

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 20 January 2025

Greetings.

Today marks the anniversary of the birth of Susanna Wesley (the mother of John and Charles Wesley) on 20 January 1669.

(She herself was the youngest of twenty-five children and, for her part, bore at least nineteen children of her own, ten of whom lived to adulthood.)

Before reaching today's 'Musings', here are several quotations from Mrs Wesley:

1. The way of practical holiness.

'Take this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind; that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself'.

(Quoted in *'The Mother of the Wesleys: A Biography'* by J. Kirk, 1865, page 178.)

2. The importance of meditation.

'I see nothing in the disposition of your time but what I approve, unless it be that you do not assign enough of it to meditation; which is, I conceive, incomparably the best means to spiritualize our affections, confirm our judgment, and add strength to our pious resolutions'.

(An extract from a letter written to her son, John, as quoted in *'The Mother of the Wesleys: A Biography'* by J. Kirk, 1865, page 288.)

3. The scope and sufficiency of the work of Christ.

'Were there as many worlds to save as Omnipotence could create, His own sacrifice of Himself would be sufficient to save them all'.

(Quoted in *'The Mother of the Wesleys: A Biography'* by J. Kirk, 1865, page 289.)

4. The gospel.

'There are two things to do about the gospel. Believe it and behave it'.

(Widely attributed to Mrs Wesley—although I have failed to trace it to any historical source.)

And now ... I set out below today's 'Musings'.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; He utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah.

Come, behold the works of the Lord, how He has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the chariots with fire.

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah.

(ii) Food for thought.

Psalm 46.

1. 'In the darkest days of the Reformation, Luther said, "Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm, and let them do their worst".'

(W. S. Plumer, 'Studies in the Book of Psalms', 1866, page 252.)

2. 'In the latter part of verse 1, the JND rendering is very beautiful; "a help in distresses, very readily found". In the troubles of life, in times of affliction and adversity, His saints have always found a refuge, a shelter, in God. A New Testament writer concurs when he speaks of "Grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4. 16). He is always at hand with seasonable help for His people ...

'What assurance is this, that though kingdoms are "moved" (Psa. 46. 2), the saints shall not be "moved" (Psa. 46. 5) ... "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psa. 46. 10). He who, in a later day than the Psalmist's, stood in a little ship in a storm on the Galilean Lake, and commanded, "Peace, be still" ((Mark 4. 39), is the same One who in the day of His power will similarly command the storms on earth and create a universal calm. Men must desist, they must be still and restrained, and contemplate that He is God. He will yet be exalted among the nations which for so long have rebelled and raged against Him. In that day there shall be no more rebellion. He will be everywhere exalted'.

(J. M. Flanigan, 'Psalms: What the Bible teaches', pages 209–212.)

'Freely'.

(i) 'The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree in the garden"' (Gen. 2. 16).

(ii) 'I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely' (Hos. 14. 4).

(iii) 'Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3. 24).

(iv) 'He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' (Rom. 8. 32).

(v) 'We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit from God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us by God' (1 Cor. 2. 12).

(vi) 'To him who thirsts, I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely' (Rev. 21. 6; cf. Rev. 21. 17).

'In pain' (Gen. 3. 16-19).

'The curse amounts to labour pains both in the case of the woman and in the case of the man. She labours through pain to produce offspring ('in pain you shall bring forth children', Gen. 3. 16) and he labours through pain to produce food ('cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it', Gen. 3. 17-19) ...

'Neither are cursed directly by God. The serpent, however, is cursed directly (Gen. 3. 14).'

(B. Witherington III, 'What Difference Can a Literal Translation Make—Part 3', accessed at ...

[https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2024/12/18/what-difference-can-a-literal-translation-make-part-3/.](https://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2024/12/18/what-difference-can-a-literal-translation-make-part-3/))

'I am not of the world' (John 17. 14, 16; cf. John 8. 23).

1. 'We observe in His ways a tenderness and a kindness never seen in man, yet we always feel that He "was a stranger". How true this is! ... He did more than refuse the pollution that was around Him— He kept the very distance of holiness itself from every touch or stain of it ...

'His holiness made Him an utter stranger in such a polluted world; His grace kept Him ever active in such a needy and afflicted world. And this sets off His life, I may say, in great moral glory; that though forced, by the quality of the scene around Him, to be a lonely one, yet was He drawn by the need and sorrow of it to be the active One'.

