

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 12 September 2022

Greetings,

As I pointed out in last week's 'spoiler', yesterday marked the anniversary of the home-call of Professor F. F. Bruce on 11th September 1990.

I said then that today I would share with you 'some of the many quotations from the writings of Professor Bruce which I have enjoyed and from which I have benefited over the years'.

I cannot pretend that I am in agreement with everything I have read which came from Professor Bruce's very productive pen. For example, my convictions about what we might describe as 'assembly distinctives' are certainly very different from his.

Nevertheless, by far the greater part of what he wrote makes for highly profitable reading. [I say this as one who has over 120 works (commentaries, journal articles, notes of lectures etc.) of Professor Bruce in my e-library, together with a small number of printed volumes.]

By design, the selected quotations below focus particularly on the person and the work of our Lord Jesus. God willing, I will follow this up with a second 'Musings' next week which will mainly comprise quotations from F. F. Bruce on other biblical themes.

Separately, I was pleased to note that Professor Bruce's writings are not devoid of touches of humour. I smiled, for instance at the closing sentence of this quotation:

'Dionysius of Corinth (c. A.D. 170) sees a special bond between the churches of Corinth and Rome in that each was founded by Peter and Paul and profited by the teaching of both apostles [Apud Euseb., Hist. Eccl. ii. 25.8]. While Paul would have deprecated nomination as one of the founders of the Roman church, he would have turned in his grave at the suggestion that Peter was joint-founder with him of the Corinthian church!'

('St. Paul in Rome', notes of a lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 8th of November 1967.)

But, for today, enjoy what Professor Bruce has to say about your Saviour and mine.

Yours in His name,

Malcolm

Selected quotations from the writings of F. F. Bruce: (1) the Lord Jesus

CREATION

'His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption ... in Him all things were created ...all things were created through Him and for Him' (Col. 1. 14-16).

'Christ through whom the divine work of redemption has been accomplished is the One through whom the divine act of creation was effected in the beginning. His mediatorial relation to the created universe provides a setting to the plan of salvation which helps His people appreciate the gospel all the more.

'For those who have been redeemed by Christ the universe has no ultimate terrors; they know that their Redeemer is also Creator — the Origin and Goal of all'.

('The "Christ Hymn" of Colossians 1. 15-20', Bibliotheca Sacra 141 (April-June 1984), page 103.)

INCARNATION

'Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8. 3).

'When Paul says that God sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (literally, "in likeness of flesh of sin" (i.e. flesh which is dominated by sin), the word "likeness" modifies "sin", not "flesh". His flesh was the same as ours, otherwise the death-blow given to sin in His death would not have broken its power in our lives; but His flesh (His human nature) was not dominated by sin, as ours is'.

('The Humanity of Christ', page 11.)

'The man Christ Jesus' (1 Tim. 2. 5).

'The gospel of our salvation depends upon the genuineness of our Lord's humanity, and so does the value of His life as an example for His people to follow. The power of that example is weakened if we can say, in extenuation of our own failure, "It was different, or easier, for Him" ...

"A Saviour not quite God" said Bishop Handley Moule, "is a bridge broken at the farther end" [Source: The Prefatory Note to Sir Robert Anderson, "The Lord from Heaven", page vi]. With equal truth it must be said that a Saviour—and an Exemplar—not quite man is a bridge broken at the nearer end.

(*'The Humanity of Christ'*, page 14.)

'Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God ... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2. 5-11).

(i) 'The outward appearance could be laid aside, but not the essential nature: being from the first in "the form of God", He retained "the form of God" when He emptied Himself by taking "the form of a slave". The implication is not that Christ, by becoming incarnate, exchanged the form of God for the form of a slave, but that He manifested the form of God in the form of a slave ...

He treated His equality with God as an occasion for renouncing every advantage or privilege which might have accrued to Him thereby, as an opportunity not for self-enrichment but for self-impoverishment and unreserved self-sacrifice.

'The God who in the Old Testament declares, 'I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other' (Isaiah 42. 8), swears by Himself, 'To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear' (Isaiah 45. 23). But now, says Paul, by God's own decree every knee is to bow in Jesus' name and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord—and in so doing enhance, not diminish, the glory of God.

'But it is not implied that this eventual exaltation was the incentive for His temporary humiliation; otherwise, the humiliation would have been no true humiliation: it would have been self-regarding, not self-denying. The lesson for the Philippian Christians is this: as Christ set His own interests aside in the interest of others, so should they'.

