

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 6 June 2022.

It was four months ago today, on 6 February, that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II reached a great milestone in her long life—she had then occupied the throne for seventy years. That historic reign has been celebrated over the Queen's 'Platinum Jubilee Central Weekend' (2-5 June), which concluded yesterday.

Her Majesty the Queen is by far Britain's **longest reigning monarch**—surpassing the rule of Queen Victoria by almost seven years and approaching that of King Louis XIV of France, whose reign of over 72 years is the longest recorded of any monarch of a sovereign country in history.

When we turn to scripture, we find that **the longest recorded reign** was also *spiritually the worst*. This was the fifty-five-year reign of Manasseh, the king of Judah (2 Kings 21. 1-2; 2 Chron. 33. 1-2).

Manasseh came to the throne at the tender age of twelve (2 Chron. 33. 1), having been born three years after a critically important prayer of his godly father, Hezekiah.

Hezekiah had 'prayed to the Lord' when he discovered that he was terminally ill at the very time his nation faced a full-blown invasion by the Assyrians (2 Kings 20. 1; 2 Chron. 32. 24; Isa. 38. 1).

In response to his prayer, Hezekiah (i) was granted a fifteen-year extension to his life and (ii) was guaranteed deliverance 'out of the hand of the king of Assyria' (2 Kings 20. 6; Isa. 38. 6).

It was during Hezekiah's fifteen-year extension that Manasseh was born. Had Hezekiah not prayed as he did, there would, therefore, have been no Manasseh.

Given the disastrous effect of Manasseh's long and evil reign (2 Kings 21. 10-16; 23. 26-27; 24. 1-4), we might be tempted to think that it would have been far better for all concerned if either (i) Hezekiah had not prayed or (ii) God had not heard his prayer.

But, if we did think that, we would be wrong—**very** wrong!

For, when we turn to the genealogy of our Lord Jesus recorded in Matthew 1, we find that Manasseh's name is included there (Matt. 1. 10). Yes, the name of Israel and Judah's worst king (although genuinely repentant in his later days, 2 Chron. 33. 12-16) appears as an essential link in the ancestral chain of 'Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' (Matt. 1. 1).

That is, humanly speaking, 'no Manasseh, no Jesus'!

We must conclude, therefore, that Hezekiah prayed 'according to' God's will. Here is a classic illustration, surely, of the assurance given by the apostle John towards the close of his first epistle:

'This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him' (1 John 5. 14-15).

Certainly, Hezekiah's prayer formed an essential part of God's purpose in that our Lord's royal descent hinged on it. Ponder it well; without that prayer and its answer, Israel would have had no Messiah and the world would have had no Saviour!

Surely, then, we must regard Hezekiah's prayer as a 'God-prompted' prayer—as a prayer which formed as much a part of God's gracious purpose for His people and for the world as was His answer to that prayer.

It has been rightly said that, 'Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man's will done in Heaven, but for getting God's will done on Earth' (Robert Law, 'The Tests of Life', page 304).

In summary, we learn from the history surrounding **the longest recorded reign in the Bible** that God has chosen to use prayer as an important means for the outworking of His purpose.

True prayer aims, therefore, not at changing God's will but at accomplishing it.

(The following biblical references record other instances which confirm the truth of these claims: (i) Ezek. 36. 36-37; (ii) 2 Sam. 7. 16, 25, 29; cf. 2 Kings 8. 25-26; (iii) James 5. 17 with Deut. 11. 16-17; and (iv) Dan 9. 2-3, 17.)

The main Musings for this week follow below.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

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### **(i) Scripture.**

Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning His Son.

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.

1 John 5. 10-15 (*English Standard Version*)

### **(ii) Food for thought.**

#### ***'In the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence' (Prov. 14. 26).***

'It was bravely done by old Hugh Latimer when he preached before Henry the Eighth.

'It was the custom of the Court preacher to present the king with something on his birthday and Latimer presented Henry VIII with a pocket-handkerchief with this text in the corner, "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" ... And then he preached a sermon before his most gracious majesty against sins of lust, and he delivered himself with tremendous force, not forgetting or abridging the personal application.

'And the king said that next time Latimer preached—the next Sunday—he should apologize, and he would make him so mould his sermon as to eat his own words. Latimer thanked the king for letting him off so easily.

'When the next Sunday came, he stood up in the pulpit and said: "Hugh Latimer, thou art this day to preach before the high and mighty prince Henry, King of Great Britain and France. If thou sayest one single word that displeases his Majesty he will take thy head off; therefore, mind what thou art".

'But then said he, "Hugh Latimer, thou art this day to preach before the Lord God Almighty, who is able to cast both body and soul into hell, and so tell the king the truth outright". And so he did. His performance was equal to his resolution.

'However, the king did not take off his head, he respected him all the more. The fear of the Lord gave him strong confidence ...

