaven and earth.

Yet despite His power and godness, God wants to know us individually. He is described as 'the Father', and that is the relationship He wants with us. He will care for us, help us, and use His absolute knowledge to guide and develop us. He is kind and tender. Although there are a lot of people in His family (they are described as being as numerous as the stars) He knows each individually:

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name (Psalm 147:3-4).

So we can have a connection to the supreme power, who will care for us and get to know us personally. As an example, Abraham was described as 'the friend of God' (James 2:23). God extends to us the promise He made to Joshua: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).



A Friend in Jesus

The way to be at one with God is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus came to do his Father's will, and to give his life so that men and women can come to God. He described those who respond with belief and obedience as his friends:

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:13–14).

So we are offered friendship with a man who loved us so much, he was prepared to give his life for us. In fact, Jesus explains that he wants, with his Father, to be part of our everyday lives:

If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).



Not only this, but Jesus invites us to share with him our difficulties and problems, and to:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:28–29).

Isn't that the best type of friend? One who wants to be involved in our

life, who wants to help us and will do anything for us – to the point that he even gave his life? Jesus offers this type of friendship to each one of us.

Jesus reassured his disciples and us: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).*

A Spiritual Family

If we do enter a relationship with God and His Son, then we need to be baptised. On doing so, God describes Himself as our Father, and the Lord Jesus as a brother. In fact, all other baptised believers become our brothers and sisters too. So we can end up with a huge family, all who share the same values and beliefs, all serving the same God and all with the same hope for the future.

This is a huge spiritual value, but is practical too. These are people living today, maybe near to us, with whom we can spend time worshipping God, learning about Him and helping one another. In fact, the Bible tells us that being together in this way is exactly what is required:

Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24–25).

The 'day' referred to here is the return of Jesus, when he will judge the world and set up God's kingdom here on earth. When that kingdom is established and the world filled with people who worship God, we need never be lonely again.

Editor

The Spiritual Water Cycle

Most people know something about the water (hydrologic) cycle: the waters and the seas on the earth are evaporated by the sun; they form clouds which condense and rain onto the land; this feeds vegetation and forms streams and rivers which run back into the sea, which is evaporated. And so the cycle continues.

If you tried (as I did) to find out who first discovered the Water Cycle, then you would find that no one really knows, but some will make the point that the earliest record that we know of is in the Bible. It describes the water cycle very neatly:

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again (Ecclesiastes 1:7).

What's even more curious is that over the centuries there have been various ideas as to how the cycle worked, but modern understanding has shown the Bible to be correct in its description for several thousands of years.

So, we know what the water cycle is, but I wonder if you've ever considered the 'spiritual' water cycle?

When I'm studying the Bible, something that excites me is how the

language, key words, phrases and themes, thread like the laces in your shoes, backwards and forwards through the Bible; if you pull at them they bring the whole book together. As we look out for these threads, analogies and parables, we find that they are consistent throughout this book, which was written over thousands of years and by dozens of different people.

So let's look at the 'Spiritual Water Cycle'. We've already seen the Bible can teach us much about the world of nature, but we also find that it tells us about the spiritual world and how important it is for us to have God and His

purpose central in our lives.

We will look at each component in turn and see what the Bible has to say.

Waters

In several places in the Bible, the waters are used as a picture to represent the nations of the world, especially godless ones.

There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring (Luke 21: 25).



The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked" (Isaiah 57: 20-21).

The nations are associated with wickedness and godlessness, which is consistent throughout scripture. On the whole, mankind is not interested in God and is restless like the sea. It was true then, and it's true now.

Sun

Next, our attention turns to the sun.

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).

Here Jesus is telling us that he will show us 'the way' like a light in the darkness. Of course, the great light for our natural world is the sun in the sky.

To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2).

I'm sure you are aware of how, naturally speaking, the sun is essential for life on this planet. Without the sun, we would have no supply of oxygen, we would be in absolute darkness and we would freeze to death.

So in scripture, when we read about the sun in the sky there are parallels to be made with the Son of God. Here in Malachi, the healing he's talking about goes beyond the benefit of the sun on the earth. He is talking about a time when the 'ills' or the 'wickedness' of this world will be healed once and for all by the return of Jesus to the earth. To help us understand this, we can

continue to follow the 'spiritual water cycle' to help us understand the benefit that was felt from Jesus being on the earth 2000 years ago.

Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain (Psalm 135: 6-7).

So we see the spiritual parallel. The sun in our sky evaporates the waters and causes them to ascend. These vapours form clouds.

Clouds

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Through the power of the sun, the waters evaporate and form clouds. Through the influence of Jesus we can be spiritually elevated above the things of this world and instead be encouraged in the work of God. This life, this world encourages us to be self-centred; Jesus taught us to be God-centred.

In this quotation from Hebrews, the clouds refer to the numerous men and women of faith listed in chapter 11, who we are told about throughout the Bible. These are good examples that we should follow, and they are described as the clouds who await Jesus' return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. They have responded and reacted to the sun's warmth.

Rain

Those who have benefited from the influence of the 'sun' can encourage the 'waters' of the earth by sharing that knowledge.

Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the LORD, have created it (Isaiah 45:8).

So the goodness of what we have been taught by Jesus should be evident in how we live, and be beneficial to those around us. Nobody is forced to accept it, but for those who do, the effects will be obvious.

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud... So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass (Deuteronomy 32:2).

The Cycle Completed

And so, quite simply, the cycle continues. The Lord Jesus brought spiritual light to the world and that light can be reflected by those who choose to follow him. In turn it is possible to have a positive influence on those who are attracted to the light. Sadly however, not everyone is attracted to that light:

Have respect to the covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the haunts of cruelty (Psalm 74:20).



But contrast this with the gentle, pleasant warmth of the sun:

Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun (Ecclesiastes 11:7).

The effects of the presence of the Lord Jesus are far-reaching and are reflected in the nature of God's planet that surrounds us. We can truly look forward to the day when the personal warmth of the Son of God will be felt once more in the earth, and the healing power that has been granted him by his Father in heaven will be evident to all.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea (Revelation 21:1).

A new heaven, a new earth, the former things passed away – what a wonderful picture. Pain, suffering, inequality, poverty, starvation... all these things will be gone forever. There will be no more sea, no more godless nations producing only wickedness.

The Spiritual Water Cycle is as important and 'life-giving' as the natural. In fact, it's clear that it is infinitely more important.

Jon Gill

The Reliability of the Gospels - 6

Names

The reliability of the Gospels is vitally important to real Christianity. If the Gospels are a reliable record of the words and deeds of Jesus, then we can trust that teaching. If they are not, then we have very little idea of who Jesus really was, and what he said.

In this series, we have seen that the finds of archaeology and the linguistic features of the Gospels are consistent with the factual accuracy of the Gospels. We looked at undesigned coincidences and found that even tiny details have been preserved accurately in the Gospels. This article is about another check based on the frequency of use of different names in the New Testament.

Name Changes

The names we choose for our children change with time and place. In 2014 the most popular names given to newly born boys in England included Oliver, Jack and Henry. In 1914 the names Arthur, Frederick and Albert were popular; these names are far less popular in the modern day. The same is true for baby girls. None of the ten most popular girls' names in 1914 is in the top ten names for 2014. Names like Elsie, Edith, Doris and Florence are hardly used in modern-day England.

Not only does the popularity of names change from decade to decade, it changes from place to place. The most popular names in Wales are slightly different from those in England, for example.

The same thing was true in the ancient world. We can gain an idea of

the frequency with which different names were used by looking at ancient literature and the inscriptions in tombs.



The Israeli scholar Tal Ilan has produced a database of the names of Jewish people in the Roman Empire between 330 BC and 200 AD. In 2006 the British scholar Richard Bauckham published a digest of this data in his book "Jesus and the Eyewitnesses". Ilan's database for Judea, Samaria and Galilee uses inscriptions in tombs, Jewish literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the works of Flavius Josephus and the New Testament as sources. In total some 2,600 individuals were identified, sharing 447 different names. The top ten names are listed in the table opposite.

Rank	Name in New Testament	English Form	Total frequency	In the Gospels and Acts
1	Simon/Simeon	Simon	243	8
2	Joseph/Joses	Joseph	218	6
3	Lazarus/Eleazar	Lazarus	166	1
4	Judas/Judah	Judas	164	5
5	Yohanan/John	John	122	5
6	Jesus/Joshua	Jesus	99	2
7	Hananiah/Ananias	Ananias	82	2
8	Jonathan	Jonathan	71	–
9	Matthias/Matthew	Matthew	62	2
10	Menahem/Manaen	Manaen	42	1

In Gospel Times

The most commonly used Jewish name in the time of Jesus was Simon. 243 people with the name Simon or Simeon appear in all the sources put together, and eight in the New Testament (excluding Simon the Sorcerer who was a Samaritan and possibly a non-Jew).