(J. G. Bellett, 'A Short Meditation on the Moral Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ', pages 13-14.)

2. 'Sin itself must have been a continual source of sorrow to the Lord's mind. If Lot vexed his righteous soul with seeing and hearing when so practically far from God, what must the Lord have suffered in passing through the world? I doubt not that, being perfectly in the place God would have Him, He was, not only in degree, but in the very nature of His feelings, calmer than the righteous man in Sodom. Still He was distressed by sin. He looked about upon them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts. His perfect love was relief here, but did not hinder the sorrow'.

(J. N. Darby, 'The Sufferings of Christ', Collected Writings, Volume 7, page 171.)

3. 'What a distasteful world this must have been for the Lord Jesus ...

'When I first started crossing the Atlantic last century, many decades ago, smoking was allowed in airplanes. If you were in the no smoking section, there was only a curtain kept you away from the

smoking section. I'm quite allergic to cigarette smoke, so eight or ten hours on an international flight was just awful to me because I wanted to breathe clean air ...

'It caused me to think about the Lord Jesus—that, *for Him, this world was a smoke-filled environment, and He was allergic to smoke. How He must have longed for the pure air of the glory that He knew well* (John 17. 5) ...

'As one of our Christmas hymns says, "What a tender love was Thine, thus to come from highest bliss down *to such a world as this!*" ... one of the ways that we can really help people to appreciate the Incarnation is by helping them to understand what this world is actually like, not from our point of view but from the Lord Jesus' point of view'.

(S. Ferguson, extracted from the transcript of an interview on 16 December 2024, accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3r8-27OeyzQ&t=3s>—timing from 15.24 to 17.11.)

'With Him'.

1. Dead with Him. "If ye be dead with Christ" (Col. 2. 20).
2. Buried with Him. "Buried with Him in baptism" (Col. 2. 12).
3. Quickened together with Him. "You...hath He quickened together with Him" (Col. 2. 13).
4. Risen with Him. "Ye are risen with Him" (Col. 2. 12).
5. Seated with Him. "Will I grant to sit with Me" (Rev. 3. 21).
6. Suffering with Him. "If so be that we suffer with Him" (Rom. 8. 17).
7. Reigning with Him. "Shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. 20. 6; Rev. 22. 5).

(F. E. Marsh, *Five Hundred Bible Readings*, page 338.)

David 'appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel' (1 Chron. 16. 4).

'The content of their songs focuses on what the Lord has accomplished on their behalf. God's people preach the faithfulness of God to each other: "Remember the wondrous works that He has done ... Declare His glory among the nations ... Ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name ... Worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth" (1 Chron. 16. 12–30).

Eyes are encouraged to look up and out. Hearts are to recount the innumerable evidences of grace. *When voices are lifted, souls are also lifted* ...

'When we have become weary of the flesh that still remains in us, and the groaning of a creation waiting to be redeemed, we can call on the God who has never failed nor ever will fail'.

(L. Chandler, *Worship Together*, in *Daily Joy*, 2022, page 26.)

'Where have you come from, and where are you going?' (Gen. 16. 8).

'The thirsting soul pants for its original *fountain-head* (Gen. 2. 7) and for the *estuary toward which it streams* (Rev. 21:6).

(E. Arnold, *Life Is Eternal*, accessed at <https://www.plough.com/en/topics/faith/devotional-reading/life-is-eternal>.)

Grieving: 'falling apart' or 'coming together'?

'When Jacob learned of his beloved son Joseph's (supposed) death, he did five striking things in response to his grief: he tore his clothes; he put on sackcloth; he mourned many days; he wept; he refused to be comforted (Gen. 37. 34-35). Our tendency might be to dismiss some of his reactions as culturally different, unusual. These reactions to grief, however, were common in ancient Near Eastern cultures. After observing our culture, I wonder if we might learn something from Jacob about facing grief.

'We have intriguing expressions about showing grief and other strong emotions. They include "falling apart", "losing it", and "breaking down" ... Our language constructs our perception of grief and our preference for turning from grief rather than facing it.