"Fear him, ye saints, and ye will then  
Have nothing else to fear"

(C. H. Spurgeon, *'Godly Fear and its Goodly Consequence'*, Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, 1876, Sermon Number 1290.)

#### ***Adam and Noah.***

'The blameless Noah falls victim to the fruit of the vine [Gen. 9. 21]. The ironic similarities to and differences from Adam's eating of another fruit [Gen. 3. 6] show that we are dealing with another fall. For example, whereas Adam's fruit made him aware of his nakedness so that he tried to cover it up [Gen. 3. 7], Noah's fruit led him to uncover himself unwittingly [Gen. 9. 22-23]'

(G. J. Wenham, *'Story as Torah: reading Old Testament narrative ethically'*, page 35.)

#### ***Reuben and Absalom.***

'It was the sin of Reuben that he defiled his father's bed [Gen. 35. 22; 49. 4]; yet not in the same height of lewdness as Absalom [2 Sam. 16. 21-22].

(i) What Reuben did in a youthful wantonness, Absalom did in a malicious despite.

(ii) Reuben sinned with one, Absalom with ten.

(iii) Reuben secretly, Absalom in the open eyes of heaven and earth.

(iv) Yet old Jacob could say of Reuben, "Thou shall not excel; thy dignity is gone"; while Ahithophel says to Absalom, "Thy dignity shall arise from incest: climb up to thy father's bed, if thou wilt sit in his throne". Ahithophel was a politician; Jacob was a prophet. If the one spoke from carnal sense, the other from divine revelation.

'Certainly, to sin is not the way to prosper. Whatever vain fools promise to themselves, there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord [Prov. 21. 30]'

(Bishop Joseph Hall, '*Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testaments*', page 235.)

**'He being dead yet speaks' (Heb. 11. 4).**

'Books may preach when the author cannot, when the author may not, when the author dares not, yea, and which is more, when the author is not'

(Thomas Brooks, '*Heaven on Earth: a Treatise on Christian Assurance*', page 12.)

**The Gospel.**

'The gospel contains:

- (i) Facts to be believed (1 Cor. 15. 3-5);
- (ii) Commands to be obeyed (Mark 16. 16; Rom. 10. 9-10);
- (iii) Warnings to be heeded (Heb. 2. 1); and
- (iv) Promises to be enjoyed (Mark 10. 29-30; 2 Cor. 5. 1-2)'

(James Fox, '*He Being Dead Yet Speaketh*', a funeral sermon, published in '*Wedding and Funeral Sermons*', edited by David A. Padfield, page 24.)

**The authority of Christ.**

'[Jesus] put Himself in a moral category in which He was alone. Everybody else was in darkness; He was the light of the world. Everybody else was hungry, He was the bread of life. Everybody else was thirsty; He could quench their thirst. Everybody else was sinful; He could forgive their sins.

'Indeed, on two separate occasions He did so, and both times observers were scandalized. They asked, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2. 5-7; Luke 7. 48-49).

'If Jesus claimed authority to forgive the penitent, He also claimed authority to judge the impenitent [John 5. 26-29; cf. 2 Thess. 1. 7-9]'

(John Stott, '*Why I am a Christian*', page 35.)

**'He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens' (Eph. 4. 10).**

Luke began his Gospel with an account of our Lord's birth (Luke 1. 26 – Luke 2. 7) and ended it with an account of our Lord's ascension (Luke 24. 50-53). The Lord Jesus *entered* the world in *lowliness* by a miraculous conception and *departed* from it in *exaltation* by a miraculous assumption'.

**'We have no king but Caesar' (John 19. 15).**

'The chief priests had rejected Jesus as Christ, but now, driven on by their bitter hatred and their desire for His death, they abandoned all their ancient longings for their Messiah and proclaimed the hated gentile as their king. What grief this apostasy meant for the One who had said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not!" (Luke 13. 34)'

(H. C. Hewlett, '*The Glories of our Lord*', pages 83-84.)

**Human free will.**

'This expression, "How often would I have gathered your children together, and you would not", sets forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually.

'And therefore does He give good counsel to all ... they who have not obeyed shall, with justice, be not found in possession of the good, and shall receive condign punishment: for God did kindly bestow on them what was good; but they themselves did not diligently keep it, nor deem it something precious'

(Irenaeus, '*Against Heresies*' {written circa. 180 AD}, Book IV, Chapter 37.)

**'I lay down my life ... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father' (John 10. 17-18).**

'Christ's death is not an incident of His life, it is the aim of it. The laying down of His life is not an accident in His career, it is His vocation; it is that in which the divine purpose of His life is revealed'.

(James Denney, 'The Death of Christ', page 143.)

**'Christ crucified ... the power ... and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor. 1. 23-24).**

Nature with open volume stands  
To spread her Maker's praise abroad,  
And every labour of His hands  
Shows something worthy of a God.

