

Greetings.

This morning, I offer two thought-provoking quotations about 'pain' in the present fallen world (cf. Rom. 8. 22):

1. **Physical** pain as God's **blessing**.

'Pain is not the enemy, but the loyal scout announcing the enemy ... In the modern view, pain is an enemy, a sinister invader that must be expelled ... This approach has a crucial, dangerous flaw ... Silencing pain without considering its message is like disconnecting a ringing fire alarm to avoid receiving bad news ... listen to your pain. It is your own body talking to you ... Pain is no invading enemy, but a loyal messenger dispatched by my own body to alert me to some danger ... Thank God for pain'.

(Dr Paul Brand, *'Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants'*, pages 187-188, 197.)

[According to his own testimony, it was in 1939, in my home city of Cardiff, Wales, that Dr Brand, 'first delved into the mysteries of pain and sensation', Dr Paul Brand, *ibid.*, page 42.]

2. Pain more **generally** as God's **megaphone**.

'We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world'.

(C. S. Lewis, *'The Problem of Pain'*, pages 90-91, 94.)

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

To each one of us has been given grace according to the measure of the gift of the Christ.

Wherefore He says, 'Having ascended up on high, He has led captivity captive, and has given gifts to men'.

But that He ascended, what is it but that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?

He that descended is the same who has also ascended up above all the heavens, that He might fill all things; and He has given some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ.

Ephesians 4. 7-13 (*J. N. Darby, New Translation*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'He led captivity captive' (Eph. 4. 8.)

'To "lead captivity captive" is a poetical expression signifying the complete triumph over a power by which one has formerly been subjugated, as it is said of Israel in reference to Babylon, "They shall take them captives whose captives they were" (Isa. 14. 2).

The words are first found in the song of Deborah, when celebrating the victory of Barak over the armies of Jabin, by whom the Israelites had long been oppressed: "Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Ahinoam" (Judg. 5. 12).

It is adopted in the passage here quoted by the apostle from the Psalms, where it is clearly prophetic of Christ's triumph: "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men" (Psa. 68. 18.) The title by which Christ bestows these gifts is therefore as follows:

Man, as fallen, was in bondage under the fear of death, and under the power of the devil. Jesus has come as man, has entered into our wretchedness, charged Himself with our responsibilities, gone down under our judgment, so that "through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2. 14).

Having thus descended and conquered the foe who held us in captivity, He has ascended in triumph, and received gifts from God in His character as the risen, victorious man'.

(T. B. Baines, *'The Gifts of an Ascended Christ'*, The Christian Friend, 1879, pages 49-50.)

'All' given by the Father to the Lord Jesus.

(i) *'All things'*: 'The Father loves the Son, and has *given all things* into His hand' (John 3. 35; cf. Matt. 11. 27).

(ii) *'All authority'*: 'And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, "*All authority is given* unto me in heaven and in earth"' (Matt. 28. 18).

(iii) *'All judgment'*: 'Jesus said to them, "... the Father judges no man, but has *given all judgment* to the Son" (John 5. 19-22).

(iv) *'Authority over all flesh'*: 'Jesus ... lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father... you have *given Him authority over all flesh*, that He should give eternal life to all whom you have given Him"' (John 17. 1-2).

'After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Heb. 1. 3).

'He sits by invitation (Psa. 110. 1) but ... He has seated Himself; He set Himself down.

Now those who attended to sins and sacrifice in the old dispensation never sat. Perhaps only one Old Testament priest is seen seated, and that with disastrous consequences (1 Sam. 4. 13–18). Jewish priests stood as they ministered (Heb. 10. 11). Even their high priest, with all the privileges of his holy office, when he had performed his most sacred duties in the sanctuary on the great day of atonement, retired from the presence of the divine glory. There was no seat for those priests of old. Their sacrificial work was never done.

But with Christ it is different. He is seated; He is enthroned; He is exalted far above all ... Three times more in this epistle we shall see Him seated (Heb. 8. 1; 10. 12; 12. 2). His work relative to sin is finished'.

(J. M. Flanigan, *'Hebrews (What the Bible Teaches)'*, page 23.)

The Lord Jesus represents us (Heb. 9. 24) and we represent Him.

'Since Christ appears in the presence of God for us, we are to appear in the presence of the world for Christ'.

(J. N. Darby, *'Notes and Jottings'*, page 4).

The Saviour died 'that He might'.

(i) 'That He might *deliver* us from this present evil world' (Gal. 1. 4).

(ii) 'That He might *reconcile* both (Jew and Gentile) in one body to God' (Eph. 2. 16).

(iii) 'That He might *redeem* us from all iniquity' (Tit. 2. 14).

(iv) 'That He might *sanctify* the people with His own blood' (Heb. 13. 12).

