

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 30 September 2024

Greetings.

Today marks the anniversary of the death of George Whitefield, who went to be with Christ at four o'clock in the morning of 30 September 1770.

George Whitefield, along with John and Charles Wesley, inspired the evangelical movement that became known as the Methodists. It is said that Mr Whitefield 'was one of the most powerful and extraordinary preachers the world has ever seen' (J. C. Ryle 'A Sketch of the Life and Labours of George Whitefield', page 25). It is reckoned that he preached more than 18,000 sermons in his lifetime, an average of 500 a year or ten a week.

Here is just one example of the effects of his preaching. In February 1739, Mr Whitefield preached on a hill to a vast crowd of coal miners coming out of the pits at Kingswood, a mining area south-east of Bristol, England. There was no church at Kingswood and the people were rough. Of that time, Mr Whitefield wrote:

'Having no righteousness of their own to renounce, they were glad to hear of a Jesus that was a friend to publicans, and came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. The first discovery of their being affected, was to see the white gutters made by their tears, which plentifully fell down their black cheeks, as they came out of their coal pits. Hundreds and hundreds of them were soon brought under deep convictions, which (as the event proved) happily ended in a sound and thorough conversion' (source: J. C. Ryle 'George Whitefield: His Life and Times', page 24).

Here are two other quotations from Mr Whitefield:

1. 'If we reflect indeed on the first and chief end of our blessed Lord's coming, we shall find it was to be a propitiation for our sins, to give His life a ransom for many. But then, if the benefits of our dear Redeemer's death were to extend no farther than barely to procure forgiveness of our sins, we should have as little reason to rejoice in it, as a poor condemned criminal that is ready to perish by some fatal disease, would have in receiving a pardon from his judge.

'For Christians would do well to consider, that there is not only a legal hindrance to our happiness, as we are breakers of God's law, but also a moral impurity in our natures, which renders us incapable of enjoying heaven until some mighty change have been wrought in us. It is necessary therefore, in order to make Christ's redemption complete, that we should have a grant of God's Holy Spirit to change our natures, and so prepare us for the enjoyment of that happiness our Saviour has purchased by His precious blood' (George Whitefield, 'The Nature and Necessity of our New Birth in Christ Jesus', 1739, pages 19-20.)

2. 'Let my name die everywhere, let even my friends forget me, if by that means the cause of the blessed Jesus may be promoted' (letter DCXLIX, dated 12 July 1748, 'The Works of the Reverent George Whitefield', Volume II, published 1771).

In the moving address which John Wesley gave at Mr Whitefield's funeral, he bore this testimony to George Whitefield:

'He was "easy to be entreated"; easy to be either convinced or persuaded. But he was immovable in the things of God, or wherever his conscience was concerned. None could persuade, any more than affright, him to vary, in the least point, from that integrity which was inseparable from his whole character, and regulated all his words and actions. Herein he did, "Stand as an iron pillar strong, and steadfast as a wall of brass"' (accessed at <https://wesleyscholar.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Death-of-G-Whitefield-1770.pdf>).

Separately, I have a short quiz question for you.

Can you name three men who spent a considerable part of their lives in prison (one in ancient Egypt, one in seventeenth-century England and one in twentieth-century America) and who are on record as having said, respectively, '*I have dreamed a dream*', '*I dreamed a dream*' and '*I have a dream*'?

[A clue: each of the three is a real man; no fictitious Shakespearean character here! 😊 ('*I dreamt a dream*', Romeo to Mercutio in Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', Acts 1, Scene 4.)]

God willing, I will name the three men in next Monday's Musings email.

I set out below this week's main 'Musings' document.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

Psalm 73. 23-28 (English Standard Version)

(ii) Food for thought.

Christ and the prophecy of Isaiah.

Isaiah, the Evangelical Prophet, provides us with a remarkable example of how the cross is the central theme of Scripture. The division of the books of the Bible into chapters and verses is, of course, a purely human arrangement; but one feels that in the arrangement of Isaiah there was a special supervision of God.

It contains as many chapters as there are books in the Bible. Then the prophecy has two main divisions. The first corresponding to the Old Testament has its thirty-nine chapters. The second with its marked correspondence to the New Testament has its twenty-seven chapters.

The second section falls naturally into three sections of nine chapters each. The *central section* covers chapters 49-57. It will be noticed that the *central chapter* of this central division is the well-known prophecy of the crucifixion—chapter 53.

In this remarkable prophecy should be included the last three verses of chapter 52, as they are a part of it. Altogether the prophecy contains some fifteen verses. These naturally group themselves, into five groups of three verses each, making Isa. 53. 4-6 the *central triplet*, with verse 5 being the *central verse*: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed" ...

