

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 3 November 2025.

Greetings.

I set out below today's 'Musings'.

Last Friday, 31 October, was not only 'Halloween' (to which I referred briefly in the covering email to last Monday's 'Musings') ... it was also 'Reformation Day', which marks the anniversary of the date in 1517 when Martin Luther is reputed to have nailed his 'Ninety-five Theses' to the door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany, and, thereby, sparked the Protestant Reformation.

As an 'Appendix' to this week's Musings, I have, therefore, (i) reproduced a relevant extract from the 'Musings' dated 6 November 2023, (ii) included the popular English translation of Martin Luther's best-known hymn (based on Psalm 46), and (iii) added written comments made by J. N. Darby concerning the writings of the Reformers.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

The words of Agur ..., 'Surely I am more stupid than any man, and do not have the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom nor have knowledge of the Holy One.

'Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name, if you know?

'Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

'Two things I request of you (deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—Feed me with the food allotted to me; lest I be full and deny you, and say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God'.

Proverbs 30. 1-9 (*New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Who has ascended into heaven, and descended?' (Prov. 30. 4).

'Agur lamented his lack of understanding and wisdom, and, in particular, his lack of knowledge of God. Most likely, in its context, Agur's question meant, "Who is there that has first ascended into heaven to acquire 'the knowledge of the Holy One' (Prov. 30. 3) and then descended back to earth to declare that knowledge?" The answer was, of course, "Nobody", any more than any mortal had ever gathered the wind in his fists or wrapped up the waters in a garment, or than he had fixed the remotest boundaries of the earth ...

'True, many centuries before, Enoch had "ascended into heaven"—Enoch "was not; for God took him"; he "was translated that he should not see death" (Gen. 5. 24; Heb. 11. 5). But Enoch had not subsequently descended, to tell of anything he had seen, heard or learnt.

'Many years later, Elijah also would ascend to heaven (2 Kings 2. 11), but no whirlwind and accompanying fiery chariot would bring him back to earth.

'Yes, some 900 years after Elijah's translation, the apostle Paul could speak of himself as "a man" who had been "caught up" to heaven, from whence he did, of course, come down again (2 Cor. 12. 2-4). But the apostle made it clear that he was not in a position to reveal any of the "unspeakable words" he had heard while in "the third heaven".

'And so, as our Lord told Nicodemus, no man has ever ascended to heaven, so as to come down again and to speak authoritatively of heavenly things (John 3. 13). Ah, but then the One who had ever been in heaven did not need first to mount up to heaven, as any ordinary man would.

'Rather, as having always enjoyed the fullness of heavenly knowledge, He had come down from heaven ... and was, therefore, perfectly equipped to testify of the things of heaven and of the Father (cf. John 1. 18)'.

('Day by Day: Bible Questions', Precious Seed Publications, page 125;' reproduced with kind permission.)

The devil and a twofold permission.

'Satan must have a double permission before he can do anything against us. He must have (i) permission from God, and (ii) permission from ourselves, before he can do anything against our happiness.

'He must have his permission from God, as you may see (i) in the example of Job (Job 1. 11-12; 2. 3-5). Though the devil had malice enough to destroy him, yet he had not so much as power to touch him, until God gave him permission. (ii) Satan and his forces could never have overthrown Ahab but by permission from God (1 Kings 22. 20-22). (iii) The demons could not so much as enter into the swine without permission from Christ (Luke 8. 32). (iv) Satan would gladly have combated with Peter—but this he could not do without leave: 'Satan has desired to have you, to winnow you' (Luke 22. 31).

'Ah! what a comfort should this be to the saints—that their greatest, subtlest, and most vigilant enemy cannot hurt nor harm them, without permission from God ...

'And as Satan must have permission from God, so he must have permission from us. ...

That is a remarkable passage, 'Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?' (Acts 5. 3). 'Peter does not expostulate the matter with Satan. He does not say, "Satan, 'Why have you filled Ananias's heart to make him lie to the Holy Spirit?', but he expostulates the case with Ananias; "Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?' Why have you given him an advantage to fill your heart with infidelity, hypocrisy, and obstinate audacity, to lie to the Holy Spirit?" As if he had said, "Satan could never have done this in you unless you had given him permission".

(Thomas Brooks, '*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*', pages.236-237.)

The Lord Jesus: balanced qualities.

'We cannot label or level Jesus. Other men are known by the predominance of one or two characteristics. One is brave: another is kind. But in Him all blend into one glorious harmony.

'Qualities which would contradict each other in other men are woven together in Him ... A man of sorrows, yet full of joy. Fearless in unmasking sin, yet gracious with sinners'.

(H. D. McDonald, '*Jesus—Human and Divine*', page 42.)

The Lord Jesus: 'sinless perfection'.

'There is a great gulf between external blamelessness and His sinless perfection.

