

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 27 May 2024

Greetings,

I set out below the Musings for this week.

You may or may not be glad to learn that, because, God willing, from tomorrow, my wife Linda and I shall be spending three weeks in South Africa with part of our family, your Monday 'Inbox' will be one email lighter until the 24th of June! 😊 😞

For now, I point you to a biographical connection with today's date. I have in mind the execution, back in the 17th century, of Archibald Campbell, the first marquess of Argyll in Scotland. I quote:

'After the execution of King Charles I in England, Argyll, a supporter of the monarchy, personally crowned Charles II as king of Scotland at Scone on New Year's Day 1651, the last coronation of a king in Scotland.

'Cromwell's Commonwealth temporarily replaced the monarchy but, in 1660, Charles II was restored to the throne, and Argyll went to London to congratulate him. Friends warned him that there was danger ahead, and the king never gave him an audience. Instead, he ordered that the marquis of Argyll be imprisoned for treason in the Tower of London, where he was kept in chains throughout the summer and autumn. In December he was sent back to Scotland to stand trial before the Parliament in Edinburgh.

'The verdict of the trial was a foregone conclusion, for the king (who resented Argyll's strictures on his immoral life) wished him to be executed ... He was found guilty of high treason and sentenced to be executed at Edinburgh on 27 May 1661. When denied a last petition to the king, he responded, "I had the honour to set the crown on the king's head, and now he hastens me away to a better crown than his own".

'On the fateful day, he rose early to write letters and see friends. He warned his minister friends that they must "either suffer much or sin much". To his daughter-in-law, he wrote, "... I can wish no more for you, but that the Lord may comfort you, and shine upon you as He does upon me, and give you that same sense of His love in staying in the world, as I have in going out of it".

(Source: E. M. and S. Rusten, 'The One Year Christian History', page 296.)

Yours, as ever, in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

Thus saith the Lord, *I remember thee*, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the firstfruits of his increase ...

Thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? *Neither said they, Where is the Lord* that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness? ... *The priests said not, Where is the Lord?* and they that handle the law knew me not ...

My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water ...

It is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts ...

Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet *my people have forgotten me* days without number.

Jeremiah 2. 2-3, 5-6, 8, 13, 19, 32 (King James Version—emphases mine)

(ii) Food for thought.

The resurgence of ‘an age-old rivalry’ in the book of Esther.

‘When we first meet Mordecai, we are provided with his genealogy. Mordecai is “the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite” (Esther. 2. 5). At least two of these names should be familiar to us. In 1 Samuel 9, we are introduced to a Benjaminite named Kish, who turns out to be the father of the infamous Saul (1 Sam. 9. 1). A little later we encounter a Benjaminite named Shimei, who turns out to be one of Saul’s descendants (2 Sam. 16. 5).

‘Apparently, then, the biblical author wants us to associate Mordecai and Esther with the house of Saul ... If so, it is a significant detail, since Esther and Mordecai’s enemy, Haman, is a descendant of Saul’s old enemy, Agag the Amalekite (Esther 3. 1)—the man whom Saul failed to make an end of (1 Sam. 15. 9).

‘The book of Esther doesn’t recount an isolated incident: it describes a resurgence of an age-old rivalry and, importantly, an opportunity for Esther and Mordecai to make amends for their ancestor’s failures. Indeed, viewed against that backdrop, some of the more unusual features of the book of Esther make good sense.

‘Why does the book go to such lengths to tell us the Jews were allowed to plunder their enemies’ goods yet declined to do so (Esther 8. 10–13; 9. 10, 15–16)? The answer is that what takes place is a reversal/rectification of Saul’s failures. Whereas Saul wasn’t permitted to plunder Agag’s goods and yet disobediently did so, thrice proclaiming his innocence (1 Sam. 15. 13, 15, 20), the Jews were allowed to plunder their enemies’ goods and yet thrice declined to do so’.

(James Bejon, ‘The Bible’s Family Trees’ ... accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-bibles-family-trees>.)

‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world’ (1 John 2. 15); ‘Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth’ (Col. 3. 2).