It had been prophesied by Isaiah that "they made for Him a grave with the wicked, but He was with the rich in His death" (Isa. 53. 9). It was their intention to throw the bodies of the three crucified together into a common grave. God had destined otherwise.

But where were the rich who would dare take their stand by One Who was thus crucified? He had had no rich followers ... to Jerusalem He rode on a borrowed ass, and the last supper was celebrated in a borrowed guest chamber.

It was most unexpected that at the hour of His final rejection and death that any rich men would come forward. But Nicodemus and Joseph were strengthened by God for this work ... one brought the ointment, and the other provided the grave'.

(J. M. Davies, 'The Mount Everest of Scripture and of Time', pages 3, 18-19.)

Necessary and fitting.

(i) 'Was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?' (Luke 24. 26).

(ii) 'It was *necessary* for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day' (Luke 24. 46).

(iii) 'It was *fitting* for Him, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering' (Heb. 2. 10).

(iv) 'Such a High Priest was *fitting* for us, who is holy, guileless, undefiled, having been separated from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens' (Heb. 7. 26).

(v) 'It was *necessary* that the heavenly things themselves should be cleansed with better sacrifices' (Heb. 9. 23).

'I will raise up evil against you out of your own house' (2 Sam. 12. 11).

The shameful sexual sin ('he lay with her', 2 Sam. 11. 4) *and murderous violence* (Uriah was struck down and killed through the agency of others, 2 Sam. 11. 15) *in which David engaged secretly is practiced openly by his sons, Amnon* ('he lay with her', 2 Sam. 13. 14) *and Absalom* (Amnon was struck down and killed through the agency of others, 2 Sam. 13. 28).

(Jim Newheiser, 'Lessons from David's Fall and Forgiveness', accessed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-lessons-david-fall-forgiveness/>).

The Pledge and Power of a Promised Hope.

'When the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen left for the North Pole in 1893, he took with him a strong, fast carrier pigeon. For many difficult months, Nansen explored the desolate Arctic regions.

'One day during that time, he penned a tiny message, attached it to the pigeon, and prepared to release the bird to travel the 2,000 miles back to Norway. Nansen took the trembling bird in his hand and flung her upward into the foreboding atmosphere. She circled three times and then headed south—a thousand miles over ice and another thousand over the ocean.

'When the bird finally arrived at the Nansen home, the explorer's wife knew her husband was safe.

'Similarly, the heavenly Dove, the Holy Spirit brought encouragement and hope to the early Christians on the Day of Pentecost. Before the Saviour left this earth, He promised to send them a Helper, a Comforter (John 14. 16, 17, 26; 15. 26, 27, 16. 7-11). Today the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children (Rom. 8. 16). He assures us that *all is well*.

(Paul R. Van Gorder, quoted in '*preceptaustin.org*', commentary on Rom. 15. 13).

The Lord's work and the Lord's will.

'Miriam Booth, the daughter of William Booth, who was the founder of the Salvation Army, was talented and greatly used in the Lord's work.

'Early in life she became seriously ill, and a friend told her it was a pity that her illness was hindering her work for the Lord.

'Her reply was, "*It's wonderful to do the Lord's work, but it is greater still to do the Lord's will*".

(L. Arnold, '*Devotions for Every Day*', page 38.)

Jesus the master teacher.

'One of the most amazing characteristics of Jesus as a teacher is the universality of His appeal.

(i) 'We find Him teaching in the synagogues (Matt. 4. 23; Luke 4. 15).

(ii) 'We find Him teaching in the Temple at Jerusalem (Mark 14. 49; Matt. 26. 55; Luke 20. 1).

(iii) 'We find Him engaged in technical arguments and discussion with the foremost scholars of His day (Matt. 22. 23-46; Mark 12. 13-44; Luke 20. 19-44).

(iv) 'We find Him in the streets and on the roads, using a fishing-boat as a pulpit by the seashore, holding the crowds spellbound with His words (Matt. 11. 1; Mark 2. 13; 4. 1; Luke 5. 17).

(v) 'We find Him teaching the intimate inner circle of the disciples (Matt. 5. 1; Mark 8. 31), and yet we find that amidst the crowds the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12. 37) ...

'There have been very few teachers who were equally at home and equally effective with any kind of audience—but Jesus was. As a teacher He had in a unique degree, the quality of universal appeal'.

(W. Barclay, '*The Mind of Jesus*', pages 97-98.)

'After fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem' (Gal. 2. 1).

The apostle Paul 'goes to Jerusalem, not to have his gospel validated or recast (at this point, Paul is not going to change his mind or direction), but to ensure there are no misrepresentations among the Jerusalem leaders as to what he is preaching, and to encourage those leaders to disassociate themselves entirely from the "false brothers" who are unfairly appealing to Jerusalem to damage Paul and his ministry among the Gentiles ...

