

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 30 March 2026

(i) Scripture.

They took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called 'The Place of a Skull', which in Aramaic is called 'Golgotha'.

There they crucified Him, and with Him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them.

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews'. Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek ...

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took His garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also His tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be'. This was to fulfil the Scripture which says, 'They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots'.

The soldiers did these things, but standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the Scripture), 'I thirst'. A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to His mouth.

When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished', and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

John 19. 16-30 (*English Standard Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'Obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil. 2. 8).

'A brief word ... about the Greek romances ... Crucifixion of the hero or heroine is part of their stock in trade ...

'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 ...

'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 ... were led to the place of execution, each carrying his own cross... The hero of the romance is saved at the last moment, just before he is to be nailed to the cross ...

'Heroes cannot on any account be allowed to suffer such a painful and shameful death—this can only befall evil-doers ... The accounts of the crucifixion of the hero served to give the reader a thrill: the tension was then resolved by the freeing of the crucified victim and the obligatory happy ending'.

**[In the Bible's great love story, of course, the 'Hero' is not saved from the cross but suffers and dies,
to be vindicated by His resurrection three days later.]**

'The apostle Paul never forgets the fact that Jesus did not die a gentle death like Socrates, with his cup of hemlock,

much less passing on 'old and full of years' like the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Rather, He died like a slave or a common criminal on the tree of shame. He did not die just any death; He was "given up for us all" (Rom. 8. 32) on the cross, in a cruel and a contemptible way'.

(M. Hengel, '*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*', pages 81-82, 88, 90.)

'Taken up ... into heaven' (Acts 1. 11).

(i) When Enoch was taken up physically into heaven, men looked for him on earth: 'he was not found, because God had taken him' (Heb. 11. 5).

(ii) When Elijah was taken up physically into heaven, men looked for him on earth: 'the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho ... sent fifty men. And for three days they sought him but did not find him' (2 Kings 2. 15-17).

But ...

(iii) When Jesus was taken up physically into heaven, **nobody looked for Him on earth**. His disciples had the evidence of their eyes (Acts 1. 9-10) and the assurance from heaven that, in due course, He would return from there (Acts 1. 11).

Key events concerning the Lord Jesus revealed to three Marys.

(i) Our Lord's incarnation revealed to **Mary of Nazareth** (Luke 1. 30-35).

(ii) Our Lord's death and burial revealed to **Mary of Bethany** (John 12. 3-7).

(iii) Our Lord's resurrection and ascension revealed to **Mary of Magdala** (John 20. 11-18).

'Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1. 17).

'When Moses asks to see the Lord's glory, he is promised a display of His goodness (Exod. 33. 19). But no one, not even Moses, can gaze at God's face and live (Exod. 33. 20). So, the Lord arranges for Moses to glimpse, as it were, the trailing edge of the afterglow of the glory of God (Exod. 34. 5-7).

'As the Lord passes by the cleft in the rock where Moses is safely hidden, the Lord intones, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in goodness and faithfulness" (Exod. 34. 6). The Hebrew words rendered "goodness" and "faithfulness" are a common pair in the Old Testament.

'The former is regularly connected with God's covenantal mercy, His covenantal grace; the latter is grounded in His reliability, His covenantal commitment to keep His word, to do what He promises, to be faithful, to be true.

'When John introduces Jesus as "the Word", he tells his readers that when "the Word became flesh", He "tabernacled among us, and we have seen His glory, the glory of the One who came from the Father, full of 'grace' and 'truth' (John 1. 14). There are good reasons to think that John has chosen these two words to render the paired expression of the Old Testament.

'John was clearly thinking of Exodus 32–34. Echoing Exod. 33. 20, he reminds us that "no one has ever seen God" (John 1. 18). But now that Jesus Christ has come, this "Word-made-flesh" has made the Father known, displaying "grace and truth" par excellence. The Law was given by Moses—that was wonderful enough—but "grace and truth", in all their unshielded splendour, "came through Jesus Christ" (John 1. 17)'.
(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, comment for 23 March—slightly adapted.)

Grace in three tenses

(i) Grace made known in the past (2 Cor. 8. 9).