'Herod (Luke 23. 15), Pilate (John 19. 4), Pilate's wife (Matt. 27. 19), the dying robber (Luke 23. 41), the centurion (Luke 23. 47) and Judas (Matt. 27. 4), bear individual yet concerted testimony to His blameless character.

'But in the light of His own teaching, the only two valid witnesses to His sinlessness are (i) God and (ii) Himself (John 8. 17-18):

'(i). We know so little of His early days, and we speak of the 'hidden' years at Nazareth. And yet we know all there needs to be known, for, at Jordan, as He emerges from obscurity, the heavenly voice declares, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3. 17). Thus, the seal of Divine approval is placed upon the years of childhood, of youth, and of opening manhood.

'On the Mount of Transfiguration, His teachings, testings and toils were searched in the light of God and approved: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him' (Matt. 17. 5). At the close of His public ministry, there was another heavenly testimony in answer to His prayer ("Father, glorify thy name"): "There came, therefore, a voice out of heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it and will glorify it again' (John 12. 28). So much for the testimony of God the Father.

(ii) 'The most saintly believer cannot sit down at the end of even one day and look into the face of God with the plea, 'I have glorified Thy name.' But this perfect Man, whose standard of holiness far exceeded any human values, can confidently look into the face of God, after thirty-three years—twelve thousand days—, conscious that between His soul and the stainless Throne, there had not come one shadow or cloud to dim their communion. And so, He is conscious of perfect rectitude.

'This is the highest and strongest kind of evidence, for with such a knowledge of man and sin as He had, it is impossible either that He could be self-deceived, or that He could say what was not true. He fulfilled all righteousness (Matt. 3. 15). He "went about doing good" (Acts 10. 38). He lived for the righteousness He loved and died for the lawlessness He hated (Heb. 1. 9)'.

(J. R. Rollo, '*The Son of Man*', in '*The Faith: A Symposium of Christian Doctrine*', pages 57-58.)

The Lord Jesus: pre-eminent in resurrection.

'To king Agrippa, Paul declared Christ to "be the first that should rise from the dead" (Acts 26. 23). Here was priority in time. Though the fact of resurrection had been plainly taught by the Old Testament, its land of joy and of song was all untrodden till the pierced feet of the Son of God began their triumphal march from the tomb.

'Writing to the Colossians, the apostle proclaimed Christ as "the firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1. 18). Here was priority in rank.

'As the firstborn in relation to every creature (Col. 1. 15), the Son was the heir and sovereign of all, but as firstborn from the dead, He acquired a new inheritance and a new sovereignty in respect to all who should share His victory over death.

'Whereas His place as "firstborn of every creature" was a solitary one in virtue of the uniqueness of His sonship, that which is His as "firstborn from the dead" has linked with it the joy of a new relationship, for He shall yet be seen as "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8. 29). His risen life will be fully shared by His redeemed ones when they, too, have done with death'.

(H. C. Hewlett, 'The Glories of our Lord', page 95.)

The Lord Jesus: 'in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4. 15).

'Should we be discouraged that Jesus can't be in solidarity with us in that most piercing of pains, the guilt and shame of our sin? No, for two reasons:

'(i). One is that Jesus's sinlessness means that He knows temptation better than we ourselves do.

'C. S. Lewis made this point by speaking of a man walking against the wind. Once the wind of temptation gets strong enough, the man lies down, giving in—and thus not knowing what it would have been like ten minutes later.

'Jesus never lay down; He endured all our temptations and testings without ever giving in. He therefore knows the strength of temptation better than any of us. Only He truly knows the cost.

'(ii). The second reason is that our only hope is that the one who shares in all our pain shares in it as the pure and holy one. Our sinless high priest is not one who needs rescue but who provides it. This is why we can go to Him to "receive mercy and find grace" (Heb. 4. 16).

'He himself is not trapped in the hole of sin with us; He alone can pull us out. His sinlessness is our salvation'.

(D. C. Ortland, 'Draw Near', accessed at ... <https://www.crossway.org/articles/draw-near/>.)

Adam and Christ.

'Adam is disobedient, cast out of an earthly paradise, and is the head of a lost, condemned, sinful race.

The last Adam obeys ... is received into a heavenly paradise, and is the head of a new justified race

...

'Adam died by disobedience; Christ died in obedience'.

(J. N. Darby, 'The Righteousness of God', Collected Writings, Volume 7, pages 290-291—slightly adapted.)

'As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven' (1 Cor. 15. 48-49).

'What will life be like when that man of heaven returns to earth and brings heaven with Him? Scripture doesn't lay out all the details. But we do know that instead of being perishable, our bodies will be imperishable.

