

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 19 August 2024

(i) Scripture.

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. 'Sovereign Lord', they said, 'you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together
against the Lord and against His anointed one”.

'Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

'Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus'.

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Acts 4. 23-31 (*The New International Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. 1. 23).

Two helpful illustrations—a clock and a lion:

1. 'In one of the old-fashioned mansions in the United States there is still be seen a brass-bound clock upon the staircase landing, with the hands fixed at the minute and hour when George Washington died. The grandfather of the present owner was a pall-bearer at the funeral of the great republican, and set the hands where they have since remained. Even so, the preacher's finger must ever point the multitude to Jesus Christ and Him crucified'.

(F. E. Marsh, '*Illustrated Bible Studies*', page 190.)

2. 'Suppose a number of persons were to take it into their heads that they had to defend a lion, full-grown king of beasts! There he is in the cage, and here come all the soldiers of the army to fight for him. Well, I should suggest to them, if they would not object, and feel that it was humbling to them, that they should kindly stand back, and open the door, and let the lion out! I believe that would be the best way of defending him, for he would take care of himself; and the best 'apology' for the gospel is to let the gospel out ...

'Preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The Lion of the tribe of Judah will soon drive away all His adversaries. This was how Christ's first disciples worked. They preached Jesus Christ wherever they went. They did not stop to apologize, but boldly bore their witness concerning Him'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, '*Christ and His Co-Workers*', a sermon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London, on 10 June 1886.)

God is not silent.

'The infinite-personal God, the God who is Trinity, has spoken. He is there, and He is not silent. There is no use having a silent God. We would not know anything about Him.

'He has spoken and told us what He is and that He existed before all else, and so we have the answer to the existence of what is ... man, beginning with himself, can define the philosophical problem of existence, but he cannot generate from himself the answer to the problem.

'The answer to the problem of existence is that the infinite-personal, triune God is there, and that the infinite-personal, triune God is not silent'.

(F. A. Schaeffer, '*He Is There, and He Is Not Silent*', pages 18-19.)

God speaking from the very opening section of the Bible to its closing section.

(i) 'And God said ...' (Gen. 1. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29; cf. Psa. 33. 6, 9).

(ii) 'He that sat upon the throne said ... and He said to me ...' (Rev. 21. 5-6).

God speaking in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Ponder the following comments:

1. 'The phenomenon and prevalence of divine speech in Hebrews is often noted. Indeed, eleven of the thirteen chapters in Hebrews include examples of divine speech. Moreover, the fact that the Father and the Son speak to each other in Hebrews has often been observed ... it is as if readers of Hebrews listen in on a dialogue between God and His Son'.

(D. M. Harris, 'The Use of the Old Testament in the Epistle to the Hebrews', The Southwestern Journal of Theology, Volume 64, Number 1, pages 101-102.)

2. 'In the first section, the Father speaks (Heb. 1. 5–13), then the Son (Heb. 2. 2–13), then the Spirit (Heb. 3. 7–4. 11) ... In the second section, the cycle of the Father (Heb. 5. 5–6; 7. 17, 21; 8. 8–12), the Son (Heb. 10.5–9), and the Spirit (Heb. 10. 15–17) speaking repeats'.

(M. N. Pierce, 'Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews', page 2.)

3. Note the three tenses: God (i) who 'spoke' in time past, (ii) who 'has spoken' to us and (iii) who 'is speaking' from heaven (Heb. 1. 1-2; 12. 25).

God speaking in the closing chapters of the Book of the Revelation.

(i) God speaks (Rev. 21. 5-8).

(ii) The Son speaks (Rev. 22. 7, 12-13, 16, 20).

(iii) The Spirit speaks (Rev. 22. 17).

The Lord Jesus in John 1. 1-18.

'John's Gospel starts out with a bang: an unmistakable allusion to the Genesis creation narrative.

"In the beginning", John writes, evoking reminiscences of the opening of the Hebrew Scriptures (Gen. 1. 1), but, rather than continuing, "God created the heavens and the earth" [what I might call, 'the Big Bang'? 😊], John writes, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1. 1).

