

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 7 October 2024

Greetings,

First, the three-part solution to last week's short 'dream' quiz question:

(i) The biblical Joseph: 'And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said, Behold, **I have dreamed a dream**' (Gen 37. 9).

(ii) The Puritan writer and preacher John Bunyan: 'As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den, and laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept, **I dreamed a dream**' (the opening words of 'Pilgrim's Progress').

(iii) The American civil rights activist and Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr: '**I have a dream** that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character' (one of eight occurrences of the words '*I have a dream*' in his famous speech delivered during the 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom' on 28 August 1963).

[Well done, 'D', 'M' and 'K' for getting the three identifications.]

Second, the 'Musings' for today - in two parts.

A. The following are seven freestanding 'Musings':

1. 'He shall grow up before Him as a ... root out of a dry ground' (Isa. 53. 2).

'He grew and flourished, drawing all His resources from above and not from beneath'.
(H.G., 'The Humanity of our Lord', The Golden Lamp, Volume X, page 150).

2. 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last' (Rev. 22. 13).

'You cannot go outside of A and Z in the realm of literature; likewise Christ Jesus is First and Last of God's new creation, and all that is in between; you cannot get outside of that'.
(T. Austin-Sparks, 'The Measure of Christ', published in 'A Witness and A Testimony', Sept-Oct 1931, Vol. 9.5).

3. Four striking paradoxes in 2 Corinthians.

(i) Affluent in privation: 'as having nothing, yet possessing all things' (2 Cor. 6. 10).

(ii) Joyful in affliction: 'I overflow with joy in all our affliction' (2 Cor. 7. 4).

(iii) Generous in poverty: 'their extreme poverty overflowed in the riches of their liberality' (2 Cor. 8. 2).

(iv) Strong in weakness: 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12. 10).

4. 'We walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5. 7).

'It is the very time for *faith* to work, when *sight* ceases. The greater the difficulties, the easier for faith. As long as there remain certain natural prospects, faith does not get on even as easily (if I may say so), as when all natural prospects fail'.

(George Müller, 'A Narrative of some of the Lord's Dealings with George Müller', Fourth Part, 1856, page 120).

5. 'My peace I give to you' (John 16. 27).

'Trusting in Jesus Christ, my Saviour, there is still a blessed quietness in the deep caverns of my soul, though, upon the surface, a rough tempest may be raging, and there may be but little apparent calm'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, 'Rest as a Test', sermon preached on 4 May 1879 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.)

6. 'In the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus ... we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works' (Eph. 2. 7-10).

'One can no more enjoy saving grace without performing good works, than one can experience saving grace without ever knowing the incomparable riches that await us in the ages to come'.

D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, meditation for 2 October.)

7. 'Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy' (Psa. 86. 1).

'Prayer is humbling work. It abases intellect and pride, crucifies vainglory, and signs our spiritual bankruptcy, and all these are hard for flesh and blood to bear. ... The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it'.

(E. M. Bounds, 'The Necessity of Prayer', page 31).

B. The main 'Musings' document for this week consists of the notes (reproduced below) of a short devotional meditation (*'At the Right Time'*) which I gave at a recent 'Breaking of Bread' meeting. (The audio recording of the meditation is available on request.)

Third, an advance notice. On account of several pressures which I face at present, there will be **no 'Monday Musings' next week** but, God willing, 'Normal service will be resumed' on Monday 21st October.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

'At the right time'. Breaking of Bread Meditation. 29 September 2024.

At the outset, we recall the words of the apostle Paul, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes'.¹

This morning, I want us to remind ourselves briefly about just *one aspect of 'the Lord's death'*—namely, that of its perfect timing.

We begin with a short visit to the Garden of Gethsemane. In chapter 14 of his Gospel, Mark tells how (and I quote), 'Judas came ... and with him a crowd with swords and clubs ... *he* went up to Jesus ... and kissed Him. And *they* laid hands on Him and seized Him'.²

'They laid hands on Him'

By way of contrast, we read earlier in the same gospel (that of Mark) that the Lord Jesus often laid *His* hands *on others*—and always in blessing.

We read in chapter **5** that, when our Lord was in Capernaum, Jairus 'besought Him greatly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death: please, come and *lay your hands* on her, that she may be healed".³ Needless to say, in due course, the little girl is healed.

We read in chapter **6** that, when our Lord was in His home town of Nazareth ... on account of the people's unbelief,⁴ 'He could do no mighty work there, except that *He laid His hands* on a few sick people and healed them'.⁵

We read in chapter **7** that, when our Lord was in the region of 'Decapolis', the local people 'brought to Him a man who was deaf and who had a speech impediment and begged Him to *lay His hand* on him'.⁶ Soon, Mark reports, the man's 'ears were opened ... and he spoke plainly'.⁷

We read in chapter **8** that, when our Lord was in Bethsaida,⁸ 'some people brought to Him a blind man'. Jesus 'led him out of the village ... and *laid His hands* on him' – twice – as a result of which, we read, the man's 'sight was restored and he saw everything clearly'.⁹

And then we read in chapter **10** that, when our Lord entered Judea on His last journey to Jerusalem, little children¹⁰ are brought to Him that He might touch them¹¹ and pray.¹² 'Taking them up in His arms', we read, 'He *laid His hands* on them and blessed them'.¹³

But we must return to our opening quotation in chapter **14**—'*they* laid hands *on Him*'.

