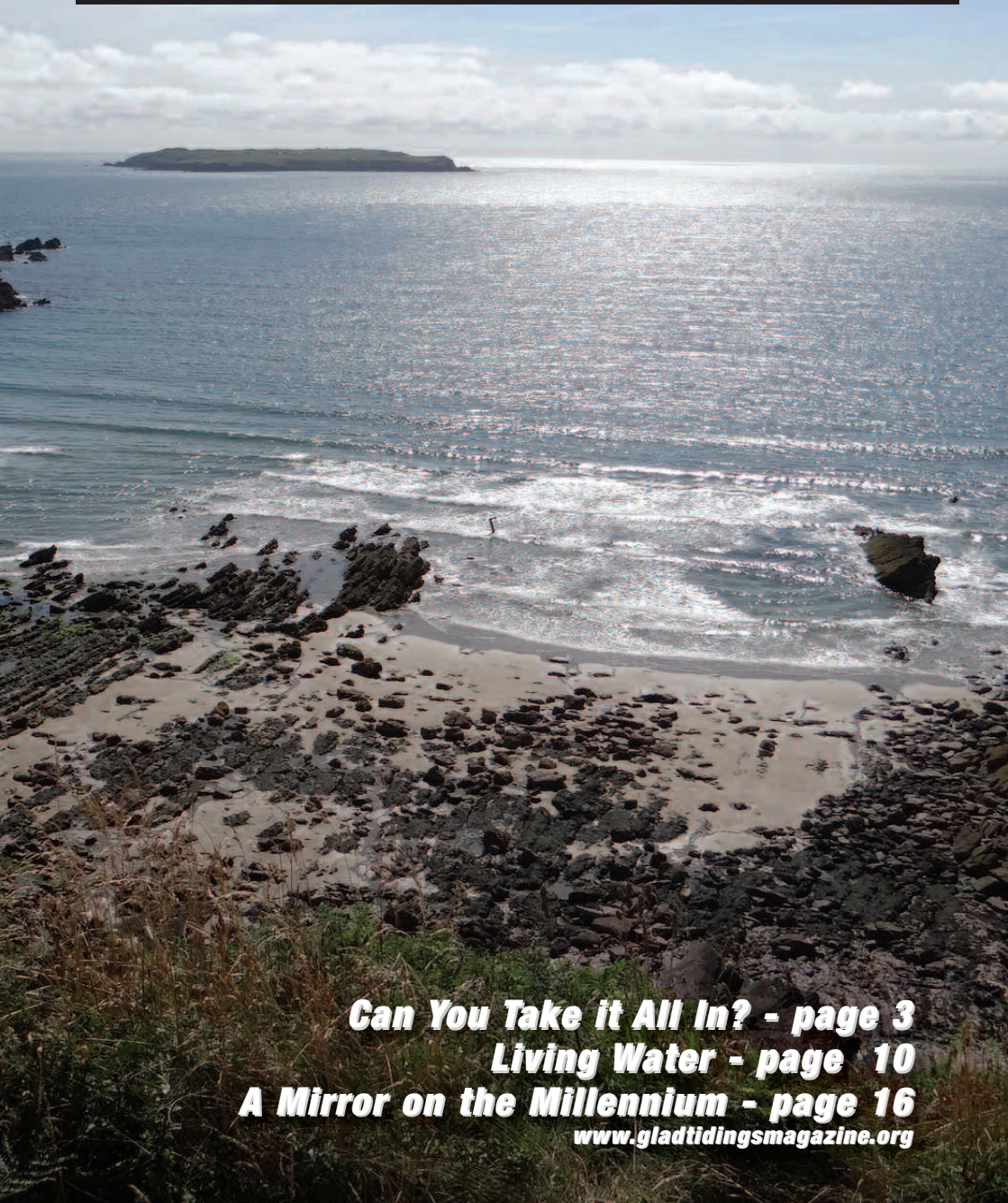


Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1600



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of the Kingdom of God

133rd Year

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Its objectives are - to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to mankind; 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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Can You Take it All In?

Standing on a cliff overlooking the sea, I was struck by just how much there was to see. The immense blue water stretched as far as I could see; the rocky coastline ran for miles in each direction; and yet every centimetre was filled with detail and colour. I felt almost overwhelmed, I couldn't take it all in at once, but spent a happy time enjoying the magnificent view.