(ii) Grace experienced in the present (2 Cor. 12. 9).

(iii) Grace anticipated in the future (1 Pet. 1. 13).

'In that He Himself has suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted' (Heb. 2. 18).

'He had particular experience thereby of the weakness, sorrows, and miseries of human nature under the assaults of temptations; He tried it, felt it, and will never forget it. His heart is hereby inclined to compassion, and acquainted with what it is that will afford relief.

'In His throne of eternal peace and glory, He sees His poor brethren labouring in that storm, which with so much travail of soul Himself passed through, and is intimately affected with their condition.

'Thus, Moses stirs up the Israelites to compassion to strangers, for the experience they had themselves of the sorrows of their hearts' (Exod. 22. 21; 23. 9; Lev. 19. 34; Deut. 10. 19; cf. Deut. 23. 7)'.
(John Owen, 'An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews', 1840 edition, Volume 2, page 426).

*Lord, in all Thy power and glory,
Still Thy thoughts and eyes are here;
Watching o'er Thy ransomed people,
To Thy gracious heart so dear.*

(J. G. Deck, 'Lamb of God, Thou now art seated'.)

Three reasons God 'sent' His son.

According to 1 John 4. 9-14, God (the Father):

(i) 'sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him' (1 John 4. 9).

(ii) 'sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins' (1 John 4. 10).

(iii) 'sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world' (1 John 4. 14).

Seven 'Fear not's' in the Gospel according to Luke.

- (i) 'The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John' (Luke 1. 13).
- (ii) 'The angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God' (Luke 1. 30).
- (iii) 'The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people' (Luke 2. 10).
- (iv) 'Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men' (Luke 5. 10).
- (v) 'When Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole' (Luke 8. 50).
- (vi) 'Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows' (Luke 12. 7).
- (vii) 'Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12. 32).

'He is the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1. 15).

'Nature reveals the existence, power, and wisdom of God, but nature cannot reveal the very essence of God to us. It is only in Jesus Christ that the invisible God is revealed perfectly'.

(W. Wiersbe, 'Be Complete', page 49.)

Occasions when the three most privileged apostles were not to be found.

(i) James and John had once threatened to call down fire on those who had done no more than insult Jesus, by refusing to receive Him to their village (Luke 9. 54). But, when the multitude with Judas took Jesus and bound Him (John 18. 12), James and John were nowhere to be seen.

(ii) Peter had 'affirmed vehemently' (Mark 14. 31) that he would 'go with' Jesus both to imprisonment and to death (Luke 22. 33). But, when Jesus was led to Golgotha, Peter was nowhere to be seen. It was another Simon, a stranger of Cyrene, who was pulled from the crowd to help Jesus carry His cross to the place of His death: 'as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus' (Luke 23. 26).

'Please let your servant remain instead of the boy' (Gen. 44. 33).

'This is the high point in what we know of Judah's pilgrimage. He offers his life in substitution for another. Perhaps in part he was motivated by a guilty conscience; if so, the genuine heroism grew out of genuine shame.

'He could not know that in less than two millennia, his most illustrious descendant (Heb. 7. 14), in no way prompted by shame but only by obedience to His Father and by love for guilty rebels, would offer Himself as a substitute for them'.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, comment for 11 February.)

'Eyes like a flame of fire'.

'Jesus's eyes marked John so profoundly that he draws attention to them three times in the Book of the Revelation.

'In the opening chapter, a loud voice from behind him rings in his ears like a trumpet. "I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me ... His eyes were like a flame of fire" (Rev. 1. 12, 14).

'A chapter later, John recalls those eyes in the letter to Thyatira: Jesus is "the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire" (Rev. 2. 18).

'Then in Revelation 19: Jesus, called "Faithful and True" sits on a white horse, judging righteously and making war (Rev. 19. 11), "His eyes are like a flame of fire" (Rev. 19. 12) ...

'John doesn't mean for us to take this literally ... these visions signify realities beyond concrete description. Jesus's eyes are not actually ablaze; they are "like" a flame of fire—just as His hair is white "like" wool and snow, His feet "like" burnished bronze, His voice "like" the roar of many waters'.

