

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 5 May 2025

(i) Scripture.

Godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ...

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

1 Timothy 6. 6-10, 17-19 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

A hymn for Spring

'On Saturday, 20 April 1776, John Newton recorded in his diary: "Making the Hymn for Sunday evening often costs me much time. It did so this week". His hymn the following day contained these lines:

'Pleasing spring again is here!
Trees and fields in bloom appear!
Hark! the birds, with artless lays,
Warble their Creator's praise!

'Lord, I long to be at home.
Where these changes never come!
Where the saints no winter fear,
Where 'tis spring throughout the year'.

(M. Rouse, 'The John Newton Project', Prayer Letter: May, June, July 2025.)

'He has no form nor comeliness' (Isa. 53. 2).

'When Isaiah says that the Messiah has "no form nor comeliness", he is not speaking of our Lord's physical appearance. Indeed, about that Scripture tells us nothing.

'Isaiah is referring rather to the fact that, when He came, Jesus possessed none of the outward characteristics for which Israel was looking. They expected the Messiah to come as a temporal conqueror and prince, appearing in great pomp and grandeur, to deliver them from the Roman yoke and restore their nation to its former splendour and glory.

'But what did they see? They saw nothing in Jesus that corresponded to their expectations. They saw no royal robes, no diadems on His brow, no magnificent retinue in attendance, no men of earthly rank and status to support His cause.

'They saw only a Galilean tradesman (Mark 6. 3), accompanied by a small band of untutored followers (Acts 4. 13) and supported by a group of pious women (Luke 8. 2-3; cf. Mark 15. 40-41). In their eyes, He therefore lacked both "form" (that which is fair and favoured) and "comeliness" (honour, majesty and excellency), for He offered them none of the external insignia of royalty which they associated with the coming Messiah ...

'Significantly, the Greek Old Testament renders our text, "no form nor glory". In his gospel, John reports that Isaiah himself had earlier seen the "glory" of Jesus (John 12. 41). Now Isaiah has to come to terms with the fact that, when the Lord appeared as the Messiah, His own nation would perceive "no glory" in Him. Only the favoured few would then "behold" His inner glory (John 1. 14)'.
(*'Christ Foreshadowed'*, Precious Seed Publications, page 297; reproduced with kind permission.)

The sufferings of the Lord Jesus.

'Christ's sufferings from man for righteousness brought **judgment** on man ... But His sufferings from the hand of God for sin bring only **blessing**, the outflowing of grace'.

(J. N. Darby, 'The Saints' Praise as Taught by Christ', Collected Writings, Volume 17, page 328.)

'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things' (Rev. 4. 11); 'every creature ... heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory ... be unto Him' (Rev. 5. 13).

'The last words of the heavenly chorus of Revelation 4 worship God as the Creator of all; the choir that sings the final chorus of chapter 5 is comprised of the whole creation.

'The grand vision of chapters 4 and 5 proceeds in concentric circles from God through Christ to the living creatures, to the twenty-four elders, to an innumerable host, to include absolutely everything that is: one creation celebrating the one God as Creator and Redeemer. Absolutely no one and nothing is excluded from this picture ...

'The hymns of chapters 4 and 5 allow the worshiper to participate in the ultimate past, signalled by creation language, and the ultimate future of God's universal victory'.

(M. E. Boring, 'Revelation: Interpretation', pages 111–112.)

'Who is this?'

(i) 'The scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5. 21).

(ii) 'Those who were at table with Him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"' (Luke 7. 49).

(iii) 'Herod said, "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" (Luke 9. 9).

(iv) 'When He entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" (Matt. 21. 10).

(v) 'Who is this that comes from Edom, with deep-red garments from Bozrah, this that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength?' (Isa. 63. 1).

'What ... for me?'

1. 'In the gallery at Dusseldorf there is a painting with a history. It is the "*Crucifixion of Christ*", by the German artist, Sternberg.

'While he was painting it, he called to his studio a very pretty gipsy girl who sat for a character sketch from day to day, and whose attention was attracted to this beautiful painting of Christ.

'One day, she asked the painter who that man was that they were treating so cruelly, and if He was a very bad man. He told her He was a good man, the best man that had ever lived, and that He was dying for others that He might save them.