You may have had similar experiences in different parts of the world. Across the valley from a large mountain, it may be impossible to see both its top and base at the same time. Only with more distance can we begin to take it all in.

The same applies when we think about the universe. The vast expanse of space is measured by astronomers in terms that we just cannot picture, numbers and distances so large that we struggle to comprehend them. Yet each part of each planet – especially our own – has so many features that they offer many lifetimes' worth of study.

As the Creation, So the Creator

Let's stand back for a moment and think about God, the Creator of these marvellous, awe-inspiring things. The Apostle Paul explained in his letter to believers in Rome that by looking at the creation, we can get a sense of what God is like:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (Romans 1:20).

The Lord God is infinite, both in time and in power. He has always been there, and He will always exist, although our finite minds struggle to grasp this. His ability to create, to act and to direct His works is limitless.

This great power is discussed at length in Isaiah chapter 40 (well worth reading in full), describing the world's nations as mere dust compared to God's magnificence. The prophet shows that this applies to God's mind, when he asks the rhetorical question:

Who has directed the Spirit of the Lord, or as His counsellor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13-14).

Great Goodness

It would be easy to be frightened by all this, were it not for the fact that God is good and kind, and extends His power in love towards men and women. He made us, so He knows our limitations and failings. In the Psalms, God's forgiveness is described like this:

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11-12).

God is willing to forgive, if we are sorry for the things we do wrong, but He doesn't forgive in a 'little' way. The psalmist uses two different measures



of distance which are actually immeasurable – infinite – to show how far away He is willing to put those sins. This is the magnitude of His mercy, and it can be hard to take in.

Thankfully, in His mercy, God does NOT give us what we deserve – which would be punishment for our sins. Instead he GIVES us what we do not deserve, and what we could never earn. That's His grace.

A Powerful Prospect

The Bible tells about the wonderful future which God has planned for those who love Him, who respond by showing faith, being baptised and trying to copy the character of Jesus.

As it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us (1 Corinthians 2:9–10).

The writer is showing how no one has ever seen or imagined the great things God has planned for His people, but that He has shown them to us – in His Word. The Bible tells about the Kingdom of God to come, where men and women will live for ever in a

perfect world. It can be a lot to take in, but it is there for us to read and to begin to picture.

All of this is made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which also can be difficult to comprehend. A sinless man was prepared to give his life for people who would fail so often. And his Father was prepared to give His Son as that sacrifice. Paul puts it like this:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6–8).

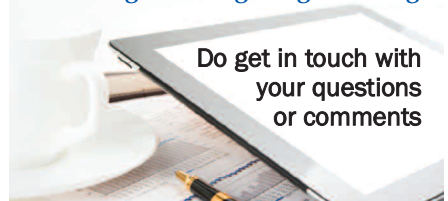
So rather than being intimidated by God's limitless power, we should be comforted by it. He has prepared a wonderful future for those who love Him, and He has made it possible through the sacrifice of Jesus.

[God] is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20).

Through the Bible we can begin to take in all of this, so let's seize the opportunity to do so.

Editor

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A Life of Service

Sir Henry Crewe was one of the more eccentric members of a line of English nobles who occupied the stately home of Calke Abbey in Derbyshire.

There's a story that Sir Henry was very partial to a particular kind of fish pie. If his pie was not prepared in just the right way, he would fly into a rage and order his wife to dismiss the cook. His wife would dutifully assure him that she would, but she never did. Because Sir Henry was not interested in his servants and did not know what the cook looked like, he never found out.

According to the Bible, God is a master and His people are His servants. But God's attitude to His servants is very different!

Freedom in Service

You may have a problem with the idea of being a servant. Isn't freedom one of the greatest goals in life?

According to the Bible, freedom is a myth. No one is free. Just suppose that you are fortunate enough to be able to do just what you want, whenever you want, and never have to answer to anyone. In that case you are not free; you are a servant (a slave!) to yourself.

What's so bad about that? The fact is, you are a bad master! This is how the Apostle Paul puts it:

Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? (Romans 6:16).



He is writing to believers, and he continues to describe what it was they did when they became believers:

God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness (v17-18).

What is sin? What is it they were enslaved to before they became Christians? Sin is that destructive tendency we all have that makes us do what is hurtful, shameful and ungodly.

So, it's in our nature to serve. The choice we have is between serving ourselves, and serving God. To become a Christian is simply to change masters. Who is the better master? Paul answers the question emphatically at the end of the same chapter:

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (v23).