'John's affirmation of creation by God's "Word" was uncontroversial. However, his declaration that the Word was not only "with God", but "was God" would have raised many eyebrows, as this raised the spectre of belief in two gods ... Undaunted, John affirms Jesus's deity at both ends of the prologue (John 1. 1, 18), as well as at strategic junctures throughout the Gospel (John 5. 18; 8. 58; 10. 33) and just prior to the concluding purpose statement (John 20. 28) ...

'Gradually in the prologue, Creation language gives way to Exodus terminology. Thus, John affirms that the Word that (or who) was with God in the beginning took on flesh and made His dwelling among us (John 1. 14). This solemn declaration of Jesus' incarnation is followed by a reference to the giving of the law through Moses (John 1. 17; cf. Exod. 31. 18; 34. 28). The closing words of the prologue, "No one has ever seen God" (John 1. 18), is also reminiscent of Moses, who asked to see God but was told that no one can see God and live (Exod. 33. 20)'.

(Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'The Use of the Old Testament in the Gospel of John and the Joannine Epistles', The Southwestern Journal of Theology, Volume 64, Number 1, page 48.)

Seven things which God 'giveth' (KJV).

(i) 'The Lord thy God ... giveth thee power to get wealth' (Deut. 8. 18).

(ii) 'Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night' (Job 35. 10).

(iii) 'He giveth His beloved sleep' (Psa. 127. 2).

(iv) 'Who giveth food to all flesh' (Psa. 136. 25).

(v) 'He giveth grace unto the lowly' (Prov. 3. 34).

(vi) 'He giveth power to the faint' (Isa. 40. 29).

(vii) 'He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding' (Dan. 2. 21).

Seven brief visits to the Lord's 'Neverland'.

(i) 'He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved' (Psa. 55. 22).

(ii) 'The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed' (Dan 2. 44).

(iii) 'My people shall never be put to shame' (Joel 2. 26-27).

(iv) 'He that believes on me shall never thirst' (John 6. 35).

(v) 'I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish' (John 10. 28).

(vi) 'Their sins and their iniquities I will never remember any more' (Heb. 10. 17).

(vii) 'I will never leave you, nor forsake you' (Heb. 13. 5).

'They shall call on my name, and I will hear them' (Zech. 13. 9).

'Prayer is the rope in the belfry; we pull it and it rings the bell up in heaven'.

(Christmas Evans, quoted by C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Dumb Singing', in 'Sermons of Rev. C. H. Spurgeon', Volume III, page 137.)

Prayer: the example set by the apostles and the early church.

'When persecution threatened to overwhelm them, the apostles led the church to cry out to God in prayer, and they "were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly" (Acts 4. 24-31). Later, the apostles devoted themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6. 4) ...

'When Peter was arrested by Herod and held for execution, the whole church united in prayer, and God sent an angel to break him out of prison (Acts 12. 5-11).

'Through prayer, God also guided the church in important decisions, such as opening her doors to the Gentiles (Acts 10) and sending out Barnabas and Paul to expand the church throughout the Roman world (Acts 13. 1-3).

'At every significant juncture, it was by means of prayer that the apostles and the church drew upon God's almighty power. This was a vital key to their survival and success ...

'With the apostles, we earnestly ask, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11. 1), then devote ourselves to praying (Acts 2. 42; Col. 4. 2). To those who walk this path, the possibilities are limited only by the limitations of God'.

(T. A. Tarrants, 'The Priority of Prayer', accessed at ...

[https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/the-priority-of-prayer/.](https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/the-priority-of-prayer/))

'If we ask anything according to His will He hears us' (1 John 5. 14).

'Good prayers never come weeping home ... I am sure I shall receive, either what I ask or what I should ask'.

(J. Yates, 'A Model of Divinity Catechistically Composed', 1622, page 242.)

Holy requests.