'We currently have a limited shelf life, but we have the promise and hope of an eternal life with no expiration date. We will live forever (1 Cor. 15. 42), and every day in that forever will be glorious, for nothing will ever perish, spoil, or fade (1 Pet. 1. 4). We also know that God will transform us from a condition of dishonour and weakness to a renewed state of power and glory (1 Cor. 15. 43).

'Neither you nor I have the categories to fathom such a resurrection life. Whatever you imagine, the reality will be better! But of this you can be sure: that life does await you, for your risen Lord Jesus Christ has trampled death underfoot once and for all. Death has been swallowed up in His irreversible victory (1 Cor. 15. 54) ...

'At times you may still feel the decay and the dust, but you can yet find hope, knowing that the man of heaven will one day transform your "lowly body to be like His glorious body" (Phil. 3. 21)—forever!'

(A. Begg, 'The Hope of Resurrection Life', accessed at ... <https://www.truthforlife.org/devotionals/alistair-begg/9/10/2025/>.)

'I thank God'.

'The Apostle Paul frequently used the expression, "I thank God," as he viewed what God had wrought in the life and labour of others.

1. A Proclaimed Faith. "I thank my God... that your faith is proclaimed" (Rom. 1. 8).
2. A Victorious Shout. "Who shall deliver me out of this body of death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7. 24-25).
3. An Enriched People. "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1. 4).
4. A Supportive Church. "I thank God... for your fellowship in the Gospel" (Phil. 1. 3-5).
5. An Enabled Servant. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who enabled me" (1 Tim. 1. 12).
6. A Clean Servant. "I thank God, whom I serve in a pure conscience" (2 Tim. 1. 3.).
7. An Appreciative Servant. "I thank my God, always, making mention of thee in my prayers, hearing of thy love, and of the faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints" (Philemon 4-5)'.
(F. E. Marsh, 'One Thousand New Bible Readings', Number 470, pages 222-223—slightly adapted.)

What the Lord requires.

- (i) 'Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?' (Deut. 10. 12-13).
- (ii) 'He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?' (Micah 6. 8).

'Led by the Spirit'.

'Being "led by the Spirit" (Rom. 8. 14) does not refer to being led to the right school or the right spouse or the right diet program.

'It refers to the preceding verse (Rom. 8. 13): being led into warfare with sinful temptations, the sinful "deeds of the body". We make war on them. We are "led by the Spirit" into hating our sin and killing it.'

(J. Piper, 'How Can I Know I'm a Christian?', accessed at ... <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-can-i-know-im-a-christian>.)

Differing attitudes to sin.

'The difference between the saint and the sinner is not so much in whether they can sin. Any human being is capable of sinning. It is the basic attitude toward sin that makes the difference. The saint lapses into sin and loathes it. The sinner leaps into sin and loves it.'

(A. Rogers, 'The Power of His Presence', page 104.)

God's desire for man.

[Background: 'The Screwtape Letters' is a satirical novel by C. S. Lewis. The novel consists of a series of 31 letters written from the viewpoint of the fictional demon Screwtape, who mentors a junior colleague, Wormwood, on the temptation and attempted destruction of a young Christian. The following quotation takes the form of an explanation given by Screwtape to Wormwood.]

'One must face ... an appalling truth. He [God] really does want to fill the universe with a lot of loathsome little replicas of Himself—creatures whose life, on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His.

'We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over.'

(C. S. Lewis, 'The Screwtape Letters', Number VIII, pages 45-46.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Age doesn't come alone:

1. Arthur, a rather elderly man, was seated with many others in the waiting room of Dr Wilson's surgery.

When he was called in to see the doctor, Arthur got up from his chair with some difficulty. Leaning on his new orthopaedic walking stick and hunched over badly, he made his way slowly into Dr Wilson's examining room.

It was only a few minutes later that Albert emerged from the room, walking completely upright.

Arthur's friend Henry was in the waiting room and could hardly believe his eyes when he saw Arthur's dramatically improved posture. 'That is positively amazing', Henry exclaimed, 'whatever treatment did Dr Wilson give you? What's his secret?'

Arthur stared at Henry and said, 'Well, he took just one look at me as I hobbled into his room and

adjusted my stick so that it was four inches longer than it was before!'

2. On the morning of his 80th birthday, William wakes up and—as he's been doing for as long as he can remember—he goes into the bathroom to have his early morning wash.

Fifteen minutes later William is still in the bathroom. His wife Elaine hammers on the door and shouts out, 'Whatever are you doing in there, Bill? Why on earth are you taking so long?'

'You'll need to be patient, Elaine', William shouts back. 'As I get balder and balder,
it's taking me longer and longer to wash my face!'

3. Molly and Morris, both in their eighties, live in a semi-detached house in a suburb of a large city in England.

On Monday evening, Molly calls from their kitchen to her husband who is upstairs, 'Morris, tomorrow is rubbish collection day. Can you come downstairs, please, and put out the waste bins for me?'