There are good masters and bad masters. If we spend our life serving ourselves there's nothing but oblivion

at the end of it. God, however, is a benevolent master who loves His servants, and the Bible abounds with descriptions of the reward of the Kingdom for those who are faithful.

What it Is to be God's Servant

The prophet Malachi sets the ground-rule. *"If I am a Master, where is My reverence?" (Malachi 1:6).* God chided His people who were being half-hearted in their worship. The starting-point for a relationship with God is reverence.

Jesus Christ gives us an insight into the life of the slave in the world of his time, and turns it into a lesson for us:

Which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.' (Luke 17:7-10).

That word 'servant' is the same Greek word as the word that Paul used in Romans 6, where it was translated 'slave'. Confusingly, the translators use two English words to translate one Greek word. The original Greek word means 'bond-servant' – essentially, that's a slave. A bond-servant was the property of his master, and his master was entitled to do with him whatever he wanted. This is our relationship with

God. It's important to understand that He is our master and He owes us nothing.

Jesus Christ – Master and Servant

Jesus adds another dimension:

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. No longer do I call you servants [slaves], for a servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:13-15).

Jesus is the Son of God, and the future King of the world. *"At the name of Jesus every knee should bow" (Philippians 2:9).* And yet he himself lived a life of service.

On the day before he died, he took his disciples to an upper room and there shared the Jewish Passover meal with them. To their huge surprise, during the meal he got up, laid aside his formal clothes, dressed himself in a towel and proceeded to wash the disciples' feet. This was the most menial job in the household, and it would normally be done by the lowliest bond-servant. Then he explained:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet (John 13:12-14).

This is another aspect of Christian service, and this should mark Christians out as special – their willingness always to put others first.



Lending a helping hand – in all sorts of ways...

What a recipe for life! To be servants of God, Who is a loving master and knows what's best for us and will always give it; to be servants of God's Son Jesus Christ, who loves us so much he gave his life for us; and to be servants of each other, looking out for each other's needs and knowing that others are looking out for ours.

The Reward for Service

It's a paradoxical fact that people who live only for themselves tend to be restless and unfulfilled, whereas people who put others before themselves tend to be happier and more content. The reason is simple – we were designed to serve. Service makes for a good life.

But life is about more than just the here and now. Remember what Paul said in Romans 6:23, *“the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”*.

What will eternal life be like? In Luke 19 beginning at verse 12, Jesus tells a story about a man who goes into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and gives each of his servants an amount of money to trade with while he is gone. When he returns, they each receive a reward in proportion to how well they have used

the resources and opportunities which they've been given.

The story is a picture of Jesus himself, who has gone away into heaven and will return to set up his kingdom. He's left his servants with work to do – to prepare themselves (and as many others as possible) for his kingdom. What was the reward for those who served well?

Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas’. And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities’ (Luke 19:16-17).

The reward for service is further service! The Bible gives us many glimpses of what life will be like in the Kingdom of God. In its very last chapter we're shown an exhilarating vision of the culmination of world history:

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Revelation 22:3).

Chris Parkin

Ruth - a Virtuous Woman

In Proverbs 31, the mother of King Lemuel taught her son about what type of king he should try to be:

Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings (Proverbs 31:3).

Perhaps because of this particular warning, Jewish tradition suggests that King Lemuel is another name for King Solomon, who is infamous for his love of women – a king whose wives turned his heart away from God. However, the advice provided in Proverbs would be relevant to any king.

Whichever king of Israel or Judah Lemuel was, he was encouraged by his mother to seek after a very special kind of wife – a ‘virtuous’ woman. Out of the many ‘virtuous women’ recorded in the Bible, one in particular seems to be the embodiment of the virtues described in the oracle – Ruth the Moabitess, found in the book which bears her name.

The special type of woman Lemuel’s mother wanted him to marry was rare:

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies (Proverbs 31:10).

Ruth was known to be a ‘virtuous woman’ (the identical Hebrew phrase) by all the people in Bethlehem (see Ruth 3:11). There are many qualities which Ruth demonstrated which earned her such an honourable reputation, and they are very similar to those described in Proverbs 31:10–31. For this brief thought, three elements will be considered.

Hard-Working

The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is incredibly hard-working and diligent:

She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands (v13).

She makes tapestry for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple (v22).

She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies sashes for the merchants (v24).

Ruth certainly fits this description – gleaning was hard work and she worked at it throughout the day.