(v) 'That He might *bring* us to God' (1 Pet. 3. 18).

(vi) 'That He might *destroy* the works of the devil' (1 John 3. 8).

Five things which God and the Lord Jesus have done for us according to Colossians 1. 12-14.

(i) *Fitted* us: 'who has made us fit for a share of the inheritance of the saints in light' (Col. 1. 12)

(ii) *Delivered* us: 'who delivered us out of the authority of darkness' (Col. 1. 13).

(iii) *Translated* us: 'who ... translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love' (Col. 1. 13).

(iv) *Redeemed* us: 'in whom we have redemption' (Col. 1. 14)

(v) *Forgiven* us: 'in whom we have ... the forgiveness of sins' (Col. 1. 14).

Stephen and the Lord Jesus.

'The parallels between the passion of Jesus and of Stephen need to be enumerated:

(i) Trial before high priest/Sanhedrin (Mark 14. 53/Acts 6. 12; 7. 1).

(ii) False witnesses (Mark 14. 56–57/Acts 6. 13).

(iii) Testimony concerning the destruction of the temple (Mark 14. 58/Acts 6. 14).

(iv) Temple "made with hands" (Mark 14. 58/Acts 7. 48).

(v) Son of Man saying (Mark 14. 62/Acts 7. 56).

(vi) Charge of blasphemy (Mark 14. 64/Acts 6. 11).

(vii) High priest's question (Mark 14. 61/Acts 7. 1).

(viii) Committal of spirit (Luke 23. 46/Acts 7. 59).

(ix) Cry out with a loud voice (Mark 15.34, 37/Acts 7. 60).

(x) Intercession for enemies' forgiveness (Luke 23. 34/Acts 7. 60)'.
(Ben Witherington III, *'The Acts of the Apostles : A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary'*, page 253.)

Lessons from David's great sins.

'(i) *Sin will take you farther than you wanted to go* ...

David had only planned on a discreet evening of adultery, yet within weeks he was guilty of betrayal, murder, and a heinous cover-up. And that was a winding road he'd never planned to travel ...

(ii) *Sin will cost you more than you wanted to pay*

David's sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah cost him a huge price:

- (a) It cost him dearly when his infant son died.
 - (b) It cost him dearly when his oldest son, Amnon, raped his half-sister and David's daughter, Tamar.
 - (c) It cost him dearly when his son Absalom killed his brother Amnon to avenge the rape of Tamar.
 - (d) It cost him dearly when years later, his trusted friend and counsellor, Ahithophel, assisted young Absalom in a plot to overthrow David and rip the kingdom out of his hands'.
- (Steve Farrar, *'Finishing Strong'*, pages 90-91, 96.)

The word of God in Psalm 119.

The psalmist in Psalm 119 refers to it:

- (i) as a strength in the time of temptation (Psa. 119. 9, 11),
- (ii) as a source of comfort in sorrow (Psa. 119. 28),
- (iii) as the secret of spiritual renewal (Psa. 119. 37, 50, 107, 149, 154, 156), and
- (iv) as the spring of prayer and praise (Psa. 119. 169-172)'.
(Alan G. Nute, *'The Christian Use of the Bible'*, page 2.)

'Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became ... the delight of my heart' (Jer. 15. 16).

'There was a poor widow in (Clydesdale) ... She was asked how she did in this evil time? "I do very well", says she; "I get more good of one verse of the Bible now than I did (for a long time). He hath cast me the keys of the pantry-door, and bidden me take my fill".

(Alexander Peden, *'Sermon on Luke 24. 21'*; accessed at <https://www.truecovenanter.com/Peden.html>).

'Let him ... lean upon his God' (Isa. 50. 10: Young's Literal Translation).

'We lean on One who affords us far greater help and support than that which:

- (i) Jacob ever found in leaning on "the top of his staff" (Heb. 11. 21),
- (ii) the hypocrite ever found in leaning "upon his house" (Job 8. 15), or
- (iii) the Assyrian wrongly assumed Hezekiah hoped to obtain by leaning on Egypt and its king (2 Kings. 18. 21).

It is not for us to "lean" on our "own understanding" (Prov. 3. 6), but rather to say with Horatius Bonar, "I have no help but Thine; nor do I need another arm save Thine to lean upon; it is enough, my Lord, enough indeed".

(*'Bible Questions'*, Precious Seed Publications, page 129.)

'The putting forth of the finger' (Isa. 58. 9).

It is easier to point the finger than to offer a helping hand.

(Author unknown.)

'This woman'.

(i) 'This woman' was thankful: 'This woman was a widow of about eighty-four years ... and coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord' (Luke 2. 37-38).