The frequency of use of names in the New Testament approximately follows the frequency of names used in general. The correspondence is not exact; we would not expect it to be so and if it had been exact we might suspect a deliberate pattern. The correspondence is what we would expect for an essentially random selection of names from those in the area at the time.

Why This Matters

The point here is that there are two possible models for the writing of the Gospels. Either they were written by eyewitnesses to the events they describe, and with considerable accuracy, or they were written much later by people who used literary imagination to fill out the narrative handed down by

tradition (or even invented episodes completely). The point is that if the stories were invented, or not handed down accurately, then we would not expect the names of people in them to have a representative distribution.

The Gospels were mainly written in the Greek-speaking areas of the Roman Empire. The frequencies of names in those areas were quite different from the frequencies in Palestine. A comparison of the frequencies of names in the New Testament with those used in Egypt, for example, shows no match.

Further Evidence

But there is more evidence. Where a name was in frequent use, there is a need to identify different people with the same name from one another. There are several ways of doing this.

Sometimes the name of the father was used, so we have Simon bar Jonas, or Simon “son of Jonas” (John 21:15–16). Sometimes a nickname was used, so Simon the disciple was known as Simon Peter (Matthew 4:18). Sometimes the place from which they came is used – the man called Simon who carried Jesus’

cross is referred to as Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32).

In the Gospels, the people with common names tend to have these extra identifiers while those with rarer names did not. Jesus was a common name in Israel (the sixth most popular name); Jesus is therefore known as Jesus of Nazareth. But in Nazareth he is not identified in this way. Everyone in Nazareth called Jesus, and there would be quite a few of these, was Jesus of Nazareth. So in that town Jesus is known as “the carpenter’s son” (Matthew 13:55) or “the carpenter” (Mark 6:3).

The way that names are used in the Gospels gives great confidence in the accuracy of the record. The names in the area covered by the Gospels had different frequencies from names in other parts of the Roman Empire. The name of the Jewish people in the Gospels has exactly the correct profile for Judea and Galilee between 1 and 70 AD.

Names are often difficult to remember; we all know of occasions where we have forgotten the name of someone we know quite well, and there are films and television programmes which we enjoyed, and where we could repeat the plot in considerable detail, but where we have forgotten the names of even the principal characters. The fact that the names are correct in the Gospels shows that they were not invented later on, and are not the result of a long chain of verbal tradition.

What we have in the Gospels is an accurate record of events that really happened.

John Thorpe

God’s Way – Or Ours?

God brought His people from
Egypt
To be a people unto Him,
From a hopeless situation
And a future dark and dim.

For they were a wayward people
With a flesh so prone to sin,
Many times they overcame it,
Many times they did give in.

Despite this, God forgave them,
His forgiveness always nigh,
For He sought only to save them,
Not willing that any should die.

This story is the same for us:
God’s way, or ours? Let’s decide.
Learn the lessons in His word,
And strive to stay by God’s side.

Peggy Rawson



The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 2

The First Two Commandments

In the second part of our review of the Ten Commandments, we shall examine the first two, which direct how men and women should worship God.

1. I Am the LORD Your God. You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me.

When the Israelites were in Egypt, they would have known many gods and goddesses. The Egyptians had a god for toothache, a god for travellers, a god for war, a god for when you wanted a baby, and a goddess for when the baby was about to be born. The Canaanites too had their gods – Baal and Ash-toreth and Molech, and Dagon the fish god of the Philistines. In the UK, our ancestors worshipped gods, and in English the days of the week are named after those gods.

But Israel's God was (and is) the living God who created the world. He is the only true God. His name 'Yahweh' in Hebrew tells us He is a God of being – He was, He is and He will be. If Israel chose to serve Him, He would not share their worship with other gods. It was all or nothing.

This commandment applies to Christians just as it did to Israel. When we are baptised we make a covenant with God that we will serve Him. This means we agree to put Him first in our life. Jesus was asked:

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with

all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:36–38).