(*'The Philippian Correspondence'*, notes of a lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 10 December 1980.)

(ii) 'The wording of Phil. 2. 10-11 is based on Isa. 45. 23, where "Yahweh" swears by Himself: "To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear".

'Here, however, it is in Jesus' name that every knee shall bow, and it is Jesus' lordship that every tongue shall confess. Nor is this by any means the only instance in the New Testament where an Old Testament passage containing "kyrios" as the equivalent of "Yahweh" is applied to Jesus. In any case, the title "Lord" in the highest sense that it can bear belongs distinctively to the risen and exalted Jesus'.

(*'Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free'*, page 116.)

BAPTISM AND PUBLIC MINISTRY

'Straightway coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens rent asunder' (Mark 1. 10, Revised Version).

"He saw the heavens rent apart", says Mark, using a vivid expression to indicate that now an answer was being given to a prayer uttered by the people hundreds of years before: "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down!" (Isaiah 64. 1)'.
(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, page 15.)

'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword' (Matt. 10. 34).

'When Jesus said that He had come to bring "not peace but a sword", He meant that this would be the effect of His coming, not that it was the purpose of His coming. His words came true in the life of the early Church, and they have verified themselves subsequently in the history of Christian missions ... In these words, then, Jesus was warning His followers that their allegiance to Him might cause conflict at home, and even expulsion from the family circle'.

(*'The Hard Sayings of Jesus'*, pages 131-132.)

'The Transfiguration' (Luke 9. 27-36).

'The transfiguration provides an anticipatory vision of what the powerful coming of the kingdom of God would mean.

For a few moments the heavenly glory which was normally veiled by the conditions of our Lord's incarnate life shone through His body and its covering. The three apostles who were granted the

vision could perhaps not have said whether they were in the body or out of the body; but they saw more of the glory of the Lord in the holy mount than ever Moses had seen at Sinai...

'His departure is literally His "exodus" ... we may be reminded of the departure out of this world which Moses and Elijah had experienced in their several ways—Moses put to sleep on Pisgah by the touch of God and Elijah caught up in a whirlwind—how different in both cases from the departure which Jesus "was to accomplish at Jerusalem"!

“**My Son**” marks Him out as the Messiah, “**my beloved**” (or, as in Luke 9. 35, RSV. “my Chosen”) marks Him out as the Servant (just as the heavenly voice at His baptism addressed Him in terms of Psa. 2. 7 and Isa. 42. 1). And the words “**listen to Him**” mark Him out as the great Prophet to whom Moses pointed forward in Deut. 18. 15. The Law, the Prophets and the Psalms alike bear their testimony to Him ...

'*John's Gospel* has no transfiguration story; but his whole Gospel is in a sense a commentary on the transfiguration. "We beheld His glory", says John, and endeavours to make his readers enter into the experience which was granted to the three on the mount'.

(‘The Transfiguration’, Inter-Varsity (Summer Term 1961): pages 19-21.)

SUFFERINGS AND DEATH

‘Hosanna’ (Mark 11. 9-10); ‘Crucify Him’ (Mark 15. 13-14)

'It is unnecessary to suppose that those who cried, "Crucify Him", on Good Friday were the same as those who had cried, "Hosanna", on Palm Sunday.

'The people who cried, "Hosanna", were Galilæan pilgrims; those who clamoured for His death were a city mob, incited by the chief priests. The Galilæan pilgrims were disillusioned, no doubt, but they need not be credited with such a *volte-face* as this'.

(‘*The Spreading Flame*’, page 56.)

‘None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. 2. 8).

'Paul speaks about the wisdom of God which is enshrined in the gospel, wisdom concealed from those who are spiritually blind but revealed by the Spirit to men and women of faith ...

'He may be referring to such "rulers" as Caiaphas the high priest, Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee and Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judæa, who shared the responsibility for the condemnation and death of Jesus and certainly had no inkling of the new power that was about to be let loose in the world as a result.

'But more probably, he is referring to spiritual forces operating behind those human rulers, using the latter as their "front-men". These are the forces of which he elsewhere speaks as "principalities and powers".

(‘*Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ*’, page 63.)

‘We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1. 23),

'That anyone should acclaim as a supreme teacher one who had not sufficient wisdom to save Himself from so shameful and horrible a death was, to Greek minds, sheer folly.

'But that anyone should acclaim as God's Messiah one who had died by crucifixion was, to Jewish minds, worse than folly; it was plain blasphemy.

