

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 23 January 2023

(i) Scripture.

Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the court, and had sat down together, Peter sat in the midst of them.

And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire, and looking steadfastly upon him, said, This man also was with Him. But he denied, saying, Woman, I know Him not.

And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou also art one of them. But Peter said, Man, I am not.

And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this man also was with Him: for he is a Galilaeen. But Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.

And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.

And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that He said unto him, Before the cock crow this day, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Luke 22. 54b-62 (Revised Version)

(ii) Food for thought.

God's prophets.

'We should distinguish between:

'(i) Their role in forthtelling (or speaking in a forthright way about present conditions) and foretelling (predicting future events).

'(ii) Their mode of communication. There were both writing and speaking prophets, some doing both.

'(iii) Their audiences. Moses, the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, addressed the whole nation. Later, after the nation was divided, some addressed the 10-tribed Israel in the north, others spoke to Judah, while still others spoke to Gentiles, Jonah being the most famous.

'(iv) Their time of ministry: those before the Mesopotamian captivity, those during (like Ezekiel and Daniel), and those after their return to the Land (like Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi), called pre-exile, exile, and post-exile prophets.

'But most important is their message. There are four themes interwoven through the prophetic books:

(i) Speaking to *present needs*, like Israel's lapses into idolatry, or their lack of care for widows and the poor;

(ii) Warnings of *approaching judgment* if they didn't repent and return to the Lord;

(iii) The promise of a *coming Messiah*, who would largely be rejected by the nation but become their sin-bearing Lamb in His atoning death;

(iv) The *ultimate triumph of God* in restoring His people, defeating their foes, and establishing His King in a glorious eternal reign.

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, 'The Themes of the Prophets', Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 12 January 2023. (Slightly adapted.)

God's ability – in '3D'.

(i) 'Our God whom we serve is *able to deliver* us from the burning fiery furnace' (Dan 3. 17).

(ii) 'Fear him who is *able to destroy* both soul and body in Gehenna' (Matt. 10. 28).

(iii) 'Him who is *able to do* exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think' (Eph. 3. 20).

'Them who through faith and patience inherit the promises', Heb. 6. 12.

'God makes a promise, faith believes it; hope anticipates it; patience waits quietly for it'.

(C. H. Mackintosh, 'Notes on Genesis', page 156.)

'The word is near you', Rom. 10. 8.

'It is said that some years ago a vessel sailing on the northern coast of the South American continent was observed to make signals of distress.

'When hailed by another vessel, they reported themselves as "dying for water!" "Dip it up, then," was the response, "*you are in the mouth of the Amazon river*".

'There was fresh water all around them; they had nothing to do but to dip it up, and yet they were dying of thirst, because they thought themselves to be surrounded by the salt sea.

'How often are men ignorant of their mercies! How sad that they should perish for lack of knowledge! Jesus is near the seeker even when he is tossed upon oceans of doubt. The sinner has but to stoop down and drink and live'.

(C. H. Surgeon, 'A Sermon for the Miserable of Men', The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit {Classic Christian Library}, Volume XV, pages 110-111).

'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (Acts 2. 21; Rom. 10. 13; cf. Joel 2. 32).

The 18th century preacher and hymnwriter, John Berridge of Everton, once declared:

'I would much rather it be written, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved", than "If John Berridge shall call on the name of the Lord, he shall be saved"; because', said he, 'how do I know that there might not be another John Berridge in the world to whom those words were addressed? But when I read, "Whosoever shall call ...", I know I must be included'.

(J. Lyth, quoted in J. S. Exell, 'The Biblical Illustrator, Romans', Volume II, page 371.)

'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God' (Rev. 20. 12).

'The godly Presbyterian preacher Robert Murray McCheyne was passing out tracts one day and handed one to a well-dressed lady. She gave him a haughty look and said, "Sir, you must not know who I am!"

'In his kind way, McCheyne replied, "Madam, there is coming a day of judgment, and on that day it will not make any difference who you are!"

(Warren Wiersbe, 'Be Right', page 114.)

'What do you think of Christ?' (Matt. 22. 42).

'To this day when a man is brought face to face with Jesus Christ, he must either hate Him or love Him; he must either submit to Him, or desire to destroy Him.

'No man who realizes what Jesus Christ demands can possibly be neutral. He must either be His liege-man or His foe'.