If we love God with all our heart, there is no room for anything else.

This is a sobering thought. Can we say that God is the greatest thing in our life? Is He more important to us than anything else? More important than our boyfriend, our wife, our children, our apartment, or our pension?

Remember, this is a national law. It made Israel unique among the nations.

Today

In some countries today people do still worship multiple gods. But many people today would say they no longer believe in any kind of god. They think man is in control of the world, and that science has made religion out of date. In a recent survey in Australia, only 68% said they believe in God. In the UK the figure is similar, although in America it is 90%.

Yet even those people who say they believe in God often do not put Him first in their lives. They allow other things to take priority. In the western world, we see churches becoming empty, and instead people flock to shopping centres, pop concerts and football matches. They spend their time and money on flat screen TVs, holidays and private schools for their children. These become their gods, the things they worship.



What about us? Do we put God first in everything we do? When we start off the day, do we think about what God would like us to do with the hours that lie ahead? When we collect our pension, do we sit down and ask ourselves what He would like us to do with our money? When we see the crowds on the way to the disco, do we put on our makeup and follow them, or do we spend our time with people who share our faith? When we switch on the TV, do we search out the channel with the war film and hours of killing and swearing, or do we switch on the nature documentary that shows us God's creation?

In these situations, we are deciding who we worship – the God of heaven, or the gods of this world. The first commandment says, 'you shall have no other gods before me!'

2. You Shall Not Make an Image, Or Bow Down To It.

In Old Testament times, most nations worshipped idols made from gold, silver, stone or wood. We can see them in our museums. In Egypt, where the

Israelites came from, there were statues of Apis (the bull), Anubis (the jackal), and even the scarab or dung beetle. Some of these gods had a family of priests who attended them. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made a huge statue and insisted people should bow down to it.

The prophet Isaiah has some strong words to say about people who bow down before a statue. *"Those who make an image, all of them are useless"* (Isaiah 44:9).

He goes on almost sarcastically in verses 10–20. The idol god is made by a man, whereas Israel's God made man in the beginning. The man who makes the idol grows tired and has to rest, but Israel's God never sleeps. The man-made god is a piece of wood; a man cuts wood to make himself warm with a fire and bake bread, and from another part of the same tree he makes an idol and asks it to save him from his enemies. It is ridiculous!

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul preached to people who worshipped idols in temples.

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:24–25).

Modern Images

What about today? As an example, we find Buddhist temples with statues of Buddha, but what about Christian churches? Everywhere in churches you will see the cross, typically made of wood, sometimes of silver or gold. People also hang them round their

necks. You may also see images of the Virgin and Child, Mary and baby Jesus, and pictures or icons of 'saints'. These are man-made images, to which people burn candles and bow down, and ask for help with the problems that they have. If you take a taxi, you may see a cross or picture of a 'saint' hanging from the mirror, to protect you on your journey. All these would be forbidden by the second commandment.

People sometimes say "Ah! But the icon is only a representation of the real god or goddess who lives in heaven." In the same way, they will tell you the icon to Saint Bartholomew, for example, is only a representation of the real saint, who is up there in



heaven. But the Bible teaches us that there is no saint up there in heaven. Nor was Baal up there when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal to shout louder to wake him up (see 1 Kings 18). Bartholomew died in the First Century, and today he is a handful of dust in the earth, waiting for the day of resurrection. However long we pray to him, he can do nothing to help us. Only the living God, the God of Israel, is able to hear prayers and answer them. If we think a cross around our neck is going to protect us from evil, then we are mistaken.

In Numbers 21, we read how in the

wilderness the people of Israel were bitten by serpents, and God told Moses to make a bronze snake and fix it to a pole. God was showing that sin, which the serpent represents, has to be put to death before we can be saved from the grave. The sick people had to crawl out of their tents and look at the serpent on the pole, to show that they believed God's power could heal them from the deadly venom.

What happened to the bronze snake afterwards? It was taken to the Promised Land, and kept as a reminder of that time in the wilderness. But by the time of King Hezekiah, it had become something the people worshipped. Hezekiah had to destroy it (2 Kings 18:4). The brass snake had become an object to be worshipped, as if the bronze itself had some power to save or heal people.

So, to summarise: If we want God to help us, and be our God, we must accept that He wants all of our heart, not part of it. He expects us to put Him at the forefront of our lives. And we should keep our lives free from associations with pagan worship and empty superstition.

