

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 15 June 2026

(i) Scripture.

Elijah said to all the people, 'Come near to me'. So, all the people came near to him.

And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, 'Israel shall be your name'.

Then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord; and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two seahs ['measures'] of seed. And he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, 'Fill four waterpots with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood'. Then he said, 'Do it a second time', and they did it a second time; and he said, 'Do it a third time', and they did it a third time. So, the water ran all around the altar; and he also filled the trench with water.

And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel and I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that you are the Lord God, and that you have turned their hearts back to you again'.

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench. Now when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, 'The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!'

1 Kings 18. 30-39 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Elijah said, "How long do you halt between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him". But the people answered him not a word' (1 Kings 18. 21).

(i) **The crisis.** For some time, the people of Israel had tried to combine the worship of the Lord and the worship of Ba'al. They were straddling the spiritual fence. And the time had come for a showdown. But, if the need was great and the time was right, God's man was ready!

(ii) **The question.** 'How long...two opinions?' The word translated 'halt' means 'to limp'. It may well indicate 'to hobble on two crutches', referring to Israel's inconsistent dependence on both the Lord and Ba'al for their blessings and prosperity.

As a man marked by passionate zeal and jealousy 'for the Lord of hosts' (1 Kings 19. 10, 14), Elijah had no patience whatever with such double-mindedness (cf. James 1. 8). In Elijah's rulebook you couldn't play for both sides!

(iii) **The challenge.** 'If the Lord...follow Him'. Who is the real God? 'This burning question ignites the whole episode' (Dale Ralph Davis, *The Wisdom and the Folly*, page 235).

To Elijah himself, there was no 'if'; he had no doubt whatever that the Lord was God. But the challenge he presented exposed the absurdity of the people's position. Religions so diametrically opposed could not both be right. Elijah demanded a definite decision.

As always, the recognition of 'who is God' and of 'who God is' demands an appropriate response. It is wholly inconsistent to believe in God and not to 'follow' Him—to walk in His ways. Correct theology always leads to discipleship.

(iv) **The response.** 'Not a word'. There was no more reaction from the people to Elijah's forthright challenge than there would be later from Ba'al to his prophets' frenzied cries (1 Kings 18. 26, 29)!

Joshua had once faced the nation with a similar challenge: to serve the Lord or to serve another god (Josh. 24. 15). But unlike those in Joshua's day (Josh. 24. 16-18), Elijah's audience held its peace!

(v) **The sequel.** Although in the ensuing 'fire contest', Elijah saw to it that all the odds were stacked in favour of Ba'al (1 Kings 18. 25, 32-35), the Lord was demonstrated decisively to be the true God and was confessed as such by the people ('The Lord, He is God', 1 Kings 18. 39), in words reminiscent of the meaning of Elijah's own name ('the Lord is God').

(Reproduced with kind permission from *'Day by Day: Bible Promises'*, (Precious Seed Publications), page 69.)

Prayer.

1. 'True prayer is an awareness of our helpless need and an acknowledgment of divine adequacy'.

(Ray Stedman, *Jesus Teaches on Prayer*, page 7.)

2. 'In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence'.

(Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, page 22.)

Sins not remembered.

'What does the Scripture mean when it says "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more" (Heb. 10. 17)? To understand that, we must understand the term "remember" in the Bible. In the ancient world the kings in their palaces had a number of officials ... The Old Testament tells us that there was one official who was called "the remembrance" or "the recorder". His job was to keep the records of everything that went on in the realm, so that the king could summon the remembrancer at any time and find out what had happened.

'So, if a king had a sleepless night, like old Ahasuerus did (Esther 6. 1), he would get up and call for the remembrancer to bring the books and to start reading. If he came to the name of someone who had done terrible things, the king would ask if he had been sentenced and punished. If the remembrancer said, "No, your Majesty, he hasn't been dealt with yet", the king would say, "Now that you've brought it to my mind, please carry out my sentence on him".

'That is what the Bible means by remembering somebody's sins. It means to haul them up in court for the judge to pronounce the sentence of "guilty" and prescribe the penalty.

'That is what God has said He will never do with us. He will never drag us into His judicial court, never rake up the guilt of our sins. He will never again pronounce the sentence, nor have the penalty executed. Why won't He? Because He's already done it once and for all, when our blessed Lord Jesus died at Calvary'.