‘No oriental monarch ever ruled his cowering subjects with any more cruel tyranny than things—visible things, audible things, tangible things—rule mankind ...

‘That we should settle down here as a wild eagle of the air come down to scratch in the barnyard with the common hens, this, I say, is the worst of anything that has ever come ... It seems incredible that we who were made for many worlds should accept this one world as our ultimate home ... the devil sees to it that we seldom get alone with time to think and meditate on the reality of the other world’.

(A. W. Tozer, ‘Renewed Day by Day’, Volume 1, page 12.)

‘Be patient in your troubles’ (Rom. 12. 12: Good News Bible).

‘Perchance it may be with you the season of trial, the chamber of protracted sickness, the time of desolating bereavement, some furnace seven times heated. Herein, too, you may sweetly glorify your God.

‘Never is your Heavenly Father more glorified by His children on earth, than when, in the midst of these furnace-fires. He listens to nothing but the gentle breathings of confiding faith and love—“Let Him do what seemeth good unto Him”.

‘Yes, you can there glorify Him in a way which angels cannot do in a world where no trial is’.

(J. R. Macduff, ‘The Words of Jesus’, page 22.)

‘Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?’ (Song of Songs 8. 5).

‘At the time of her forthcoming marriage to King Solomon, the maiden had been the centre of attention in the bridal pro-cession which approached Jerusalem. The question had then been asked, “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness ... perfumed with myrrh and frankincense” (Song of Songs 3. 6).

‘Now, as the loving couple reach again the neighbourhood of the bride’s home, not in royal state but in the simplicity of true affection, the question is again asked, “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness ...?” But on this occasion, the Shulamite is described, not as being “perfumed with myrrh and frankincense”, but, most beautifully, as “leaning upon her beloved”.

‘How precious it is that we, in all our weakness and in spite of our past waning affection, can lean on our “Beloved”, on One immeasurably “greater than Solomon”. And we rest in the knowledge that, leaning on Him ..., even though we may stumble, He will not let us fall, and, even though we may grow faint and weary, He will uphold our tottering steps.

‘We lean on One who affords us far greater help and support than that which:

(i) Jacob ever found in leaning on “the top of his staff” (Heb. 11. 21);

(ii) the hypocrite ever found in leaning “upon his house” (Job 8. 15); or

(iii) the Assyrian wrongly assumed Hezekiah hoped to obtain by leaning on Egypt and its king (2 Kings 18. 21).

It is not for us to “lean” on our “own understanding” (Prov. 3. 5) but rather to say with Horatius Bonar:

"I have no help but Thine; nor do I need
Another arm save Thine to lean upon;
It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed".

(*'Day by Day: Bible Questions (Precious Seed Publications)*', page 129; reproduced with kind permission.)

'Nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Rom. 8. 39).

'In hard times, we only notice what we don't have. Like the Christian businessman who told a friend, "I've lost everything".

"Your wife and children have turned against you?"

"Well, no".

"You've lost the indwelling Spirit, Christ as your Saviour, God as your Father, heaven as your home?"

'Of course not!'

(J. B. Nicholson Jr, *'Emptied To Be Filled'*, Taste and See, Uplook Ministries, 20 May 2024.)

'You must be born again' (John 3. 7).

'To be the people of God without regeneration, is as impossible as to be the children of men without generation. Seeing we are born God's enemies, we must be new-born His sons, or else remain enemies still'.

(R. Baxter, *'The Saints Everlasting Rest'*, page 64.)

'On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord ...". And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me"' (Matt. 7. 22-23).

'When the author walks on to the stage the play is over.

'God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else—something it never entered your head to conceive—comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time, it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature.

'It will be too late then to choose your side ... That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we really have chosen, whether we realised it before or not. *Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side.* God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last for ever. We must take it or leave it'.

(C. S. Lewis, *'Mere Christianity'*, page 63.)

Cryptic letters.

'The cryptic letters, "PBPGIFWY", stand for, "Please be patient. God isn't finished with me yet". There is good news and bad news in this truth.

'The good news is that because God isn't finished yet, we have great hope for the future.