(William Barclay, 'Matthew: The Daily Study Bible', 1975, Volume 2, page 356.)

'Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ' (Rom. 8. 17).

'We are blessed with Him. As we were associated with the first Adam in ruin, so we are associated with the second Man in glory. There is nothing He has that He does not bring us into. This is the character of perfect love.

'Christ gives "not as the world giveth" [John 14. 27]. The world may give generously sometimes, but it has done with what it gives; Christ gives by introducing His own into what He is enjoying Himself. Take glory: "the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them" [John 17. 22]. Take joy: "that my joy might remain in you" [John 15. 11]. Take peace: "peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" [John 14. 27]. Take love: "that Thou ... hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me" [John 17. 23].

'Having become man and accomplished perfect redemption, He would not take the inheritance without His joint-heirs'.

(J. N. Darby, 'The Prayers in Ephesians 1 and 3', Collected Writings, Volume 27, page 116. References added.)

'An inheritance ... reserved in heaven for you' (1 Pet. 1. 4).

This world can offer us nothing permanent; 'we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out' (1 Tim. 6. 7). Money leaves us or we leave it ('when it fails', Luke 16. 9). But not so the 'eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9. 15) reserved for you and me!

The Bride of Christ.

'Adam lost a bone to gain a spouse [Gen. 2. 21-22]; Jacob sacrificed fourteen long years and many material comforts to obtain his beloved bride [Gen. 29. 20, 27-28]; the Hebrew servant surrendered his liberty out of love to his master, his wife and his children [Exod. 21. 4-6].

'But all these pictures fade into insignificance before the One who gave not a bone but His body (1 Cor. 11. 24), who sacrificed not years and comforts of life but life itself (John 10. 11), whose ear was not bored with an awl, but whose soul was pierced with the awful pangs of sin and death (Isaiah 53) to win His bride'.

(John Toll, 'The Death of Christ Is the Basis of the Church', Basic Bible Teaching, Number 17, page 19. References in square brackets added.)

'As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men' (Gal. 6. 10).

'Neither is love content with barely working no evil to our neighbour. It continually incites us to do good: as we have time, and opportunity, to do good in every possible kind, and in every possible degree, to all men'.

(John Wesley, *'The Law Established through Faith'*, Sermons on Special Occasions, Volume 1, page 389. The saying was later enhanced – in a version often wrongly attributed to Mr Wesley – to read, 'Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can'.)

'Keep yourselves'

(i) 'Abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which, if you keep yourselves, you shall do well' (Acts 15. 29).

(ii) 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5. 21).

(iii) 'Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life' (Jude 21).

'Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. 10. 12).

'Often, we advance farther and farther down temptation's hallway because we think, at the start, that we won't.

The bitter thought comes, and instead of praying it to death, he indulges it, desperate to replay the scene just once or twice. The image enters his head, and rather than rising from bed or running away, he lingers, thinking he can handle it fine.

'How easily we wander near forbidden trees, forgetting that those who do so usually trip on the roots. One of our best escapes from temptation, then, is a keen sense of our own frailty'.

(Scott Hubbard, *'Sin is Never Inevitable'*, [https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sin-is-never-inevitable.](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/sin-is-never-inevitable))

'Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments' (Ezra 7. 10).

'Ezra devoted himself to the observance of the Law.

'For some people, study is an end in itself, or perhaps a means to the end of teaching. But even though the subject matter is Scripture, for these people there is no personal commitment to living under its precepts—to ordering their marriage, their finances, their talk, their priorities, their values, by the Word of God. They do not constantly ask how the assumptions of their age and culture, assumptions that all of us pick up unawares, are challenged by Scripture.

'The study of Scripture, for such people, is an excellent intellectual discipline, but not a persistent call to worship; the Bible is to be mastered like a textbook, but it does not call the people of God to tremble; its truths are to be cherished, but it does not mediate the presence of God.

'Ezra avoided all these traps and devoted himself to observing what Scripture says'.

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God'*, Volume 2, meditation for 7 January.)

'The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter ... And Peter went out, and wept bitterly' (Luke 22. 61-62).

(1) 'Christ heals with more ease than any other ... Christ made the demon go out by speaking a word (Mark 9. 25-26). So, when the soul is spiritually possessed, Christ can with a word heal, nay, He can cure with a look.