So she gleaned in the field until evening, and beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. Then she took it up and went into the city, and her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. So she brought out and gave to her what she had kept back after she had been satisfied (Ruth 2:17–18).

Kindness

A further godly trait of the virtuous woman is that she exhibits kindness.

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her tongue is the law of kindness (Proverbs 31:26).

Ruth was complimented twice for her kindness, firstly by her mother-in-law and then by Boaz (her future husband):

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me" (Ruth 1:8).

Then he [Boaz] said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter! For you have shown more kindness at the end than at the beginning, in that you did not go after young men, whether poor or rich" (Ruth 3:10).

Praised by Her Husband

Because Ruth was so hard-working, practical and kind, she received praise from Boaz, a man who appreciated Ruth's godly virtues:

Blessed are you of the LORD, my daughter... All the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:10–11).

Boaz was unrestrained in his praise of his wife-to-be, but we never read of this resulting in arrogance or self-adulation on the part of Ruth. The example of Ruth therefore follows another Proverb:

Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips (Proverbs 27:2).

As we might expect by now, the dynamic between Boaz and Ruth echoes further descriptions of the virtuous woman in Proverbs:

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: "Many daughters have done well, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the

LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates (Proverbs 31:28–31).

Perhaps Boaz is also in the background of Proverbs 31:

Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land (v23).

We see that this was exactly the case with Boaz:

Now Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the close relative of whom Boaz had spoken came by. So Boaz said, "Come aside, friend, sit down here." So he came aside and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, "Sit down here." So they sat down (Ruth 4:1–2).

A Prophetic Picture

The Bible often talks about the relationship between Jesus Christ and his followers as being like a marriage. The idyllic pairing of Boaz and Ruth teaches us about this.

Just as Ruth, a virtuous woman, was clearly "the crown of her husband" (Proverbs 12:4), so the followers of Jesus need to be morally beautiful, like a crown made worthy to adorn the king's head. Let us try to follow Ruth's example of hard work, diligence and kindness, looking forward to the return of Jesus. He will...

...bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God (1 Corinthians 4:5).

Stephen Blake

Living Water

Without water, we die. It is that simple. This fact is most obvious in the hotter, drier countries of the world, but it applies to each one of us. To some, it is a scarce resource, difficult to find and collected with much effort. To others, it is plentiful and may be taken for granted. But to every man, woman and child on the planet, it is vital to life.

This is why Jesus' words in John chapter 4 had such an impact, and why they still matter today. He spoke about the very source of life – not just life today, but eternal life. He was passing through Samaria, in the middle of Israel, when he met a woman by a well. This was not unusual, as one would expect to meet others at the water sources in the Middle East.

He asked the woman for a drink of water, and at first she questioned him. It was unusual that Jesus (a Jew) would talk to a Samaritan woman, as there was no love lost between the two races. However, this was typical of Jesus: his message was for everyone and he spoke to any who would listen; the same applies to his message today. In fact, he immediately lifted the level of the conversation:

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10).

Practical and Spiritual Pictures

Her immediate reaction was a practical one. Jesus had nothing with which

to draw water from the well – how was he going to give water to her? She had missed the point, and we can easily do so too, especially reading the account in English.

In verses 11 and 12, the woman uses a word for 'well' which means 'a hole in the ground' in the original language of the gospels. That was all she was thinking about. On the other hand, in verse 6 and in verse 14, where Jesus refers to the well, he uses a word which means a 'gushing fountain or spring'. This distinction is even more interesting when we consider the Old Testament, where the word for 'running water' is literally 'living water'.

Perhaps now we can see the word-play being used – Jesus was talking about 'living water' both in the practical case of the spring they were visiting and in terms of eternal life. Just like the woman, we too can miss the point, and indeed miss the living water itself.

Jesus explained what he meant:

Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (v13-14).

Accepting in Humility

Jesus was, and still is, offering eternal life – a life of unending perfection. It is unsurprising that the woman immediately asked him to give her this water. She still did not quite understand the full meaning of Jesus' words:

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v15).

Jesus didn't reprimand her for this, he accepted her humble desire to take what he was offering. He showed that he was from God, by telling her all about her own marital situation. Then he gently explained that he was showing her the need to worship God in the right way.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him (v23).

He explained to her that he is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed of God. She took him at his word, believed, and went off to tell her friends and family from the village. They also came to listen to Jesus, and they believed him too. They said:

Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world (v42).