David M. Pearce

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The Plan and Purpose of God

God has a real plan for the human race upon planet Earth, and a definite purpose for His creation. The Bible is the only book in the world by which God speaks to mankind. There is no other source where we can learn about God's plan and purpose.

Reading the Bible with an open, enquiring mind will show that the plan and purpose of God is revealed throughout, from the very first book – Genesis – right through to the last – Revelation. This is endorsed by the Lord Jesus Christ after his resurrection, when he said this to two disciples as they travelled:

“O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

At this point, only the Old Testament was complete, but the Lord Jesus is like a golden thread running through the whole of God's word.

In the Beginning

In the beginning God created man and woman, Adam and Eve. They were placed in the Garden of Eden and were given the following commandment by God:

Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (Genesis 2:17).

They both disobeyed God and ate the fruit (Genesis 3:1-6), and their disobedience was the first sin. Consequently, they were cursed to die:

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; For dust you are, and to dust you shall return”(v19).

Sin and death have been with us ever since, but God's purpose and His plan for the salvation of men and women was put into action from the day Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden (v23–24).

Promises to Abraham

The Old Testament tells us God's plan continues with promises made to faithful Abraham and his children: they and their descendants were to be given the promised land of Israel. To Abraham God said:

Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you (Genesis 13:14–17).

Abraham was promised he would become a great nation, and we can see that the blessing extended to all people:

Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice (Genesis 22:17–18).

Through Abraham's descendants, Isaac and Jacob, the nation of Israel was born. This nation was the first kingdom of God but the people rejected the Lord God from being their king, demanding one they could see like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8).

Around 1000 years after Abraham came King David, called "a man after God's own heart". He was promised a son who would also be the Son of God, who would save the people of Israel and ultimately bring salvation to the whole world (2 Samuel 7:8–16).

The Work of Jesus

At the time of Jesus' birth there was a prophet called Simeon who spoke about Jesus, the promised Messiah and Saviour of the world, and what he would do in the future:

For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel (Luke 2:30–32).

The Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was sent to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection from the dead to eternal life for all who believe in God and obey His commandments. Jesus said:



For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

As part of God's plan, Jesus also came to provide us with the way of reconciliation to Him. Jesus was, as John the Baptist said "*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29).

For this to happen, it was necessary for Jesus to submit to crucifixion, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Apostle Paul compared the sin of Adam with the obedience of Jesus:

For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous... so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:19, 21).

Paul described this aspect of God's plan and purpose succinctly:

Since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first-

fruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when he puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:21-26).

We saw in the promises made to Abraham that God's purpose extends to all people, not just the Jews. We are told specifically that the Gentiles (non-Jews) were also brought into God's plan. In Jerusalem at the council of believers, Simon Peter "declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15:14).

Jesus' Return as King

In order for God to complete His purpose with the earth, Jesus Christ has to return from heaven to reign as king over the restored kingdom of God. We read about his ascension to heaven, and the promise made at that time:

Now when he 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).

We find the same message when we look in the Old Testament:

In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44).

Not everyone will be allowed into the Kingdom of God. Jesus explained this to his disciples particularly by means of parables, such as in Matthew 25. Jesus will raise from the dead and judge all who had opportunity to follow him. Those who have shown faith and tried to follow Jesus' example will enter that wonderful kingdom.

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

The Plan

The Lord God in heaven created the earth, He formed it to be inhabited (Isaiah 45:18). In fact, He wants to fill the world with people who want to worship Him, to fulfil His stated purpose:

Truly, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD (Numbers 14:21).

The Lord Jesus is to return from heaven to set up God's kingdom upon earth and ultimately he will hand over the kingdom to God Himself:

When all things are made subject to him, then the Son himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Grahame A. Cooper

Recovery

I had to go into hospital for a serious operation, and I was blessed with a good hospital experience. I was also conscious of God's guardian care of me the whole time, and after what felt like a death and resurrection experience (when I had the operation) I made a full recovery.

Thankfully the cause of the disease has been removed and in the words of the surgeon, when looking at my results, "They don't get better than that." I really do feel that I have been given a new life.

But it is not immortal life with eternal health. I still have the old body with its other failings and weaknesses to remind me of my mortality. And if I'm to make a really complete recovery there are various things that have to be done.

