

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 13 December 2021.

Greetings.

This is your weekly 'Musings' email from me.

Yesterday, the 12th of December, marked the anniversary of the date in 1936 when the former King Edward VIII left England, having just renounced the throne.

It was on 10th December 1936 that Edward VIII signed an Instrument of Abdication. The next day, Parliament approved the Abdication Instrument, and Edward VIII's reign came to an end. He had reigned for less than eleven months, which made him the shortest-reigning monarch of the United Kingdom.

All this was that he might marry an American divorcée, Mrs Wallis Simpson. The former king was made a royal duke, 'the Duke of Windsor', by his brother when his brother became King George VI.

But why do I tell you this?

Not, I assure you, because I am over interested in the political and constitutional considerations which necessitated the abdication nor in any alleged sympathies which the Duke of Windsor had for Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.

The reason for today's short history lesson is that I wanted to draw your attention to the more-or-less closing words of the Duke of Windsor's published memoirs, '*A King's Story*'.

The Duke's own words (on page 378) are:

'And so it came to pass that at two o'clock on the morning of December 12 1936, H.M.S. Fury slid silently and unescorted out of Portsmouth harbour. Watching the shore of England recede, I was swept by many emotions ... *it had been hard to give up the throne* ... But of one thing I was certain: so far as I was concerned *love had triumphed*'.

I do not doubt that '*it had been hard*' for King Edward VIII '*to give up the throne*'.

But I know Someone who, out of **far greater love**, gave up a **far grander throne**.

I know Someone who exchanged *the lofty throne of heaven* (Isa. 6. 1) for *an animal's rough feeding trough* (Luke 2. 7).



Now, that is something to ponder in the run-up to Christmas!

But you and I know something even more wonderful ...

***He left the splendour of heaven,
Knowing His destiny
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha,
There to lay down His life for me.***

If that isn't love
The ocean is dry,
There's no star in the sky
And the sparrow can't fly.

(Lyrics by Dottie Rambo)



Below you will find this week's 'Musings'.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

It happened in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the entire world should be registered [on tax lists]. This registration was before Quirinius governed Syria.

And all went to be registered, each one to his own town.

Joseph went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea to the town of David called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David, to be registered with Mary, who was betrothed to him and pregnant.

It happened that while they were there, the days for her to give birth were fulfilled; she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a feeding trough because there was no place for them in the guest room.

Luke 2. 1-7 (*Translation: David E. Garland, 'Luke: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament'*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the thousands of Judah, out of you shall He come forth unto me who is to be Ruler in Israel' (Micah 5. 2).

'Micah the prophet envisages a king from the Davidic line. He springs from Bethlehem Ephrathah, ancestral home of David, the birthplace of his dynasty ...

'So, in the fullness of time, God arranged international affairs to ensure that Jesus was born not in Nazareth, the residence of Mary and Joseph, but in Bethlehem, their ancestral home (Luke 2. 4). It was almost as if Almighty God was going a second mile: not only would it be said that Jesus "as to His human nature was a descendant of David" (Rom. 1. 3) and thus an offshoot from Bethlehem, but that He was actually born there.

'Indeed, when the Magi arrived in Herod's court to inquire as to where the promised King had been born, the chief priests and teachers of the Law quoted this passage in Micah 5 to settle the matter: He would be born in Bethlehem in Judea (Matt. 2. 5-6). Though the village of Bethlehem was entirely unprepossessing ("small among the clans of Judah"), with such a son it could "by no means" be considered "least among the rulers of Judah" (Matt. 2. 6).

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God: Volume 2'*, 30 November.)

'Matthew is interpreting the text (Matt. 2. 6 with Micah 5. 2) to emphasize that the insignificant village of Bethlehem has become truly great because the Messiah was born there'.

(Grant R. Osborne, *'Matthew (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on The New Testament)'*, on Matt. 2. 5.)

'The magi were seeking the King; Herod was opposing the King; and the Jewish priests were ignoring the King.

'These priests knew the Scriptures and pointed others to the Saviour, but they would not go to worship Him themselves! They quoted Micah 5. 2 but did not obey it. They were five miles from the very Son of God, yet they did not go to see Him!'

(Warren W. Wiersbe, *'The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: New Testament'*, page 13.)

Our Lord's 'Let us go' sayings.

(i) To neighbouring towns – to preach: 'Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also' (Mark 1. 38).

(ii) To the other side of the Lake of Galilee – to cast out an unclean spirit: 'Let us go over to the other side of the lake' (Luke 8. 22).

(iii) To a grave in Judea – *to raise a dead man*: ‘Let us go into Judaea again ... Let us go to him’ (John 11. 7, 15).

(iv) To the cross – *to suffer and to die*: ‘Arise, let us go hence’ (John 14. 31); ‘Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrays me is at hand’ (Mark 14. 42).

‘He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (Phil. 2. 8).

‘Wonderful is that act of humiliation by which Christ became a servant; more wonderful still that by which He underwent death; but most wonderful of all that by which He underwent the death of the Cross. It is this which overwhelms us with wonder at His obedience’.

(Henry Newland, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Philippians*, page 79.)

‘Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree’ (Deut. 21. 23; Gal. 3. 13).

‘For this cause the Jews also eagerly desired to slay Him in this manner (Mark 15. 13-14), to make Him a reproach, that if no one fell away from Him by reason of His death, yet they might from the manner of His death ...

‘Not by slaying Him, but by slaying Him in such sort did they think to make Him abominable, to prove Him more abominable than all men, but they availed nothing’.

(John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians: Homily 7*, paragraph 11.)

‘As they required ... whom they had desired ... to their will’ (Luke 23. 24-25)

‘Note the insistence on the will of the Jews. ‘Pilate gave sentence that it should be *as they required*’: he delivered Barabbas, *‘whom they had desired’* ... and ‘he delivered Jesus *to their will*’.