But in the grace that rescued man  
His brightest form of glory shines;  
Here on the cross 'tis fairest drawn  
In precious blood and crimson lines.

Here His whole name appears complete;  
Nor wit can guess, nor reason prove  
Which of the letters best is writ,  
The power, the wisdom, or the love.

Here I behold His inmost heart,  
Where grace and vengeance strangely join,  
Piercing His Son with sharpest smart,  
To make the purchased pleasures mine.

(Isaac Watts, 'Christ crucified, the wisdom and the power of God', hymn number X in Book III ['Prepared for the Lord's Supper'] of his 'Hymns and Spiritual Songs'.)

**Worry versus obedience and faith.**

'There is time to do anything and everything that God wants us to do. Obedience fits smoothly into His given framework. One thing that most certainly will not fit into it is worry ... Worry is the antithesis of trust. You simply cannot do both. They are mutually exclusive'.

(Elisabeth Elliot, 'Discipline: The Glad Surrender', pages 105-106.)

**'The pleasures of this life' (Luke 8. 14).**

'The greatest enemy of hunger for God is not poison but apple pie. It is not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink in every night.

'For all the ill that Satan can do, when God describes what keeps us from the banquet table of His love, it is a piece of land, a yoke of oxen, and a wife (Luke 14. 18-20).

'The greatest adversary of love to God is not His enemies but His gifts. And the most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth. For when these replace an appetite for God himself, the idolatry is scarcely recognizable, and almost incurable'.

(John Piper, 'A Hunger for God', page 14.)

**'Be not grieved even as also the rest who have no hope' (1 Thess. 4. 13).**

'The Bible says that, as Christians, we don't "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope"—but that doesn't mean we won't still grieve. Our hope of heaven tempers our grief, but it doesn't erase it.

'When we grieve over someone who has died in Christ, we are sorrowing not for them but for ourselves. Our grief isn't a sign of weak faith, but of great love'.

(Billy Graham, 'The Journey: Living by faith in an Uncertain World', page 221.)

**The Lord at work.**

(i) The Lord working 'for' us (1 Sam. 14. 6).

(ii) The Lord working 'in' us (Phil. 2. 13; Heb. 13. 21).

(iii) The Lord working 'by/through' us (Acts 15. 12; Rom. 15. 18).

(iv) The Lord working 'with' us (Mark 16. 20; 2 Cor. 6. 1).

**Death and the devil.**

'Grace puts a believer out of the devil's possession, but only death frees him from the devil's temptation ... Death will set him out of gunshot'.

(Thomas Watson, 'A Body of Divinity', pages 298-299.)

**'My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him' (John 14. 23).**

'It is a present manifestation which is an anticipation of heaven; as if He said: Till you can abide with us, we will abide with you'.

(J. N. Darby, 'Fragment', in 'Food for the Flock', 1878, page 263.)

**'Till He come' (1 Cor. 11. 26).**

'Even as there was a "Lord's Last Supper", so too there will one day be a "last Lord's Supper", when the remembering and the future hoping will have no need, even as Jerusalem will have no need of the sun.

'Instead, the Last Supper and the Lord's Supper will both be seen as the mere prelude to the great wedding feast of the Lamb and His bride'.

(J. T. Pennington, 'The Lord's Last Supper in the Fourfold Witness of the Gospels', in 'The Lord's Supper', edited by T. R. Schreiner and M. R. Crawford, page 70.)

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

A motorist and a biker.

**1.** Dave and Sophie were on their first trip to Israel. They rented a car, had all of their guidebooks ready and had a full itinerary for their ten-day stay.

On their second day, they stopped for lunch at a small restaurant in Hebron.

Dave asked the young waitress, 'What is the quickest way to get to the Dead Sea?'

She scratched her head for a moment and then asked, 'Are you walking or driving?'

'Oh, I'm driving', replied Dave.

'Then all's well', she said, '*That's the quickest way*'.

**2.** Doug was sitting in a coffee shop just staring at his full mug when a tough-looking motorcyclist came in and sat alongside him. The motorcyclist grabbed Doug's mug and gulped down its entire contents in one swig.

Poor Doug suddenly burst into tears.

'Ah, come on man', the biker said, 'Pull yourself together. I know I was giving you a hard time but men don't cry'.

'You don't understand', Doug said between loud sobs, 'This is the worst day of my life. I can't do anything right. I overslept this morning and was late for an important meeting in work, so my boss fired me.

'When I went out to the car park, I found my car had been stolen—and I knew that my insurance expired yesterday. I took a taxi cab home but, after the cabbie dropped me, I realised I had left my wallet with all my money and bank cards in his cab.

'I had had enough! I came to this coffee shop and sat here for half an hour trying to work up the courage to put an end to everything. And now, to cap it all, you show up *and drink all the poison!*'