Oh, many times previously His foes would gladly have 'laid their hands on Him', either to take Him into custody or to kill Him outright.

We read, for example, in Luke 20 that, after our Lord had told the so-called 'Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen', 'The scribes and the chief priests sought to *lay hands* on Him ... for they perceived that He had spoken this parable against them'.¹⁴

But, prior to *this* moment in Gethsemane, *they had always failed to lay hands on Him*.

It is the apostle John who puts his finger on¹⁵ the true reason for their abysmal failure. 'They sought to take Him', he records in chapter 7 of his Gospel, 'but no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour was not yet come'¹⁶ ... a point John repeats in the following chapter, telling us there that, when Jesus (and I quote) 'taught in the temple ... no man laid hands on Him; because His hour was not yet come'.¹⁷

But now 'His hour' had come ... had well and truly come. He had commenced His prayer immediately before crossing the Kidron Valley into the Garden with the words, 'Father, the hour has come'.¹⁸

And so it is that we read of the motley crowd in Gethsemane, 'they laid hands on Him'.¹⁹

But worse—far worse—lay ahead of Him. We know well the words of Isaiah: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on²⁰ Him the iniquity of us all'.²¹

And so, if in Gethsemane it is lawless men who lay 'hands' on Jesus,²² at Golgotha it is the Lord God Himself who lays on Him 'the iniquity of us all!' When His foes lay hands on our Lord in Gethsemane, He suffers from men, but when God lays iniquities on our Lord at Golgotha, He suffers for men—suffers for you and for me.²³

As I said, man's previous attempts to 'lay hands' on the Saviour and to slay Him had been doomed to failure, because, as John notes more than once, 'His hour was not yet come'.

But, when the same apostle records the actual death of Jesus, he focuses our attention on the execution squad who came—not too early, as those men, but—too late to inflict death on Him.

We read that, having broken the legs of the two men crucified alongside Him (to hasten their deaths),²⁴ 'when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But', John adds, 'one of the soldiers (aiming, no doubt, to 'make assurance doubly sure'²⁵) pierced His side with a spear,²⁶ and at once there came out blood and water'²⁷—verifying His death beyond all question.

For our Lord had entered Jerusalem, not as a Conqueror seated on a war horse, come to wield a military spear and to administer God's judgment, but as a Saviour seated on a young donkey, come to receive a thrust from a military spear and to endure God's judgment.²⁸

But if the Jews with their stones²⁹ had come too early to kill Him, the soldier with his spear came too late. Our Lord had once claimed that no-one—but no-one—could take His life from Him, that He would lay it down of Himself—of His own accord.³⁰ And, at the precise moment when God's clock strikes, He does just that.

We opened with something which Paul once wrote ... and we close with the apostle's well-known words in Romans 5—'when we were yet without strength, in due time ('at the right time'³¹) Christ died for the ungodly'³² ... 'dead on time', you could say!

And, yes, it was all for us!

Notes

¹ 1 Cor. 11. 26.

² Mark 14. 43-46.

³ Mark 5. 22-23.

⁴ Matt. 13. 58.

⁵ Mark 6. 5.

⁶ Mark 7. 32.

⁷ Mark 7. 35.

⁸ On the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee.

⁹ Mark 8. 23-25.

¹⁰ 'παιδιά'.

¹¹ Mark 10.13.

¹² Matt. 19. 13: 'children were brought to him that He might *lay His hands* on them and pray'.

¹³ Mark 10. 16.

¹⁴ Luke 20.19.

¹⁵ 'Spells out'

¹⁶ John 7. 30; cf. 'some of them would have taken Him; but *no man laid hands on Him*', John 7. 44.

¹⁷ John 8. 20.

¹⁸ John 17. 1.

¹⁹ It was in the Lord's mercy that they were not 'smitten' by God in His anger as had been Uzzah a thousand years before when 'he *put out his hand* to the ark, and he died there' (1 Chron. 13. 10).

²⁰ The Hebrew word translated 'laid on' occurs frequently in the Old Testament to describe those who meet with, or who fall on, others with a view to smiting and killing them. It is quite likely, therefore, that we should understand Isaiah 53 verse 6 as saying that, during the three hours of darkness at the cross, God caused our iniquities to rush on the Lord Jesus, falling upon Him as would some hostile, vicious and destructive foe.

²¹ Isaiah 53. 6; the confession of the nation of Israel, when broken down with a sense of their sin.

²² Acts 2. 23.

²³ We read that 'the Judge of all the earth' will not punish the just *with* the unjust (Gen. 18. 25), but, thank God, He has accepted the suffering of the Just *on behalf of* the unjust! (1 Pet. 3. 18.) The action of Jesus' foes in laying their hands on Him only added to human sin, whereas the action of God in laying our iniquity on Him served to remove it.

²⁴ John 19. 31-32.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act 4, Scene 1: 'Then live, Macduff: what need I fear of thee? But yet *I'll make assurance double sure*, and take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live'.

²⁶ Or, lance.

²⁷ John 19. 33-34.

²⁸ Mark 11. 7.

²⁹ John 8. 59; 10. 31.

³⁰ John 10. 17-18.

³¹ NIV; cf. 'at the proper time', Lexham English Bible.

³² Rom. 5. 6.