Morris walks slowly to the staircase and shouts down,

'I can only tackle one or the other of those challenges. You choose.'

Appendix

(i) Reproduced from the 'Monday Musings' of 6 November 2023.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever ...

The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? ...

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man ...

The right hand of the Lord is exalted; the right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord ...

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.

This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it ...

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! ...

You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 118. 1, 6, 8, 16-17, 22-24, 26, 28-29 (*The New King James Version*)

'Reformation Day' and Luther's 'beloved psalm'.

Tuesday past, 31 October, was 'Reformation Day'.

Each year, 'Reformation Day' marks the anniversary of the date in 1517:

(i) on which (according to Philip Melancthon, writing some thirty years later) Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the West Door of the All Saints' Church in Wittenberg, Germany;

(ii) on which Luther sent his Theses to Albert of Brandenburg, the Archbishop of Mainz (we can confidently say, therefore, that the Ninety-five Theses were 'mailed' even if we cannot be certain that they were 'nailed');

(iii) which is generally identified as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, sending a shockwave through the whole of Christendom.

Today, I fast forward the story to 1530. At that time, Luther was under the Imperial Ban (stripped of all his rights and declared legally dead) imposed by the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, and subject to arrest as an outlaw if captured.

During the period from April to October, Luther was given refuge in the fortress of Coburg. Whilst there, he dedicated his translation and exposition of Psalm 118 to his patron, Abbot Frederick of Nuremberg.

In the preface to his commentary, he wrote:

While I should like to show my gratitude to you for your love and favour to me, I am, by earthly standards, a beggar. Besides, even if I had much, there is nothing special I could do for you in your position.

And so I turned to my wealth, which I treasure so much, and took up my beloved psalm [Psalm 118], putting down on paper the thoughts which came to me ... These thoughts of mine I decided to send you as a gift. I have nothing better ...

This is my own beloved psalm. Although the entire Psalter and all of Holy Scripture are dear to me as my only comfort and source of life, I fell in love with this psalm especially.

Therefore, I call it my own. When emperors and kings, the wise and the learned, and even saints could not aid me, this Psalm proved a friend and helped me out of many great troubles ...

But lest anyone, knowing that this psalm belongs to the whole world, raise his eyebrow at my claim that this psalm is mine, may he be assured that no one is being robbed. After all, Christ is mine, and yet He belongs to all believers.

I will not be jealous but will gladly share what is mine. Would to God all the world would claim this psalm for its own, as I do! ... May Christ our Lord help us by His Spirit to love and honour His holy Word with all our hearts'.

(Translated by George Beto in 'Luther's Works: Volume 14', pages 45-46).

Confident that, in spite of his many powerful enemies, he was safe until his work on earth was done, Luther adopted verse 17 of Psalm 118 ('I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord') as

'a kind of motto ... He had written the text on the wall of his study at the Coburg fortress in 1530'.

(James L. Brauer, 'Luther's Hymn Melodies', page 15.)

Today, let us each respond afresh to the appeal which both opens and closes Luther's 'beloved psalm':

'Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His mercy endures forever' (Psalm 118. 1, 29).

(ii) The hymn, 'A mighty Fortress is our God'.

A mighty Fortress is our God,
A Bulwark never failing;
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing;
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing:
Dost ask who that may be?

Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth His Name,
From age to age the same,
And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:
The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly powers,
No thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through Him who with us sideth:
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,

His Kingdom is forever.

(Martin Luther, the hymn, '*Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*'; translated, under the title, 'A mighty Fortress is our God', by Frederick H. Hedge. This hymn has been called 'the Battle Hymn' or 'the Marching Song' of the Reformation.)

(iii) Comments by J. N. Darby on the status of the writings of the Reformers.

'I could not tie myself to any of the ancients, nor own their authority in any way. I may learn from them, and own thankfully, what was given them of God.

'I see in Luther an energy of faith for which millions of souls ought to be thankful to God, and I can certainly say I am. I may see a clearness and recognition of the authority of scripture in Calvin, which delivered him and those he taught (yet more than Luther) from the corruptions and superstitions which had overwhelmed Christendom, and through it the minds even of most saints.

'But present these to me as a standard of truth—I reject them with indignation. They were not inspired. Their teachings are not the word of God. To this I hold fast tenaciously. It is the safeguard and guide of the Church and of the saints under grace at all times, and especially in these days.

'The gifted men I respect, when presented to me as such, would become a horror to me if they were in any way substituted for, or made to compete with, the word of God'.

(Source: J. N. Darby, '*The Sufferings of Christ*', Collected Writings, Volume 7, page 205.)

[The same holds true, of course, of the writings of Mr Darby, of the writings of W. E. Vine, or the writings of anyone other than the writers of Scripture themselves.]