'While the Gospel is something worth contending for, there are right ways and wrong ways to go about this business.

'When Peter's inconsistency is public and doing public damage, Paul's rebuke is public (Gal. 2. 11-21: 'to his face'). When Paul is trying to clear the air, find out what is going on, and present the tenor of his own work, he approaches the others "privately" (Gal. 2. 2)'.
(D. A. Carson, '*For the Love of God*', Volume 1, meditation for 26 September.)

'The wisdom of God ... which none of the rulers of this world age knew: for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2. 8).

(i) 'The crucifixion of Christ was a memorable instance of the short-sightedness of worldly policy.

'Not a single calculation of those who compassed the Saviour's death was destined to be fulfilled: (a) Pilate (John 19. 12) did not escape the emperor's displeasure; (b) Caiaphas (John 11. 50) did not save Jerusalem; (c) The scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5. 21; 6. 7; 11. 53) did not put down the doctrine of Jesus'.

(J. J. Lias, '*The First Epistle to the Corinthians: The Cambridge Bible*', page 42.)

(ii) 'Crucified the Lord of glory ... is strongly emphatic, bringing out the contrast between the indignity of the Cross (Heb. 12. 2) and the majesty of the Victim (Luke 22. 69; Luke 23. 43)'.

(A. Robertson and A. Plummer, '*The First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians: The International Critical Commentary*', page 40.)

‘He found him ... in the waste howling wilderness. He compassed him about, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of His eye’ (Deut. 32. 10).

‘The privileged position of Israel was not merely to have been kept from the destroying angel by the blood of the lamb (Exod. 12. 13); neither was it merely to have been secured from Pharaoh by the power of Jehovah (Exod. 14. 3-5); nor to have been kept by the cloud behind them, that their incensed enemies should not approach them, even as they were conducted by the same cloud when it went before them (Exod. 14. 19-20).

‘But, moreover, this is what characterised Israel, that they were guaranteed by God that He would care for them in the wilderness, where they had to walk after having been delivered. They were there with God.

‘But alas! their hearts turned back always in thought towards the country that they left. They were, but too often, taken up with the onions and the cucumbers that they had left (Num. 11. 5)’.

(J. N. Darby, *‘The Earnest of the Inheritance’*, Collected Writings, Volume 16, pages 207-208.)

‘You were called to freedom ... but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’ (Gal. 5. 13–14).

‘What an amazing paradox. We are called to freedom, but through love we should be slaves to one another. *We are not bound to the Jewish law, but we are empowered to live out what it represents:* the love of God expressed in our love of our neighbours [cf. ‘that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us’, Rom. 8. 4]’.

(H. Arnold, *‘The Bible’s Story of Freedom’*, accessed at <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/bible-studies/the-bibles-story-of-freedom.>)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Seeing the doctor.

1. Norman says to his friend, ‘I’m rather worried, Jack. I keep seeing spots before my eyes’.

Concerned, Jack asks, ‘Have you seen your doctor yet?’

‘No’, Norman replies, *‘just spots’*.

2. Following several weeks of distressing symptoms, Sid Powell finally went to see his doctor

The doctor examined Sid carefully and sent him back into the surgery waiting room. The doctor then called Sid’s wife into his office.

‘I have both good and bad news, Mrs Powell’, he said. ‘The bad news is that your husband is suffering from a very rare and serious form of anaemia. Without proper care, he’ll be dead in a few weeks. But there is no need for you to be alarmed. The good news is that we have identified Mr Powell’s condition in time and it can be treated with proper nutrition.

‘From now on’, the doctor explained, ‘you will need to get up early every morning and fix your husband a hot breakfast—pancakes, bacon and eggs. He’ll need a large, home-cooked lunch every day. And you must provide him with an old-fashioned, meat-and-potatoes dinner every evening. It will also be necessary for you to bake frequently—cakes, pies, homemade bread. There is just one more thing. Mr Powell’s immune system is very weak, so it’s important that you keep your home absolutely spotless at all times.

‘I assure you that by taking these actions we can ensure that your husband will live a long and symptom-free life. Do you have any questions?’ ‘No, doctor’, Mrs Powell replied.

‘Do you want to explain all this to your husband or shall I?’ the doctor asked as Mrs Powell was leaving. ‘I’ll do it’, she said and stepped out into the surgery waiting room.

Sid, sensing that things might be serious, immediately probed, ‘It’s bad, isn’t it?’ Mrs Powell nodded.

‘You must tell me. What did the doctor say?’ he asked.

Speaking in hushed tones, his wife blurted out, *‘The doctor says you’re going to die!’*