(D. Mathis, 'When Jesus Looks You in the Eye', accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-jesus-looks-you-in-the-eye>.)

'The Lord Himself shall come
And shout a quickening word;
Thousands shall answer from the tomb;
"For ever with the Lord" ...

'How shall we meet those eyes?'

(James Montgomery, 'The Lord Himself shall come', verses 1 and 3a.)

'The God of ...'.

(i) 'The God of peace' (Phil. 4. 9; cf. Rom. 15. 33; 16. 20; 1 Thess. 5.23; Heb. 13. 20) and 'the peace of God' (Phil. 4. 7—hapax legomenon).

- (ii) *'The God of glory'* (Acts 7. 2; cf. Psa. 29. 3) and *'the glory of God'* (Acts 7. 55; cf. Psa. 19. 1; John 11. 4, 40; Acts 7. 55; Rom. 3. 23; 5. 2; 15. 7; 1 Cor. 10. 31; 11. 7; 2 Cor. 1. 20; 4. 6, 15; Phil. 2. 11; Rev. 15. 8; 21. 11, 23).
- (iii) *'The God of love'* (2 Cor. 13. 11) and *'the love of God'* (2 Cor. 13. 14).
- (iv) *'The God of ... grace'* (1 Pet. 5. 10) and *'the grace of God'* (1 Pet. 5. 12; cf. Acts 20. 24; 1 Cor. 15. 10 etc.).
- (v) *'The God of truth'* (the Old Testament: Deut. 32. 4; Psa. 31. 5; Isa. 65. 16) and *'the truth of God'* (the New Testament: Rom. 1. 25; 3. 7; 15. 8).

The silent years.

The record of salvation in the Bible knows two long periods without revelation:

- '(i) the time between Malachi and John the Baptist and
'(ii) the time between Christ and the coming of the manifested kingdom of God.
The first lasted 400 years; the second has lasted already almost 2000 years ...

- '(i) the lamp of the first is the prophet of the nations, Daniel, and
'(ii) the guiding star of the last is the Revelation of John.

Also:

- '(i) the book of Daniel was given to the saints of the Old Covenant on entering the night between the first destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) and the first appearing of the Lord and
'(ii) the Revelation of John was given to saints of the New Covenant on entering the night between the second destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) and a second appearing of the Lord'.

(Eric Sauer, *'The Dawn of World Redemption'*, 1951, pages 163-164.)

'Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good' (Rom. 12. 21).

'We are largely helpless to interrupt violent cycles of retaliation across the world... but we can meaningfully disrupt spiralling conflict in our own homes and communities by choosing a gentle response instead of a harsh one.

'Resist the urge to have the last word, confident that God will bring perfect justice in the end'.

(*'The Pour Over newsletter'* for 9 March 2026, accessed at <https://thepourover.org/no-white-flag/>, under 'No White Flag: Christian response'.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

'Out of the mouth of babies and infants'.

1. Mark and Susan Maxwell were very concerned. Their seven-year-old son, Oliver, had never spoken a word.

And then, suddenly, one day during lunch, Oliver turned to his mother and said quite clearly: 'Soup's cold'.

His mother burst into tears and hugged her boy.

'My little precious one', she sobbed, 'I have waited so very long to hear you speak! Your father and I have been worried sick about you. Why have you never spoken to me in all these years?'

'Easy', Oliver said,

'Til now, everything's been okay'.

2. Emma, the teacher at the local junior school, is reading her class the story of 'Chicken Licken'—but with a few changes of her own. Emma tells how nervous Chicken Licken, having been struck on the head by a falling acorn, believes that the sky is falling.

Emma gets to the part where (so she told the story), having frantically warned all his animal friends about the danger, Chicken Licken tries to warn the farmer.

'So, Chicken Licken runs to the farmer', Emma says, 'and he cries out, "Run, run, the sky is falling!"'

At that point, Emma stops the story and asks her class, 'What do you think the farmer says?'

Little Archie raises his hand. 'Please Miss, I think he'd say,

"Wow... a talking chicken!"