As I left hospital, I felt there was a whole new way of life to learn about. Just look at this list:

- ❖ Hospital medication to complete.
- ❖ Periodic blood tests.
- ❖ Calls to the doctor if things don't feel quite right.
- ❖ Calls from the district nurse to check the wound is healing.
- ❖ Visits to the hospital so the surgeon can check his handiwork.
- ❖ Specific exercises to do every day – almost certainly for the rest of my life.
- ❖ Regular general exercise.

My body has to relearn how to perform certain functions in an appropriate way, following the removal of a certain organ. Because of the loss of

that one part, the rest of the body has to do more work and become more efficient. Happily, the body is quite capable of making the changes and I am confident of a good outcome.

Without any exaggeration, the whole experience represents learning to live a new way of life. This is vital if I am going to really benefit from my recovery and be totally cured from the disease.

Spiritual Medicine

This is all true of the new life we can have in Jesus Christ. First we have the diagnosis: we are all in need of the salvation that God has offered to us because we have the deadliest disease. The Bible calls it sin and every human being suffers from it. It is like a cancer that continually eats away at us and ultimately we will perish unless we undergo some radical treatment.



First, we have to prepare ourselves for the experience, just like going into hospital, and we need to consult the expert. Once again the Bible comes into play, telling us what has to be done and how we have to change our thinking and our lives. This is necessary so that God, just like a medical consultant, can operate on our lives to spiritually remove the disease and give us a fresh start – a new life. He does so with the support of His vitally important ‘staff’, the master physician, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have to undergo a death and resurrection experience to start the new life. The Bible explains very clearly, in the words of Jesus, that we need to be baptised. It says this:

He who believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16).

Notice that word, ‘believes’. When we have to have surgery and enter a recovery programme it is absolutely vital that we believe in what the doctor tells us, especially about recovery.



We are going to place our complete confidence in the surgical team. With spiritual things it is just the same. We have to place our complete trust in God and the Lord Jesus; they are the only experts in dealing with our problem.

Being baptised is the believer’s way of showing that he has that faith in God. It is also our personal symbolic experience of death and resurrection. We are buried in water for a few moments, symbolising the end of the old way of life. Then we rise up and start our new life. It also associates us with the Lord Jesus in his death and resurrection.

We were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection (Romans 6:4–5).

A New Life

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17).

So after baptism we begin a new life in Christ. But let’s remember that is just the start. Just as I had to follow instructions after the operation, there is a continuing need to follow a recovery programme. For me, there was a new regime of regular exercise, the support of friends and family and the continued interest of the medical staff.

In the new life in Christ these things include Bible reading, prayer and living in a spiritual family.

Daily Bible reading is a ‘must’, to learn about God’s character and to take in what He asks of us. A Bible reading plan is available through this magazine. It is important to be systematic and regular about this, just like my exercises. If you start to miss days, or

to exercise haphazardly, then the cure will not be effective and recovery will not be as good. The instruction book can never be thrown away! The same really applies to every aspect of the new life.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Prayer is your opportunity through the Lord Jesus to share your concerns with God about your recovery and spiritual development. If God speaks to us through His word, prayer is our opportunity to talk to Him, to consult Him (following the medical metaphor). The Apostle Paul advised his readers to:

Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Having been baptised, we become a son or daughter of God. We then have a spiritual family in those other believers, who have the same relationship, and so become our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact the name ‘Christadelphians’ means ‘brothers (and sisters) in Christ’. The support of this new family in Christ is very important.

Promise of Unfailing Health

Where will all the exercises of this new life get you? Very far indeed! My surgery, as good as it was, will only prolong this life. One person with whom I shared this experience said that the doctor had told him it would prolong his life by about fifteen years.

As we said earlier it won’t bring eternal life. It won’t bring certain hope into our lives for a future free of illness.



But the spiritual operation we have been considering, and to which we all need to subject ourselves, leads to a better quality of life now; a literal resurrection experience when Jesus comes; and everlasting life and eternal health in his kingdom. It is full of hope. We can live in confident expectation that God, working through the Lord Jesus, will keep His word to us. The cure will finally be totally effective.

One of the Old Testament prophets gives us a glimpse of that life in these words:

Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31).

Now that’s the kind of recovery I’d really like!

David Nightingale

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