'A suffering Messiah was foreign enough to current Jewish ideas, but a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms. The Messiah was one upon whom the divine blessing rested in a unique degree, whereas the form of death that Jesus died was an evident sign that the divine curse rested on Him; for it was clearly laid down in the holy law: "He that is hanged is accursed of God"'.
(‘*The Spreading Flame*’, page 19.)

‘Blasphemy’ or ‘treason’: ‘stoning’ or ‘crucifixion’.

'When Judæa became a Roman province in A.D. 6, the Romans deprived the Jewish authorities of the right to inflict capital punishment—except with regard to offences against the sanctity of the temple, whether by deed or by word ...

'Jesus was taken before a court of enquiry over which the high priest presided. An attempt was apparently made to convict Him of language which amounted to an attack on the sanctity of the temple (Mark 14. 58) ... The witnesses who reported Jesus' words did not agree, so their testimony collapsed.

'If it had been admitted and Jesus had been convicted on this charge, then the Jewish authorities would presumably have been able to deal with Him according to their own law since sacrilege against the temple was an offence for which they were permitted by the Romans to inflict the death penalty themselves.

'The death penalty in that case would no doubt have been stoning, as it actually was a few years later when Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was charged with (among other things) continually "speaking words against this holy place" (the temple), saying "that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place" (Acts 6. 13-14) ...

'Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy" (Matt. 26. 65). While blasphemy was a capital offence by Jewish law, it did not belong to that restricted area in which the Jewish authorities retained capital jurisdiction under the Roman administration.

'If the death sentence was to be carried out, permission would have to be secured from the Roman governor who, as it happened, was at that time resident in Jerusalem. And the Roman governor was not likely to take seriously a charge of blasphemy against the God of Israel. However, the claim to be Messiah had political as well as religious implications. Pilate might not be impressed by a claim to be the Son of God, but a claim to be Israel's Messiah, the king of the Jews, was a different matter. [So, "they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a king" (Luke 23. 2).]

(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, pages 33, 39-41.)

Faith, shame and exaltation (Heb. 12. 2).

'Jesus is presented as the one who has blazed the trail of faith and as the one who Himself ran the race of faith to its triumphant finish ... Not only is Jesus the pioneer of faith; in Him faith has reached its perfection.

"He trusts in God", they said as they stood by His cross (Matt. 27. 43); the implication was: "Much good His trust in God is doing Him now!" The words, though not their implication, were truer than they knew.

'The whole life of Jesus was characterized by unbroken and unquestioning faith in His heavenly Father, and never more so than when in Gethsemane He committed Himself to His Father's hands for the ordeal of the cross with the words: "not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14. 36). It was sheer faith in God, unsupported by any visible or tangible evidence, that carried Him through the taunting, the scourging, the crucifying, and the more bitter agony of rejection, desertion, and dereliction ...

'To die by crucifixion was to plumb the lowest depths of disgrace; it was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death, Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute; the dignity of the Roman name would be besmirched by being brought into association with anything as vile as the cross. For slaves, and criminals of low degree, it was regarded as a suitable means of execution, and a grim deterrent to others.

'But this disgrace Jesus disregarded, as something not worthy to be taken into account when it was a question of His obedience to the will of God. He brought faith to perfection by His endurance of the cross—and now the place of highest exaltation is His'.

(*'The Epistle to the Hebrews: The New London Commentary'*, pages 351-353.)

'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us' (Gal. 3. 13).

'In the very book which pronounced the divine curse on anyone who was hanged—Deuteronomy [Deut. 21. 23]— he recalled another passage which pronounced the divine curse in a different context. This was the last and most comprehensive of a series of twelve curses pronounced on people who broke the law of God, and it ran: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them" (Deut. 27. 26) ... Jesus voluntarily submitted to the divine curse when He suffered death on the cross, in order that the curse which others had incurred by disobedience to God might be transferred to Him, and others might be released from it'.

(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, pages 53-54.)

'Cancelling the record of debt that stood against us ... He disarmed the rulers and authorities' (Col. 2. 14-15).

'Our sins, Paul says, represented a mountain of bankruptcy which could not be disowned and could not be discharged. But Christ has wiped the slate clean and given us a fresh start. He took that signed confession of indebtedness which stood as a damning indictment against us, and cancelled it by His death.