'When Peter had fallen into a relapse, Christ looked on Peter, and he wept. Christ's look melted Peter into repentance; it was a healing look'.

(Thomas Watson, *'A Body of Divinity'*, published 1833, page 749.)

(2) The courtyard and its fire were below the place where Jesus appeared before the council (Mark 14. 66). The servants of the High Priest were poised to mock Him, to beat Him with their fists, and to blindfold Him (Luke 22. 63-65). Then He would be able to look at no-one!

But, for one brief moment, His eyes met those of Peter. And that single glance told Peter that Jesus knew everything—that Jesus had recognised both his face and his voice—that Jesus had heard every word, together with that horrendous oath (Matt. 26. 72)!

For the Lord to have spoken just one syllable to Peter would have been to betray him, for, under close questioning, Peter had maintained that he did not know Him. The Lord could afford, therefore, to make no gesture of recognition. He wasn't able even to slacken His pace. But He didn't need to. One look said it all.

The Saviour compressed everything He wanted to say into His look.

Perhaps that look reminded Peter of the very first time he had met Jesus. Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, had left the Baptist to follow 'the Lamb of God' (John 1. 35-40). Andrew found his brother Simon and declared, "we have found the Messiah; that is the Christ" and brought Simon to Jesus (John 1. 41-42a). 'Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon, the son of John? You shall be called Cephas", which is by interpretation, a stone (or 'rock')' (John 1. 42b).

Now Jesus looked at Peter again but Peter certainly doesn't feel much like 'a rock' today! Among other things, the Lord's look reminded him of his empty promises and protests of loyalty; "ready to go with you to prison and death"(Luke 22. 33)—what a joke. And, of course, that look reminded Peter of Jesus' own specific prediction about his multiple denial before the cock crowed (Luke 22. 34).

But who can tell all that was conveyed in that look? Certainly, it was not a flash of anger. Disappointment?— doubtless. Pain?—almost certainly. But so, so much more.

Speaking personally, I am confident that the Lord's unbounded and unquenchable love spoke from His eyes that moment. In the full knowledge of all that Peter had said and done, that single look proclaimed loudly, 'Peter, I still love you ... and I always will'.

Just as once He had reached out with His hand to grasp a man about to sink into the depths of the windswept sea (Matt. 14. 30-31), so now Jesus reached out with His look to save that self-same man from sinking into the depths of utter despair. What a wonderful Saviour!

(Notes of an address given in June 2003.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

1. A millennium difference between two calendars.

[Background:

(i) *The Chinese New Year officially began yesterday, 22 January 2023. It is common to number years from 2697 BC, when the reign of Emperor Huángdì began. This would equate AD 2023 with Huángdì year 4720.*

(ii) *According to Jewish reckoning, the creation of Adam and Eve took place in 3760 BC. This would equate AD 2023 with Jewish year 5783.]*

What conclusion can be drawn from a comparison of a Hebrew calendar with a Chinese calendar?

'The Hebrew year is 5783 and the Chinese year is 4720. That must mean that against all odds the Jews went without Chinese food for 1,063 years'.

(Quotation updated from '[Why Did Jewish Communities Take to Chinese Food? | Arts & Culture | Smithsonian Magazine](#)'.)

2. Two genuine quotations.

(i) **A typographical error.**

'When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of deaths, and hell's destruction,
Land my safe on Canaan's side'. (Emphasis mine)

(Source: <https://answersingenesis.org/education/spurgeon-sermons/1588-the-believers-deathday-better-than-his-birthday/> ... scroll down to the section immediately below Mr Spurgeon's sermon.)

(ii) **An anecdote.** (With apologies to any readers with Scottish blood in their veins.)

Several years ago, I came across the following (seemingly true) anecdote:

'On one occasion there was a typographical error in a hymnbook and the words read, "land my safe on Canaan's side".

'I mentioned this in a sermon on one occasion ... On that particular Sunday, a young man who was engaged to one of the young ladies of the congregation happened to be with us.

'He had a very strong Scottish background ... so he was not one who would just pick on the Scottish people for being tight with their money.

'After the service he told me, "That was no typographical error, man, that was just the Scottish version of your Welsh hymn!"

(Source of years ago but, sadly, no longer accessible: <http://firstpresmarianna.org/docs/ser20070930.pdf>.)