

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 28 August 2023

### (i) Scripture.

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, He takes up the coastlands like fine dust ... All the nations are as nothing before Him, they are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness.

To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him? ...

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power not one is missing.

Isaiah 40. 15-26 (English Standard Version)

### (ii) Food for thought.

#### ***The grace of God.***

“Grace” is ... not simply love, but the love of a sovereign, transcendently superior, one that may do what He will, that may wholly choose whether He will love or no.

‘There may be love between equals, and an inferior may love a superior. But love in a superior... is called grace. Therefore grace is attributed to *princes*; they are said to be gracious to their subjects, whereas subjects cannot be gracious to princes.

‘Now God, who is an infinite Sovereign, who might have chosen whether ever He would love us or no, for Him to love us, this is grace.’

(Attributed to Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan.)

#### ***‘Why?’ and the mystery of God’s will.***

(i) Why did God deliver Lot’s daughters from the rapists of Sodom (Gen. 19. 4-11) but did not deliver the Levite’s concubine from the rapists of Gibeah (Judg. 19. 22-28)?

(ii) Why did God deliver the prophet Jeremiah from death when he prophesied against the city of Jerusalem (Jer. 26. 11, 16, 24) but did not deliver the prophet Uriah from death when he prophesied against the city of Jerusalem just as Jeremiah did (Jer. 26. 20-23)?

(iii) Why did God deliver the apostle Peter from death at ‘the hand of Herod’ (Agrippa I) (Acts 12. 3-11) but did not deliver the apostle James from death ‘with the sword’ of the same Herod (Acts 12. 1-2)?

#### ***‘Why?’ and the absence of explanations.***

“Why?” is an easy question to ask but a very difficult one to answer.

‘Suppose God had told Job the reasons behind his troubles. Would that have solved his problems?’

‘After all, God’s people live on promises, not on explanations.’

(Warren W. Wiersbe, ‘*With the Word*’, page 284.)

***‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1. 8).***

The Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples of:

(i) a person (‘me’);

(ii) a power (‘the Holy Spirit’); and

(iii) a programme (‘Jerusalem ... all Judea and Samaria ... the end of the earth’).

***‘Ahaz said, “I will not ask ...”. And he (Isaiah) said, “... Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?” (Isa. 7. 12-13).***

‘Some people think God does not like to be troubled with our constant coming and asking. The way to trouble God is not to come at all.’

(D. L. Moody, ‘*Prevailing Prayer*’, page 79.)

#### ***‘Pray for one another’ (James 5. 16).***

‘I have benefited by my praying for others; for by making an errand to God for them, I have gotten something for myself.’

(Attributed to Samuel Rutherford.)

#### ***Godward and manward.***

Anna 'gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption ...' (Luke 2. 38). Anna spoke to the Lord in thanksgiving, and spoke of the Lord in testimony.

**'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus' (Heb. 11. 1-2).**

'The way in which the apostle engages them to disentangle themselves from every hindrance, whether sin or difficulty, is remarkable; as though they had nothing to do but cast them off as useless weights.

'And, in fact, when we look at Jesus nothing is easier; when we are not looking at Him, nothing more impossible'.

(J. N. Darby, 'Looking unto Jesus', Pilgrim Portions, Nineteenth Week.)

**Seven key 'always' expressions in the epistles of Paul:**

- (i) 'Always abounding in the work of the Lord', 1 Cor. 15. 58.
- (ii) 'Giving thanks always for all things to God and the Father', Eph. 5. 20.
- (iii) 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit', Eph. 6. 18.
- (iv) 'Always... Christ shall be magnified in my body', Phil. 1. 20.
- (v) 'Rejoice in the Lord always', Phil. 4. 4.
- (vi) 'Let your speech be always with grace', Col. 4.6.
- (vii) 'Always seek to do good to one another and to everyone', 1 Thess. 5. 15.

**'Through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross', 2 Cor. 5. 19.**

'In an imperial decree delivered in person at Corinth in the year 66, the emperor Nero proclaimed freedom to the Hellenes. He concluded his prefatory declaration with these words: "Other commanders have liberated cities, [but Nero] an entire province" ...