'We ask not for wealth, reputation, honour, or prosperity; but we pray for a calm and peaceful spirit; for every opportunity of leading a holy life; and for circumstances in this world as may be most free from temptation. We pray for Thy preserving grace, for holiness of life'.

(H. Thornton, 'Family Prayers', page 203.)

'Do not be anxious about tomorrow' (Matt. 6. 34).

'What does your anxiety do? It does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows; but it empties today of its strength. It does not make you escape the evil—it makes you unfit to cope with it when it comes. It does not bless tomorrow, and it robs today'.

(A. Maclaren, quoted in 'The Baptist Magazine for 1869', page 663.)

'The appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord' (Ezek. 1. 28).

'The whole colossal phenomenon was a manifestation of the glory of the Lord. The word translated "glory" (*kabod*) is richly significant in the Bible, and for Ezekiel it had profound depths. His whole ministry was virtually framed on the one hand by the awful sight of this glory of the Lord departing from the temple (Ezek. 8-10), and on the other hand by the joy of its returning there in his final vision (Ezek. 43. 1-5).

'The word essentially has to do with "weight", or "substance". It portrays the sense of God's majestic reality, the overwhelming power of His presence, the 'weight' of His eternal Being ... It portrays the transcendence of God ... The Lord is the God who is exalted above all else—above the earth, above whatever spiritual beings the four living creatures represent, above the very heavens ...

'It does not deny His nearness—another equally precious article of Israel's faith and experience—but it does warn us against any kind of chummy familiarity that fails to acknowledge that the God who, with incredible grace, chooses to live in friendship with the humble, is the transcendent occupant of the throne of the universe. Ezekiel's posture—flat on his face—is a good place to start in response to such awareness.

'It portrays the universal sovereignty of God. The image of a throne in itself speaks of authority and power, as it does elsewhere throughout the Bible. The Lord's throne is the seat of His rule over history, through His kingship over earthly kings; it is the place of His exercise of righteousness and justice. But the somewhat static image of a throne has been transformed in Ezekiel's vision into a highly mobile, dynamic scene, in which the Lord's presence and all-seeing eye can be anywhere at any time, throughout all four corners of the earth ...

'The place where He seemed to be absent and the place where His people seemed to be utterly rejected has been transformed by this tumultuous invasion ... For many Israelites, the Lord was defeated, disabled, disgraced, and certainly very, very distant ... the conclusion that Yahweh had

abandoned them must have been close to irresistible—until today ... the Lord, in all His kingdom, power and glory, has arrived in Babylon. No border guards can keep Him out. No place on earth is barred to the throne-chariot of this God. He was there!

(C. J. H. Wright, *'The Message of Ezekiel'*, pages 51-53).

Familiarity and the presence of God.

'Reverence and awe have often been replaced by a yawn of familiarity ... Worshipers gather as though attending a football game or a movie, arriving breathless ... laughing ... waving at friends—as though it were entirely natural for humans to meet God. No big deal, it seems, to encounter the Lord of the universe'.

(D. W. McCullough *'The Trivialization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity'*, pages 13, 57.)

'In', 'for' and 'with' Christ.

'To be in Christ is the secret of our life; to be for Christ is the meaning of our activity; to be with Christ is the hope of our glory'.

(*'The King's Business'*, Volume X, Number 11, page 995.)

'He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe' (2 Thess. 1. 10).

'If Christ is in us now the hope of glory, He will be in us then the display of glory'.

(J. N. Darby, *'The Hope of the Christian'*, Collected Writings, Volume 16, page 229.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

Bill Johnson was completely lost in the kitchen and never ate unless his wife Joan prepared their meals. On the occasion that Joan became ill, Bill volunteered to go to the superstore to buy the necessary food supplies. Joan sent him off with a carefully numbered list of seven items.

The obliging husband returned home just over an hour later, very proud of himself, and proceeded to unpack the grocery carriers.

From these, he extracted:

one dozen eggs, two bags of sugar, three packs of chicken pieces, four bottles of lemonade, five boxes of biscuits, six cartons of milk, and seven green peppers.