'She was very much touched, and she said to him, "I should think that you would love Him very much. If anybody did that for me, I should be willing to die for him". Through this message the painter was led eventually to give his heart to the Saviour.

'At length the painting was hung up in the great gallery and, among the thousands who came to admire it was a German Count of high rank and great worldly prospects. But the picture so impressed him that it changed his whole life. As he gazed upon it, the Master seemed to say to him: "All this I did for thee. What hast thou done for me?"

'He went back to his estates to consecrate his life, his means and his influence to the founding of one of the greatest missionary societies of modern times. He was no other than Count Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Society, which still leads modern Christendom in missionary zeal and unselfishness ...

'At the same time, another form was kneeling before the painting. It was the little gipsy girl, and as she looked up at that face she gave a little cry, "Oh, I wish He had died for me!" Then the painter was able to return the blessing she had brought to him and he told the trembling little heart that He had died for her, and she went away rejoicing in salvation'.

(F. E. Marsh, 'Illustrated Bible Studies', pages 67-68. I am in no position to vouch for many of the details in Mr Marsh's account; I reproduce it as he wrote it.)

2. The hymn, 'What hast thou given for me?':

'I gave my life for thee;
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead.

I gave my life for thee:
What hast thou given for me?

(Frances R. Havergal, 1859.)

'Hitherto' and 'Henceforth'.

'Assuming we grew up with the King James Version, we describe the most important events in our lives with only two code words: "Hitherto" and "Henceforth".

'We sweep across our past and say, "Ebenezer ... Hitherto the Lord hath helped us" (1 Sam. 7. 12). And we encapsulate all that lies ahead in these words: "the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever" (Psa. 125. 2).'

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, 'Journey's Rest', Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 4 April 2025.)

'Praise the Lord ... Save us, O Lord ... Praise the Lord' (Psa. 106. 1, 47-48).

'I used to have a mixed-up ideology about prayer and praise ... My praise was based on my circumstances and feelings. I praised God when He answered my prayers (in the way I wanted) and for "blessings" (that made my life easier). After all, it's easy to say "God is good" when good things happen.

'But how do you praise God when the healing you've been praying for doesn't come or when that job you wanted falls through? Or you lose someone you love? How do you praise God when you're drowning in the depths of depression or when your mind is flooded with anxiety or when your body is suffering in chronic pain? ...

'We praise God not because of our circumstances but because of His character. Genuine praise is dependent not on how we feel but on who He is ...

'There is no easy answer to suffering, and our praise does not negate the reality of pain in our lives and in our world. But prayers wrapped in praise can transcend even the darkest depths of despair because they remind us of (i) the reality of God's promises, (ii) the dependability of His character, and (iii) the certainty of His ultimate victory.

'So even in the midst of suffering, even as we plead for help and beg for mercy and lament injustice, we can wrap it all in praise—because this is how we hold on to hope'.

(J. Tucker, 'Grounding Your Prayers in Praise', accessed at <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/grounding-your-prayers-in-praise>.)

'He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability' (1 Cor. 10. 13).

'When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat'.

(W. Wiersbe, 'Be Hopeful', page 24.)

'When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' (Gal. 4. 4-5).

'The Lord Jesus voluntarily submitted to be put under the test of the law, taking upon Himself all the obligations imposed by God upon men. Those obligations He perfectly fulfilled. Tested in all points, He was yet without sin.

'This fulfilment of the law by Christ was indeed a manifestation of His own absolute righteousness and of His uniqueness in this respect, but it was also a demonstration of His entire fitness and competence for the carrying out of the divine purpose for which He had come, namely, to bring redemption and salvation to man by His expiatory sacrifice on the Cross ...

'It was not His keeping of the law that constituted a righteousness that can be reckoned to us, nor can we thereby be viewed as though we had kept the law ... Christ's death was the necessary means by which man could be brought into the condition of being right with God ... we are justified, not by the righteous life of Christ, but by the "blood of Christ"' (Rom. 5. 9), that is to say, by His expiatory sacrifice for our sins.