(David Gooding, 'A Glimpse of Heaven: One Study from Revelation 21 on the Believer's Future', Myrtlefield Sermons. This 'Musing' is reproduced from the 'Musing' dated 7 February 2022.)

Christ our object.

(i) He is the Object of our Faith. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus" (Acts 16. 31).

(ii) He is the Object of our Worship. 'They worshipped Him" (Luke 24. 52).

(iii) He is the Object of our Life. 'Should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him" (2 Cor. 5. 15).

(iv) He is the Object of our Imitation. 'Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example" (1 Pet. 2. 21).

(v) He is the Object of our Hope. 'Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope" (1 Tim. 1. 1).

(F. E. Marsh, 'Five Hundred Bible Readings', page 178—slightly adapted.)

The tabernacle.

'God describes the creation of the whole universe in about 50 verses; for the tabernacle, He takes 50 chapters!

'There were some things missing ...

'There were no windows. ... this is a scale model of heaven, and there the inhabitants have no need of the "light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light" (Rev. 22. 5).

'There was no floor but the desert sand, perhaps reminding them that they weren't Home yet!

'There were no seats for the priests, because, like mothers, their work was never done. Thankfully, when Christ, our High Priest, having 'by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1. 3), His work never to be repeated.

'Of course, there were no locks on the door or gate, in spite of the fabulous wealth within. God handles His own security, thank you very much.

'We will find out there were no steps to the altar (Exod. 20. 26), for the work of salvation does not allow for human effort.

'And, interestingly, there were no cherubim on the outer gate, for God welcomes all, sinners though they be, to come and be saved'.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, 'The Mystery of the Missing Furniture', Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 27 December 2021.)

'What have you to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?' (Jer. 2. 18).

'I have tasted of Christ's own manna, and it has put my mouth out of taste for the brown bread of this world's joys'.

(Samuel Rutherford, quoted by C. H. Spurgeon, 'Words of Expostulation', sermon preached on 20 January 1861 at Exeter Hall, London.)

The fear of sin: John Chrysostom (fourth century AD).

1. 'Go and tell the Empress, I fear nothing but sin'.

(Attributed to John Chrysostom, when threatened with banishment by Empress Eudoxia, the wife of Emperor Theodosius II.)

2. 'I fear not an enemy's plots: one thing only do I fear, which is sin. Fear not the devices of a potentate, but fear the power of sin'.

(John Chrysostom, 'Two Homilies on Eutropius', Homily 2, paragraph 4.)

Matthew 6. 1-18.

'The first three sections of Matthew 6 (which itself is the central chapter of the Sermon on the Mount) deal with three fundamental acts of piety in Judaism: (i) giving to the needy (traditionally called "alms-giving"), (ii) prayer, and (iii) fasting.

'The common link is striking: Jesus recognizes how easy it is for sinners to engage in worthy, philanthropic and even religious activities, less in order to do what is right than to be admired for doing what is right.

'(i) If being thought generous is more important than being generous, (ii) if gaining a reputation for prayerfulness is more important to us than praying when no one but God is listening, (iii) if fasting is something in which we engage only if we can disingenuously talk about it, then these acts of piety become acts of impiety.

'The fundamental way to check out how sound we are in each of these areas is to perform these acts so quietly that none but God knows we are doing them.

'So be generous, but tell no one what you are giving (Matt. 6. 1-4). Insist that even the recipients be silent. Pray far more in secret than you do in public (Matt. 6. 5-8). By all means, fast—but tell no one you are doing so (Matt. 6. 16-18).

'As for the middle item in these three traditional acts of piety, there is a further test: do not bother to ask your heavenly Father for forgiveness where you yourself are unwilling to forgive (Matt. 6. 14-15).

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, comment for 6 January.)

For the sake of another.

(i) Blessing for Joseph's sake: 'the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake' (Gen. 39. 5).

(ii) Kindness for Jonathan's sake: 'David said, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"' (2 Sam. 9. 1).

(iii) Forgiveness for Christ's sake: 'forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. (Eph. 4. 32).

Parallels between Moses on Mount Sinai and Jesus during His transfiguration (Matt. 17. 1-8).

'Jesus goes up on a mountain and is transfigured beside Moses and Elijah. And yet while all three Synoptic Gospels include the mount of Jesus's transfiguration, Matthew in particular draws his readers' attention to Moses and Sinai. The story he tells echoes Israel's story, completes it, and moves it forward.