The scriptures are their own commentary. ‘And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain’ (Acts 13. 28).

Here was the will of the flesh in all its wickedness, and in vain did the Gentile ruler attempt to rid himself of guilt by the cynical manoeuvre of washing his hands before the crowd (Matt. 27. 24) ...

But none of this took God by surprise. Although men were working out their own will, and were thus responsible in that sense for the Lord’s death, all unknown to them they were also serving the purpose of God (Acts 2. 23) ...

Little did these people realize that the crucifixion of Christ ... would, in fact, involve the working out of the good purpose of God, and that His sacrificial death upon the cross of Golgotha would be the basis on which all blessing for mankind depends’.

(Dennis MacKinnon, *Moments with the Master*, Precious Seed Publications, page 355.)

‘When Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit”’ (Luke 23. 46).

‘Among rabbis of a later time, this simple prayer from Psalm 31. 5, “Into your hands I commit my spirit”, was part of a Jewish evening prayer that was to be repeated before sleep. This tradition probably reflects earlier practice, and Jesus Himself may well have regularly used this prayer to end His own evening devotions’.

(Murray J. Harris, *Navigating Tough Texts: A Guide to Problem Passages in the New Testament*, page 61.)

Suffering and the cross.

‘I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross ...

‘In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away.

‘And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.

‘That is the God for me!

‘He laid aside His immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of His’.

(John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, pages 335-336.)

'The story is told of a father whose son was killed in a terrible accident. He came to his pastor and in great anger said, "Where was God when my son died?"

'The pastor thought for a moment and replied, "The same place He was when *His* Son died"'

(Ray Pritchard, '*Keep Believing: Finding God in your Deepest Struggles*', Chapter 3.)

'Speaking about Christ'.

'When we speak about wisdom, we are speaking about Christ. When we speak about virtue, we are speaking about Christ. When we speak about justice, we are speaking about Christ. When we speak about truth and life and redemption, we are speaking about Christ'.

(Traditionally attributed to Ambrose of Milan: quoted from Randy Alcorn, '*It's All About Jesus*', page 30).

The Lord Jesus, the King.

'Scripture never speaks of Him as King of the Church. The Church has a much higher place. It is His body and His bride. Nay, when He takes His great power and reigns, we shall reign with Him. He is on His Father's throne now; when He sits on His own, those who overcome will sit there with Him.

It is a wholly false and unscriptural dogma, derogatory to the glory and truth of the Church and to the value of Christ's death and love, to make Christ King of the Church'.

(J. N. Darby, '*Presbyterianism*', Collected Writings, Volume 14, page 343.)

Four altars, four wells and four pillars.

(i) Abraham built four altars: Gen. 12. 7, 8; 13. 18; 22. 9.

(ii) Isaac sank four wells: Gen. 26. 19-20, 21, 22, 25.

(iii) Jacob set up four pillars: Gen.28. 18-22; 31. 45-52; 35. 14, 20.

'I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee ... for a light of the Gentiles' (Isa. 42. 6).

'The saintly Miss Frances Ridley Havergal lived and moved in the Word of God. It was her constant solace, delight, and inspiration.

'It is related of her that, on the last day of her life, she asked a friend to read to her the forty-second chapter of Isaiah.

'When the friend read the sixth verse ... Miss Havergal stopped her. "*Called—held—kept—used*", she whispered. "Well, I will just *go home on that*".

'And she did "go home on that", as on a celestial chariot'.

(Joseph Excell, '*A word to go home on*', Biblical Illustrator, Volume 3, on Isa. 42. 6.)

'I count ...'.

(i) 'I count not my life dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy' (Acts 20. 24).

(ii) 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phil. 3. 8).

(iii) 'I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do ... I press toward the mark for the prize' (Phil. 3. 13-14).

'The trial of your faith' (1 Pet. 1. 7).

'God will be true to every believer ... If one promise of God to one of His people should fail, that one failure would suffice to mar the veracity of the Lord to all eternity; they would publish it in the "Diabolical Gazette", and in every street of Tophet they would howl it out, "God has failed. God has broken His promise. God has ceased to be faithful to His people" ... all our faith must be tested. God builds no ships but what He sends to sea.

(C. H. Spurgeon, '*Let Him deliver Him now*', Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit No. 2029, pages 5-6.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Brrr ...!

1.

It was late November and elderly Indian Chief, Running Water, felt in his bones that it was going to be a cold winter.

So he commanded all his tribe to collect firewood. But, to double-check his prediction, he called the National Weather Service and asked a meteorologist if the winter was going to be a cold one.

'Well', the meteorologist responded cautiously, 'according to our indicators, we think it might just be'.

Following that phone call, Running Water told his people to collect extra wood, just in case.

A week later, he called the National Weather Service again, and they confirmed that it would indeed be a harsh winter that year. This time, Running Water ordered his tribe to scavenge for every scrap of wood they could find.

In the middle of December, he called the National Weather Service yet again, this time to check that their earlier forecast still stood. 'Are you absolutely certain', he questioned, 'that this winter is going to be very, very cold?'

'Oh, yes, there is no doubt about it', the meteorologist replied, '*The Indians are collecting wood like crazy!*'

(As an aside, Chief Running Water had a droll sense of humour. When his wife gave birth to twins, he insisted on naming them 'Hot' and 'Cold'.)

2.

One frosty winter's morning, Wilbur Smith was hard at work in his office in the city when he received a text message from his wife, Ethel.

'Help!' it read, 'Windows frozen!'

'No need to panic', Wilbur texted back. 'Pour lots of lukewarm water over. Keep me informed'.

Five minutes later, Ethel's text read, 'Did as told. *Computer won't work at all now*'.