This is a vital lesson for us too: to listen to what Jesus has to say, in the pages of our Bibles; to believe him; to respond in humility, accepting that we need the life he offers; and to share that message with those with whom we come into contact.

Looking to the Future

This picture of living waters, and their source, is one we find first in the Old Testament. Back in Jeremiah 2:13, God describes Himself as “*the foun-*



tain of living waters”. The Creator of everything is the source and the maintainer of life, both present and eternal.

In the Book of Revelation, we read about the establishment of God's kingdom, with now familiar words:

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts (Revelation 21:6).

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

These are marvellous promises of living for ever in a world of life, light and love, ruled by the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's accept the invitation:

Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).

Andrew Hale

Miracles of Jesus - 3

Jesus Heals the Paralysed Man

All the people in Capernaum seemed to be heading in one direction. Like bees returning to a hive, their steps converged on the door of the house where Jesus was staying. Mark tells us that *“it was heard that he was in the house”* (Mark 2:1).

Mixed Motives!

Some came to hear him speak. His radical teaching sounded so different from the pompous, legalistic language of the scribes. Warm, practical and full of hope, he could still make you feel uncomfortable, for he had a way of spotlighting the human weaknesses that pride would prefer to forget.

But he spoke of a loving heavenly Father Who cared equally for the poor and the rich, and Who called all people to a Kingdom where faith was the only fee for admission. He used vivid, compelling pictures that stamped themselves onto the memory and left you wanting more. Even though our modern English gospels are translated from Greek and we live in an alien world of computers and motorways, there is no doubting the power of his words. They still turn people’s lives upside down after all these years.

Some of the people who came to the house had no love for Jesus at all. As Luke records, *“there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem”* (Luke 5:17). The Pharisees considered themselves



the official interpreters of the Law of Moses, the preservers of synagogue tradition. They spent years studying the rulings and sayings of their predecessors, and enveloped the religious life of the Israelites in a suffocating cocoon of rules that made obedience impossible.

They viewed Jesus, the young carpenter, at first with scorn, then with alarm and resentment. His lack of qualifications upset them. His sharp disdain for their traditions made them angry. They envied how the crowds flocked to hear him, and longed for an opportunity to discredit him. The fact that they had come up-country from Judea and Jerusalem shows the urgency with which they viewed his challenge. Their grim faces were very evident amongst the happy, earnest audience of country folk that hung on Jesus’ words.

There was a third group of people waiting outside the house at Capernaum while Jesus taught. These were

those who had come because they were ill, and they hoped that he might make them better. Some were lame; some were blind; some had their families with them to bring them to Jesus. They knew it was no good interrupting while he was talking, but they desperately wanted to be near the door of the house when he finally emerged, so that he could lay hands on them and drive their diseases away. Jesus could easily have spent all day healing the sick, but he deliberately chose to devote more time to teaching. In his view, the healings were not the real purpose behind his mission. They were the evidence that his teaching had the authority of God.

Good Friends in Action

It was this last point that brought about an extraordinary miracle on this particular day, an event so striking that three individual accounts were recorded and have come down through the centuries from the gospel writers. It started when a man 'sick of the palsy' (paralysed) was brought along by four of his friends. They loved him so much that they were determined to try to get Jesus to see him, but as the man was unable to move, their only chance was to carry him. They dropped him onto a cloth bed, and one at each corner, pushed their way through the crowd. But even the street outside the house was jammed with people.

Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door (Mark 2:2).

If their friend had been able to walk, they might have made a passage for him to get to the front, but as he lay

horizontal on a bed, they had no hope of getting near. It was a bitter blow.

After a while the curious crowd saw the four men talking together and pointing at the house. They then seized their long bundle, and grunting with effort, dragged and pushed the sick man up the stairs at the side of the house, and onto the roof. Flat roofs are normal in the Middle East. In countries with little rain, leaky roofs are no problem, and the level top with a parapet round the edge provides a cool area to sit and sleep when the sun goes down. The apostle Peter, for example, was taking his afternoon siesta on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house when he had his strange dream recorded in Acts chapter 10.



The course of events was not visible to the circle of listeners inside the house, but soon they became aware of a heavy knocking above the ceiling. Pieces of plaster began to rain down from above, and at length a bright shaft of sunlight stabbed through as the four men on top broke a hole through the roof. All conversation ceased, as with renewed vigour the friends enlarged the opening until their heads could be seen as four dots silhouetted against the cobalt sky.