'In all the Synoptics, Jesus—like Moses—goes up on a high mountain (Matt. 17. 1; cf. Exod. 24. 12, 15). After six days (Matt. 17. 1; cf. Exod. 24. 16), three individuals are given special privilege (Matt. 17. 1; cf. Exod. 24. 1), a cloud descends and covers the mountain (Matt. 17. 5; cf. Exod. 24. 15-18), and a voice calls out from the cloud (Matt. 17. 5; cf. Ex. 24. 16).

Unlike the other Synoptics, however, Matthew includes details that provide further fodder for seeing the Moses story as central:

(i) First, Matthew lists Moses first in the naming of Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17. 3; contrast Mark 9. 4).

(ii) Second, he includes an allusion to the coming of a prophet like Moses. The statement about Jesus on the mountain is identical to the one at His baptism—"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3. 17) —except for the addition of this command: "Listen to Him". Why? Because Moses commanded the people that when the prophet like him comes, "to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18. 15).

(iii) Third, Matthew is the only author to reference Jesus's shining face (Matt. 17. 2; cf. Exod. 34. 29).

(P. Schreiner, 'Matthew's Gospel as You've Never Read It Before', accessed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/matthew-gospel-never-read-before/>.)

'Make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28. 19).

'When placed within the overarching story of the Bible, the universal scope of this commission finds its origin in the promise God made to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12. 3).

'It is no wonder that Matthew begins his Gospel by retracing Christ's lineage to the forefather of the Jewish faith (Matt. 1. 1-17), and then ends his Gospel with a commission that has in view the worldwide extension of blessing initially promised to the patriarch (Matt. 28. 18-20)'.
'

(Trevin Wax, 'Five Ways We Get the Great Commission Wrong'.)

'He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Heb. 1. 3).

'The impact of Jesus' enthronement was at least twofold in the ancient world: He brought victory over the spiritual powers that the ancients feared and which controlled their lives, and He demonstrated the emptiness of the Roman Emperor's claims to be lord and saviour over this world ...

'The Christian phrase "Jesus is Lord" (Acts 10. 36; 1 Cor. 12. 3) stood in stark contrast to "Caesar is Lord".'

(J. Paulien, 'The Resurrection and the New Testament', Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 50, No. 2, 258.)

'The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy"' (John 10. 33).

'The fourth gospel records three occasions on which the Jews sought to kill our Lord, and each time it was because He had spoken what they considered to be blasphemy (John 5. 18; 8. 59; 10. 31; cf. Lev. 24. 16).'

(J. N. Case, 'The "I am"', 'Excellent Things', New Series XVIII, 08, page 78.)

Rising above difficulties: 'Rejoice in the Lord alway' (Phil. 4. 4).

'We have to pass through the world, and there are difficulties in our path, temptations to draw us aside; but one walking in the power of God's Spirit rises above all the difficulties in the midst of which he is. In Philippians is brought out the power of God's Spirit acting in one walking in the right path, and the result is a person entirely above it all, one who can "rejoice in the Lord alway".

'We may remember, too, that Paul had been four years in prison at the time, two of them with a soldier chained to him; and, what was still more trying, his work as an apostle put a stop to, his activity all come to an end. He might have reproached himself as to going up to Jerusalem, and so on, but he does not; he rises above it all.'

(J. N. Darby, 'This One Thing', Collected Writings, volume 32, page 347.)

'Christ Jesus ... a propitiation in His blood ... in His divine forbearance He had passed over previously committed sins ... at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus'. Rom. 3. 25-26.

'God forgave sinners before Christ died. God forgives sinners since Christ died. But God forgives all sinners because Christ died.'

(J. MacArthur Jr, 'The Final Passover, the First Communion', accessed at <https://www.gty.org/sermons/42-269/the-final-passover-the-first-communion>.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

At a training session at a new fire station in rural Wales, the team was assembled around the fire station's lunch table.

Idris Williams, the training officer, was explaining the behaviour of fire.

'Imagine you receive an emergency call. When your engine pulls up to an apartment building, you see puffs of smoke coming from the eaves, blackened windows and little or no visible flame. What does this tell you?' he asked—expecting to hear that the apartment building is in a possible backdraught condition, a very dangerous situation for fire fighters.

After a few moments awkward silence, Owain pipes up from the back,

'That you've gone to the right place'.