'The accurate rendering of Romans 5. 18 is of very great importance: "So then as through one man's trespass judgment came unto all men to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto all men to justification of life". The "one act of righteousness" is set in contrast to the one trespass. As Adam's act of disobedience constituted all his descendants sinners, so Christ's one act of righteousness in His death on the Cross brought justification to all who believe on Him ...

'So, "as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One shall the many be made righteous" (Rom. 5. 19). Here again the context shows that the culminating act of obedience in His death is in view (cf. Phil. 2. 8); the death of Christ is set in contrast to the one act of disobedience on the part of Adam.

'If justification meant that the believer was regarded as having kept the law, then righteousness would come by law, atonement was unnecessary, and, as the apostle says, "Christ died for nought", that is to say, causelessly (Gal. 2. 21)'.

(W. E. Vine, 'The Gospel of the Bible', pages 91-93.)

'The scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth"' (Rom. 9. 17).

'God has not made the wicked as such, but He has made the being which is capable of wickedness, and which has decided for it—in view of the day of adversity which God will cause to come upon him, thus making His holiness manifest in the merited punishment, and thus also making wickedness the means of manifesting His glory ...

'What Paul (with reference to Exod. 9. 16), wishes to say is this, that it was not Pharaoh's conduct that determined the will of God, but that ... *nothing happens to God through the obstinacy and rebellion of man which determines Him to an action not already embraced in the eternal plan*, but also such an one must against his will be subservient to the display of God's glory.

'In Rom. 9. 22, the apostle shows that he recognised the factor of human self-determination, but also as one comprehended in God's plan. *The free actions of men create no situation by which God would be surprised and compelled to something which was not originally intended by Himself*.

(F. Delitzsch, 'Commentary on the Old Testament by Keil and Delitzsch', Volume 6, page 337.)

Things which riches can and cannot buy.

Money can buy a house but not a home.

Money can buy food but not appetite.

Money can buy a bed but not sleep.

Money can buy a book but not knowledge.

Money can buy a clock but not time.

Money can buy medicine but not health.

Money can buy position but not respect.

Money can buy blood but not life.

Money can buy insurance but not safety.

(Attributed, with variations, to many sources.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Out of the mouths ...

1. A true story about a visit from a college president.

Henry Brandt tells the following story of when he and his wife invited to dinner the president of the college which he was attending as a young man. (Source: H. R. Brandt, 'I Want to Enjoy My Children', 2002, pp. 28-29.)

'We were privileged to have a visit from our college president. It was quite an honour for a couple of young students to entertain the president of our school, and we were determined to make the most of it.

'Our apartment looked better than it had ever looked before. Everything was in place, polished to a high lustre. Of course, we had determined to act as though it was always this way, so we carefully coached our little preschool children on what they could and couldn't say. We practically wrote them a script.

'Soon the president came, and we stumbled all over ourselves trying to make him comfortable. We got him to the table just fine and sat him next to our little daughter who was just learning to talk.

'That was a mistake!

'During the meal, the little tot said to the president in her bird-like voice, "Will you please pass the salt?"

'Nobody paid any attention. We were listening to the president. So, she tried again. "Will you please pass the salt?"

'This quiet, little voice was easy to ignore as we strained at every word the president was saying.

'The third time she spoke, this curly-haired tot single-handedly smashed all illusion about the offspring of the Brandt family that we had so carefully constructed.

'She hammered our distinguished guest on the arm and yelled, "*Pass the salt or I'll knock your block off*".

2. An apocryphal story about a visit from a local preacher. (Slightly adapted from D. Tait, '*Laughing at Ourselves*', number 188.)

'An elderly preacher was spending the Saturday afternoon at a house in the little country town.

'After lunch, the preacher was sitting out on the front porch with his hosts when their two children rushed up, the boy swinging a dead rat by its tail.

"Don't be afraid, Mum, it's dead", exulted the boy, oblivious to his mother's embarrassment.

"Yeah, Mum", shouted the girl. "We bashed him in the head with a stick, then we stoned him, then we took a rake to him, and then we whacked him and hacked him until" ... which outburst—suddenly catching sight of the preacher—she quickly concluded in a hushed, respectful voice, "*until he was called home*".