'Alas, Nero was not aware that an action taken ... earlier had already expanded the concept of liberation to its limits. Nero might liberate an entire province, but God had already delivered the entire world ... Besides, history records that Nero's decree was repealed by Vespasian. God's is valid for all time'.

(F. W. Danker, 'II Corinthians: Augsburg Commentary', page 83.

**Love for Christ.**

Our Lord Jesus is on record as having said, 'Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life' (John 10. 17) ... and that is the very same reason we love Him too.

**'Whom having not seen, you love' (1 Pet. 1. 8).**

'Nothing is of any value that does not spring from personal love to, and communion with, Christ Himself.

'We may have scripture at our finger ends; we may be able to preach with remarkable fluency, a fluency which unpractised spirits may easily enough mistake for 'power'; but if our hearts are not drinking deeply at the fountain head—if they are not enlivened and invigorated by the realisation of the love of Christ—it will all end in mere flash'.

(F. Whitfield, 'Christ our Life', 1885, page 145; the quotation is sometimes wrongly attributed to C. H. Mackintosh.)

**'The peace of God ... will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 4. 7).**

'Weapons of war guard the world; God's peace guards the church.'

(C. Wordsworth, 'The New Testament in the Original Greek: with Introductions and Notes', Volume 2, page 358.)

**'I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep ... your faithfulness reaches to the clouds' (Psa. 4. 8; 36. 5).**

David 'could rock himself to sleep on the assurance of God's faithfulness'.

(W. G. Moorhead, 'Outline Studies in the New Testament: Philipians to Hebrews', page 37.)

**The believer's thought life.**

Meditation 'will keep your hearts and souls from sinful thoughts. When the vessel is full you can put no more in it ... If the heart is full of sinful thoughts, here is no room for holy and heavenly thoughts. But if the heart is full of holy and heavenly thoughts by meditation, there is no room for evil and sinful thoughts'.

(William Bridge, 'The Sweetness of Divine Meditation', page 33.)

**'Jesus ... found Philip and said to him, "Follow me" ... Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him"' (John 1. 43-45).**

'Some ask, "Did you choose Christ or did He choose you?" The answer is, "Yes!"

'We see divine sovereignty clearly at work, but human choice as well. There's no contradiction here'.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, 'Midnight Rendezvous' Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 22 August 2023.)

**'Mary ... sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching' (Luke 10. 39).**

(i) 'Mary takes up the position of a student with a rabbi; "Let thy house be a meeting-house for the sages and sit amidst the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst", Pirkie Avot 1:4'.

(J. Nolland, 'Luke 9. 21-18. 34', Word Biblical Commentary Volume 35B, page 603.)

(ii) 'The picture of a woman in the disciple's position, at the feet of Jesus, would be startling in a culture where women did not receive formal teaching from a rabbi'.

(D. L. Bock, 'Luke: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament'), introductory comment to Luke 10. 38-42.)

(iii) 'Christ affirmed Mary's interest in learning. Christ did not shoo Mary away to work in the kitchen, nor did He rebuke her desire to sit at His feet ... Culturally, this was unheard of at that time. It was not acceptable ... for women to learn from Jewish leaders in this way. Jesus's response to Mary provides deep encouragement for women who desire to learn the truths of Scripture'.

(P. Collins, 'Choosing the Good Portion', Word by Word, Logos.)

(iv) Found in J. N. Darby's Bible after his home call:

'Low at Thy feet, Lord Jesus,  
This is the place for me;  
Here have I learned deep lessons—  
Truths that have set me free.  
Free from myself, Lord Jesus,  
Free from the ways of men.  
Chains of thought that have bound me  
Never can bind me again.  
None but Thyself, Lord Jesus,  
Conquered this wayward will;  
But for Thy love constraining,  
I had been wayward still'.

**'The Pharisees ... said to His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors ...?"' (Matt. 9. 11).**

'Tax collectors seem to have been generally regarded as collaborators with the Roman occupation.