Satisfied with their work, they disappeared for a moment, and then their long-bedridden bundle, held fast with ropes, began to slither precariously through the hole and descended to the feet of Jesus and the astonished onlookers.

Healing and Forgiveness

It was an act so bold that it compelled admiration. Never had a queue been jumped so decisively. But the situation provided Jesus with a unique opportunity to teach the Pharisees a lesson, and to drive home a fundamental truth about his mission.

As the paralysed man lay pale and still on the floor before him, and the four anxious faces peered down from above to see what would happen, Jesus was naturally touched by their love for their friend, and their obvious conviction that he would make him better. But first he spoke to reassure the sick man:

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2).

All three Gospel records record that Jesus acknowledged their faith. The friends relaxed. He had not been offended by their intrusion into his teaching session. He was going to do something.

But the Pharisees stiffened. Not a word passed their tight lips, but he knew at once what they were thinking.

And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:6-7).

It looked as though Jesus had given them an excuse to have him arrested for blasphemy. But now he began to trap them in their own hypocrisy and convoluted legalism.

He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?" (v8-9).

With a little reflection, the answer is obvious. It would be much easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven", because nothing would happen. There would be no way of telling whether or not they had. But if he said, "Arise and walk", it would be obvious at once if he was an impostor. The man would continue to lie on his bed. Deliberately Jesus had chosen the harder option.

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" — He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (v10-11).

To their amazement, the paralytic jumped up, folded up the sheet and walked out of the door into the sunshine, praising God.



Neatly and efficiently, Jesus' argument had destroyed their accusation. Only God could give the power to heal a man with paralysis, and if he had God's power to read men's thoughts and to heal at a word, he certainly had the authority to pronounce the sinner forgiven.

The Pharisees would assume a sinner needed an impressive animal sacrifice to be forgiven. But they were blind to the fact that the sacrifices of the Law of Moses pointed forward to the forthcoming death of Jesus himself. The forgiveness of all our sins would depend, at last, on his offering of himself.

Healing for Everyone

There is also another striking connection between disease and sin, which this act of healing demonstrates. Diseases, all of them, came into the world as a result of Adam's sin. They form part of the curse; they are one of many causes from which, eventually, we all must die. Jesus' great mission was to reverse the curse; to undo, by his own obedience, the effects of Adam's disobedience. He is, at last, to destroy even death itself. The apostle Paul writes:

For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:25–26).

By healing disease on a small scale, Jesus showed his power to conquer sin, the cause of disease, for all of humankind.

In fact, there was powerful symbolism about this particular healing. The palsied man, stiff and unmoving, really would have resembled a man in whom

sin had already done its work and brought about death. He was as near to a corpse as a living man could be. And lowered down by his friends on ropes into that dim, congested room, packed full of people; is not that what we see, each time we go to a funeral?

The difference is that Jesus was there too, in the room with all the others. He was to enter the grave voluntarily, to save us all. And just as the four friends looked down, and saw their companion walk out of the room with praises on his lips, so Jesus will release from the tomb all those who put their faith in him. At the day of resurrection, they will be raised from the dead, no longer oppressed by pain and tears. Jesus himself proclaims:

I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:18).

It will be the greatest miracle of all time, and by that "Amen" he guarantees it will surely happen.

David M. Pearce



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A Mirror on the Millennium

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth he said:

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12).



Paul was referring to the rather imperfect mirrors of the day, using this lovely image to explain that today we cannot fully comprehend the future, but we will do so in due course. We are not given many detailed descriptions of what the future Kingdom of God will be like. We know the Kingdom of God will be established at the return of Jesus to the earth, and we know that it will be incomparably better than anything which exists now. But how much do we know about it?

The last book of the Bible says:

Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed... They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4).

Twice more in the following verses, we read, “when the thousand years

are ended” (v4, 7). The initial phase of the Kingdom of God appears to be a one thousand year period, with both mortal and immortal parts to the population. This is the period we call ‘the Millennium’. It is followed by a further time which has no end.

This idea is supported by the Apostle Paul, who talks about an initial phase in which Jesus reigns, without specifying the period. During this time, Jesus removes all opposition to his reign, and then he can hand over the kingdom to his Father, the Lord God.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet... that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:24–25, 28).

The Beginning and the End

What do we know about the Millennium and the period which follows it? The Bible opens with a picture of what God originally planned.