(ii) 'This woman' was commended: 'He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see *this woman*? ... she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head ... *this woman* has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in ... *this woman* has anointed my feet with fragrant oil' (Luke 7. 44-46).

(iii) 'This woman' was forgiven: 'They said to Him, "Teacher, *this woman* was caught in adultery, in the very act" ... Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you"' (John 8. 4, 11).

(iv) 'This woman' was healed: 'He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight ... The Lord said, "Ought not *this woman*, ... whom Satan has bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"' (Luke 13. 13, 16).

(v) 'This woman' was remembered: 'Wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what *this woman* has done will also be told as a memorial to her' (Matt. 26. 13).

(vi) 'This woman' was raised up: 'This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did ... she became sick and died ... he said, "Tabitha, arise" ... he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and ... presented her alive' (Acts 9. 36-41).

Drawing with a crooked stick: 'All things work together for good' (Rom. 8. 28).

'We must believe that God has a good purpose for the awful things that occur to us. Just as a straight line can be drawn with a crooked stick, biblical faith requires the confidence that wicked and tragic circumstances can be turned to loving purposes by God for His people. Such conclusions are drawn in the earliest pages of Scripture. Joseph says to his brothers about their sale of him into slavery (when they could not know that his presence in Egypt would ultimately result in their family's rescue from famine), "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (Gen. 50. 20)'.
(Bryan Chapell, *'The Hardest Sermons You'll Ever Have to Preach'*, page 13.)

'Things present'.

'I am persuaded that neither death nor life ... nor things present ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8. 38).

'Life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours' (1 Cor. 3. 22).

'I know the future all is bright,
The Cross has made my heaven secure;
The blood of Christ, on Calvary shed,
Has made my peace divinely sure.

But though my future thus is bright,
When sin and death shall all be o'er;
Over the present hangs a cloud,
Though sunshine sleeps on yonder shore.

Until I fully grasp that word
Which in my soul its music rings;
"Nothing can part us from God's love—
The future nor the present things."

"Nor present things", the daily life,
With all its small ten-thousand needs,
Can't separate us from the One
Who e'en the sparrow daily feeds.

"Nor present things", the little cares
Which daily, hourly, constant rise,
Like some dark cloud which, stretching o'er,
Blots out the sunshine of the skies.

They "cannot separate"; they only bring
Him nearer, closer, to us here;
His love, to meet our daily needs;
His sympathy, our hearts to cheer'.

(A. S. Oliphant, '*Things Present*', The Christian Friend, 1879, pages 307-308.)

Five things which Christians should 'know' according to 1 Corinthians 6.

- (i) 'That the saints will judge the world' (1 Cor. 6. 2).
- (ii) 'That we shall judge angels' (1 Cor. 6. 3).
- (iii) 'That your bodies are the members of Christ' (1 Cor. 6. 15).
- (iv) 'That your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 6. 19a).
- (v) 'That ... you are not your own, for you were bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6. 19b-20).

Five instances of keeping and being kept (τηρέω) in the Epistle of Jude (quotations from the New American Standard Bible).

- (i) 'Beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ' (Jude 1).
- (ii) 'Angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode' (Jude 6).
- (iii) 'He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day' (Jude 6).
- (iv) 'Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life' (Jude 21).
- (v) 'To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling ... be glory, majesty, dominion and authority' (Jude 24).

Five occasions when heaven opened.

- (i) In judgment: 'the windows of heaven were opened' (Gen. 7. 11).
- (ii) In blessing: 'open the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing' (Mal. 3. 10).
- (iii) In testimony: 'the heaven was opened ... and a voice came from heaven, which said, "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased"' (Luke 3. 21-22).
- (iv) In encouragement: 'I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God' (Acts 7. 56). [See the following note.]
- (v) In victory: 'I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and He that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war' (Rev. 19. 11).

(iii) Go on, smile.

Shortly before the plane reached its destination, the chief flight attendant made a general announcement to all passengers: 'Please let the cabin crew know if you would like some chewing gum before we begin our descent prior to landing. It will help prevent your ears from popping'.

After the plane arrived, everyone left ... with the exception of one man.

'Excuse me, sir, do you need some assistance?' the stewardess asked.

'You'll need to speak up', the man yelled back, '*I can't hear a thing with this chewing gum in my ears!*'

The kindergarten class had just settled down to its colouring books when little Johnnie raised his hand.

'Miss Jeffries', he said, 'I ain't got no crayons'.

'Johnnie, that's not right', Miss Jeffries responded. 'You should say, "I don't *have* any crayons". You must remember to say, "*You* don't *have* any crayons. *We* don't *have* any crayons. *They* don't *have* any crayons". Do you understand what I am telling you?'

'Yes, Miss', Johnnie replied, '*but where have everyone's crayons gone?*'