'One might actually say that He took the document and nailed it to His cross as an act of sovereign defiance in face of those blackmailing powers which were holding it over us as a threat'.

(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, page 66.)

RESURRECTION AND BEYOND

'The abolition of death'.

'Several years ago, a European scholar, Oscar Cullmann, compared ... the work of Christ to the progress of a great war — in this case, the war between good and evil.

In a great war there is often one battle which decides the outcome of the war. After this decisive battle has been fought and won, there is little doubt which side will be victorious, but no one can say how long the war will yet go on. D-day, the day of the decisive battle, is past, but V-day, the day of the victory celebrations, lies in the future ...

'If the decisive battle determined the outcome of the war, it could be said that those forces whose defeat was then sealed were in principle defeated when the decisive battle was fought. Thus, while Paul speaks of death as the last enemy which is to be abolished ('καταργέω', 1 Cor. 15. 26), we read that Christ has already 'abolished ('καταργέω') death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel' (2 Tim. 1. 10).

(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, page 65.)

'Then He appeared to James' (1 Cor. 15. 7).

'All the others who saw the risen Christ had their former faith restored and reinforced thereby, but James and Paul became disciples of Jesus only from the time when He appeared to them in resurrection.

"The brothers of the Lord" are enumerated among the leaders of the church (1 Cor. 9. 5), and their discipleship goes back to the period preceding the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 1. 13).

'But they were not disciples of Jesus during His public ministry, "for even His brothers", we read, "did not believe on Him" (John 7. 5). Strange, that they should have withheld their support from Him when He enjoyed comparative popularity, and given it freely on the morrow of disaster and defeat!

'Among these brothers of Jesus, the outstanding figure is James. He appears in later days as the unquestioned leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem, and his pre-eminent holiness of life procured for him the title, "James the Just" even from the non-Christian Jerusalemites.

'A man of his character is unlikely to have been a party to deceit, nor was he predisposed ... to expect the resurrection of one whose messianic actions and claims he deplored.

'The condemnation and execution of Jesus were just what His brothers had feared all along. What wrought the revolution in James's attitude towards Jesus at this juncture, when the worst had actually happened? Paul gives us the explanation which he received from James himself: "He appeared to James" (1 Cor. 15. 7)'.
(*'The Spreading Flame'*, pages 67-68.)

'He presented Himself alive to them after His suffering ... appearing to them during forty days' (Acts 1. 3).

'In the primitive apostolic preaching the resurrection and ascension of Christ represented one continuous movement and together constituted His exaltation ...

The fortieth day was not the first occasion on which He vanished from the sight of His companions after His rising from the dead. Nor did the New Testament writers intend us to suppose that the intervals between His resurrection appearances were spent in some earth-bound state.

'These appearances, in which He condescended to their temporal conditions of life, were visitations from that exalted and eternal order to which His "body of glory" now belonged. And what happened on the fortieth day, when "a cloud received Him out of their sight", was that this series of frequent though intermittent visitations had now come to an end'.

(*'The Spreading Flame'*, page 64.)

'In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when He was taken up' (Acts 1. 1-2).

'The implication is that Luke is now going on to deal with all that Jesus continued to do and teach, since "the day when He was taken up". In the Acts as much as in the gospel, the work is still the work of Christ. Only, whereas previously He carried out his work personally, in His visible presence on earth, now He carries it out from His state of exaltation, withdrawn from human sight, by His Spirit in His followers—the apostles and others.

'The book which we commonly call "The Acts of the Apostles" might be called with greater accuracy, but at inconveniently greater length, "The Acts of the Risen Christ by His Spirit in the Apostles".

(*'Jesus: Past, Present & Future: The Work of Christ'*, pages 44-45.)

'We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses' (Heb. 4. 15).

'Far from being an impassive visitor from another realm, playing a set part on the world stage with Olympian detachment, He sympathizes with the weaknesses of His fellow-men and knows how best to help them, for 'He Himself has suffered and been tempted'—tempted indeed 'in every respect ... as we are, yet without sinning' (Heb. 2. 18; 4. 15).

'There is nothing impassive, there is everything that is warmly and appealingly human in the picture of one who poured out His soul in 'prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death', and 'learned obedience through what He suffered' (Heb. 5. 7-8), who blazed the trail of faith ... enduring the cross and despising the shame, putting up with sinners' hostility so that His people, profiting by His example, need not 'grow weary or fainthearted' (Heb. 12: 2-3.).

('The Humanity of Christ', page 12.)