God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31).

The record in Genesis continues:

Out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9).

This sounds idyllic: Eden was a wonderful place in which to live, the place that God intended for the first man and woman. Later in the chapter we read, “*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it*” (Genesis 2:15).

The man and woman were not just left to be at leisure, they had work to do. It does not appear that this was a burden to them, as work was later to become. We discover that the man Adam, and Eve his wife, must have spent time in the evening of each day communing with the angel who represented God. “*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day*” (Genesis 3:8). This reads as if this was something which happened routinely.

For Adam and Eve, life in the Garden of Eden must have been a paradise. They had all they needed, an ideal climate, no threats of danger, nothing to fear. There was sufficient food, pleasant work to do, and at the end of the day they spent time in the company of an angel. If all that is to be restored in the Kingdom of God, what a wonderful existence it will be. That seems to be the prospect held out also at the end of the Bible:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve

kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. (Revelation 22:1–3).

This last prophecy of all gives a picture of the garden of Eden restored, but now on a larger scale, able to hold a much bigger population. The leaves of the tree of life are there to heal the nations, which demonstrates the loving provision of the Lord God, for they are in desperate need of healing. The curse which followed the sin of Adam and Eve will be removed. It is a continuation of the scenario in Eden.

Right in the middle of this vision of the future is the throne of the Lord God, and also of the Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peace and Worship

Other Bible passages tell us a little about life in God’s Kingdom; many are in the prophecy of Isaiah.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob,



that He may teach us His ways and that we may walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore (Isaiah 2:2-4).

This message is so important that it is also found in the book of Micah chapter 4. It demonstrates that God’s law will be imposed, replacing all the fallible systems of law which now operate. This is willingly accepted by the population, although not everyone elects to go to God’s house, so it must be speaking about the Millennium.

Perhaps the most encouraging part of the prophecy comes at the end. God’s judgment is to be imposed on all nations. Instead of energy and resources being used for armaments, they will be used to produce food. The prospect of never seeing a picture of a starving child ever again is a great reason to take notice of these verses. The idea that nations will not take up arms against another nation is also wonderfully appealing. So many lives



are lost, or irretrievably scarred by war, and Isaiah promises that people will not even learn how to fight and make war.

A New Start

The end of Isaiah’s prophecy has this wonderful vision:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness (Isaiah 65:17-18).

Jerusalem today is seen as a difficult place: holy for three of the world’s major religions; a city which has been more fought over than almost any other; a place whose history is full of tears and conflict; constantly associated with strife and trouble. Yet its name means “City of Peace”! The prophet sees it as somewhere which will become a place of joy.

No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed (v20).

This is clearly looking at a population of people who are mortal. For those members of the public who are fortunate enough to survive the coming judgements and who then live in God’s Kingdom, theirs will be a long life free of the dangers that now exist.

Isaiah’s picture continues to describe a life of peace and safety, with oppression and crime removed:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands (v21-22).

Pictures of Paradise

These prophecies set out for us what God's Kingdom will be like. In the same way that builders sometimes present an 'artist's impression' of what a new development will look like, Isaiah gives us a 'preview' of the Kingdom. It is always interesting to compare the artist's impression with the reality. For those who are in God's Kingdom, they will be able to compare the kingdom with the visions which Isaiah saw.

"The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain," says the LORD (v25).



Not many miles from where we live there is a zoo, with a variety of animals in cages or enclosures so that you can see them safely. Some find it quite

cruel, and I confess I have not been for a long time. I am sure, however, that there are no wolves and lambs in the same cage, nor would a zoo-keeper last long if he fed straw to the lions.

Isaiah, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is painting another picture of God's Kingdom for us, a place which will have been vastly transformed from all that we experience now. There are many other details which we would love to know, but we can see already that life in God's Kingdom will be vastly better than today's world.

Not For Everyone!

There is just one worrying feature of all this. Not everyone will be in that kingdom. The Bible makes it clear that not everyone will be raised from death, and not all of those raised will be accepted. For example:

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

We must allow ourselves to be so enthused by these visions of life in the Kingdom, that we become determined to be there, that we do not allow anything to get in the way of us following the Lord Jesus.

By reading our Bibles and discussing these wonderful pictures with others, we can develop that knowledge and enthusiasm, which will fill our lives now with purpose and give us a real hope for the future.

Mark Sheppard

(Bibles Quotations from ESV)

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