'The first-century Jewish historian, Josephus, doesn't give much detail about public opinion concerning tax collectors. But he does explain that starting during the time of the Ptolemies (before the Roman conquest) tax collection contracts, so to speak, were given to the highest bidder, and that some rich men in Syria and Egypt who won the bids gained fabulous sums of money. In other words, corruption was rampant around the collection and processing of taxes.

'Rabbinic sources give us a better understanding of just how much social ostracism tax collectors experienced. The majority opinion in rabbinic thought, for instance, forbade people to accept charity from a tax collector, because it was assumed that the money was stolen (*Bava Kamma 113a*). Tax collectors were also not allowed to testify in a court of law (*Mishnah Sanhedrin 3a*).

'Yet Jesus chose a tax collector as a disciple (Matt. 9. 9) and was known as a "friend of tax collectors" (Matt. 11. 19)'.

(T. J. Keiderling, 'Tough Love on the Mount', accessed at ...

[https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/bible-studies/tough-love-on-the-mountain.\)](https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/bible-studies/tough-love-on-the-mountain.)

**David's personal enjoyment of the Lord in Psalm 27.**

In effect, David asserts that the Lord is:

(i) 'my light', Psa. 27. 1-3;

(ii) 'my sanctuary', Psa. 27. 4-6;

(iii) 'my object and my helper', Psa. 27. 7-10;

(iv) 'my guide', Psa. 27. 11-12; and

(v) 'my hope', Psa. 27. 13-14.

**Psalm 46 and William Shakespeare: an interesting legend.**

'A wonderful legendary story exists about Psalm 46. According to the tale, the translators of the King James Version, who worked in 1604-11, were determined to arrive at the best possible English translation of the biblical text.

'When they considered the translation of the poetic material of the Old Testament, especially the book of Psalms, they felt the best choice for a translator was none other than England's own poet and playwright of the time, William Shakespeare. And so, they prevailed upon him to work with them in rendering the psalms into good English.

'Shakespeare agreed and undertook the task ... Shakespeare arrived at the translation of Psalm 46 on the day of his forty-sixth birthday. Not one to let a good opportunity pass by, Shakespeare decided to "leave his mark" on the Psalter to mark the occasion ...

'When readers examine the King James translation of Psalm 46, they discover:

- (i) the forty-sixth word from the beginning of the text of Psalm 46 is "shake" ("though the mountains *shake*", v. 3); and
- (ii) the forty-sixth word from the end of the text of Psalm 46 is "spear" ("he cutteth the *spear* in sunder", v. 9) ...

'Thus, according to the legend, Shakespeare, the master English poet of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, lent his immeasurable talent to the English Bible translation that was the standard for the English Protestant church for over three hundred years'.

(N. Declaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*, pages 425-426.)

### **(iii) Go on, smile.**

With due respect to the aforementioned 'master English poet' and with obvious allusion to Act 3, Scene 1 of his longest play, 'Hamlet' ... **'To drink or not to drink, that is the question'.**

**1.** Donald, an American tourist in Wales decided to eat out at a local restaurant. He had no sooner sat down at a table than a waitress approached him. 'Would you like something to drink?' she asked.

Unable to see a menu, Donald asked, 'What are my choices?'

Giving Donald a rather strange look, *the Welsh waitress responded, with marked emphasis, 'Yessss or nooooo!'*

**2.** Stuart was a successful Coca Cola salesman in America. But on one occasion, following an assignment to Israel, he returned to his company office very disappointed and disheartened.

A close colleague asked him, 'Why do you think that you failed this time?'

'When I was first posted to Israel', Stuart replied, 'I was confident that I would do well. I had only one problem ... I didn't know any Hebrew, the official language in Israel. I decided to get the message across visually—with a series of three large posters.

'The poster on the left pictured a man lying on the hot desert sand, totally exhausted. The poster in the middle pictured the same man drinking from a bottle of Coca Cola. The last poster (that on the right) pictured the man looking totally refreshed. I had five thousand sets of the posters printed and then had them prominently displayed in order in each of the major cities'.

'I don't understand', his colleague responded, 'why such a method didn't work well'.

'Well, I soon found out why', Stuart continued. 'I hadn't realised that *Hebrew is read from right to left* and I soon discovered that *most of the locals were viewing the posters in that order!*'