'The bad news is that because God isn't finished yet, He won't let us stay as we are today. He's going to keep chipping away at us until we are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ'.

(R. Pritchard, *'Why Did This Happen to Me?'* page 156.)

'We look for the Saviour' (Phil. 3. 20).

'He is expected as Saviour. He has not resigned this function, and He comes to complete it, Salvation has been in process, now it is to be in fulness.

'The work ascribed to the Lord Jesus in the next verse ("transform our body of humiliation") is the last and completing act. Therefore, it is as Saviour that He comes, to fit (us) for glory—to accomplish the deliverance of the body from the penalty of death, and assimilate our whole humanity to His own as its blessed prototype ...

'(Paul) characterizes Jesus as Saviour and thus suggests an awful contrast, in point of destiny, between himself and those like-minded with him, and the party reprobated by him in the two preceding verses. *Their end is destruction, but ours is salvation—to them, He is Judge, but to us, He is Saviour* ... "the body of our humiliation" we understand as the body which belongs to and also characterizes our humble state'.

(J. Eadie, *'A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians'*, pages 225-226.)

The cross.

1. 'The death of the cross' (Phil. 2. 8).

In the view of the unbelieving world of Paul's day:

'To believe that the one pre-existent Son of the one true God, the mediator at creation and the redeemer of the world, had appeared in very recent times in out-of-the-way Galilee as a member of the obscure people of the Jews, and even worse, had died the death of a common criminal on the cross, could only be regarded as a sign of madness.

'The (so-called) gods of Greece and Rome could be distinguished from mortal men by the very fact that they were immortal—they had absolutely nothing in common with the One who, in the words of Celsus, was "bound in the most ignominious fashion" and "executed in a shameful way".

(Martin Hengel, 'Crucifixion', translated by J. Bowden, pages 6-7.)

2. 'Come down from the cross' (Matt. 27. 40, 42).

In several ancient novels, the heroes were condemned to death by crucifixion but, in the event, they survived, having been 'taken (down) from the cross' before they died. See, for example, the following two quotations:

(i) 'Chariton of Aphrodisias, who was perhaps still writing in the first century AD, gives a vivid description of crucifixion as a punishment for slaves: sixteen slaves from the domains of the satrap Mithridates escaped from their lodgings, but were recaptured and, chained together by necks and feet, were led to the place of execution, each carrying his own cross ... The hero of the romance is saved at the last moment.'

[Chariton's words are, 'Mithridates ordered me, when near expiring, to be taken from the cross and afterwards ranked me among his bosom friends'; Chariton, Chaereas. Callirhoe, book 8. Chapter 8. Paragraph 4.]

(ii) 'In the "Babyloniaca", written by the Syrian Iamblichus, the hero is twice overtaken by this fearful punishment, but on both occasions he is taken down from the cross and freed'.

(Both quotations are taken from: Martin Hengel, *op. cit.*, pages 81-82.)

By way of contrast, in the Bible's great love story, the Lord Jesus 'endured the cross' (Heb. 12. 2) and died (Rom. 5. 6, 8), to be vindicated by His resurrection three days later (Rom. 1. 4).

(iii) Go on, smile.

The mother-in-law:

1. Susan was worried. Her husband David had walked out of their house early that morning and hadn't returned.

At nine o'clock in the evening, she went to her local police station to report David as a missing person.

While providing details to the officer in charge, Susan gave him a photo of David and said, 'When you find him, could you please tell him that *my mother didn't come after all. She decided she would stay the week at my brother's house instead*'.

2. Joe decided to try his hand at being an estate agent and was thrilled when he got his first listing. He wrote and published an advertisement for the house—which had an upstairs 'mother-in-law suite' that could be accessed using a motorised stair lift (consisting of a plush chair which moved smoothly along a rail mounted to the stairs).

Alas, nobody responded to Joe's 'For Sale' advertisement and, understandably, the homeowners were most unhappy.

Joe, therefore, had a go at improving the advertisement. To make the upstairs suite sound more attractive, he wrote, 'Luxurious upstairs mother-in-law suite comes *complete with a very effective electric chair!*'