'I remember visitation at the funeral home following the death of my younger brother. When my friend, John C., came through the line, he hugged me and I wept. Later, someone who had observed my reaction described it as "Dave lost it". After hearing this, I didn't want to make others feel uncomfortable, so I chose to hide my grief. I got the cultural message and let it shape my response to my grief ...

'Jacob not only faced his grief but also embraced it. He put on sackcloth—a culturally accepted way of expressing grief—which was typically coarse black cloth made of goat's hair, much like wearing black in some cultures today; he wept and he mourned ... Jesus wept when His friend Lazarus died ...

‘What if expressing grief is actually “coming together” rather than “falling apart”—our heart and spirit coming together with our body?

(D. Beach, ‘Facing your Emotions’, in ‘When Grief Goes Deep: Where Healing Begins’, edited by T. J. Beals, pages 8-9.)

‘Great is the mystery of godliness’ (1 Tim. 3. 16).

‘The centrality of Christ to every aspect of God’s eternal salvation plan is captured in this verse:

(i) The pre-existent Christ was manifested in the flesh and fulfilled His earthly ministry, climaxing in His crucifixion (1 Tim. 6. 13). Having satisfied God’s righteous demands in His death,

(ii) He was vindicated by (possibly in) the Holy Spirit through his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1. 4; 8. 11).

(iii) Following His ascension, He appeared to angels (1 Tim. 5. 21; cf. Eph. 1. 21). Since then,

(iv) The gospel about Him is preached to the nations (1 Tim. 2. 7; cf. Rom. 1. 16),

(v) People believe on Him for eternal life (1 Tim. 1. 16); and,

(vi) As the one taken up in glory, He now lives and intercedes for them (Luke 24. 51; Rom. 8. 34).

‘That is, Christ Himself—“incarnate and glorified”—is “the mystery of godliness”’.

(Adapted from C. Smith, ‘The One Mediator we find in 1 Timothy’, accessed at <https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-one-mediator-we-find-in-1-timothy/>.)

The main message of the book of Nehemiah.

‘The book of Nehemiah is often treated as a manual on godly leadership. I wonder if this does justice to the book.

‘Did Nehemiah intend to write a manual on leadership? Is the book included in the canon for that purpose—as if we turn, say, to Acts to discover the history of the early church and to Nehemiah to discover the principles of leadership? This is not to say that there is nothing about leadership to be learned from Nehemiah—or, for that matter, from Moses, David, Peter, and Paul. Yet a reading of this book that focuses on the theme of leadership is bound to be skewed ...

‘Nehemiah is a book about God’s faithfulness and about the agents God used in re-establishing His covenant people in the Promised Land at the end of the exile—about the first steps taken to secure their protection and identity as God’s people and to assure their covenantal faithfulness’.

(D. A. Carson, ‘For the Love of God’, Volume 2, meditation for 11 January.)

New Testament books where the writer states his purpose in writing towards the close.

(i) The Gospel according to John: ‘Jesus did many other signs ... which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name’ (John 20. 30-31).

(ii) The epistle to the Hebrews: ‘Bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.’ (Heb. 13. 22).

(iii) The first epistle of Peter: ‘I have written to you briefly ... testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand’ (1 Pet. 5. 12).

‘No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it’ (1 Cor. 10. 13).

‘All temptation is common. All temptation is escapable. Every believer has the ability to overcome it ... Behind every temptation, great or small, stands the faithfulness of God eager to provide a way of escape. When we answer His faithfulness with our faithfulness, temptation loses both its glitter and its brawn’.

(J. Wilkin, ‘1 Corinthians 10’, accessed at <https://mailchi.mp/crossway/god-is-not-holding-out-on-you>.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Eight-year-old Emily Brooks brought her term report home from school.

Although her marks were good—mainly A’s and a couple of B’s—at the close of the report, her teacher Mrs Thompson had written:

‘Emily is an intelligent and well-mannered little girl. She has only one noticeable fault—she talks too much. I have a method which I have used successfully many times with others and which I believe will break Emily of the habit. But, before I take the necessary action, I need your authorization. If you are happy for me to proceed, please sign the attached card and return it to me at the school’.

Emily's dad readily signed the card. But he added the following short note on the back of the card:

'To Mrs Thompson from Mr Brooks. Please let me know if your idea works with Emily. If it does, *I would like to try it with her mother*'.