

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 22 January 2024

(i) SCRIPTURE

I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all went through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

But God was not pleased with the majority of them, for they were struck down in the desert.

Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we should not be desirers of evil things, just as those also desired them, and not become idolaters, as some of them did, just as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play', nor commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed sexual immorality, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day, nor put Christ to the test, as some of them tested Him, and were destroyed by snakes, nor grumble, just as some of them grumbled, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Now these things happened to those people as an example, but are written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

Therefore, the one who thinks that he stands must watch out lest he fall.

1 Corinthians 10. 1-12 (*Lexham English Bible*)

(ii) FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Lessons to be learned from scripture.

(i) *Positively*. 'Whatever things were written in former days were written for our instruction, *that* through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures *we might* have hope' (Rom. 15. 4; cf. 1 Cor. 9. 10).

(ii) *Negatively*. 'These things were our examples, *that we should not* be lusters after evil, as they also lusted ... all these things happened to them as examples; and were written for our instruction' (1 Cor. 10. 6, 11).

'The Lord God said to the serpent, '... her seed shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel' (Gen. 3. 14-15).

'There was not a word of promise *to* Adam personally ... in pronouncing the curse on the serpent: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel".

'This was a promise *for* Adam, one on which his soul might rest, one which faith could lay hold of, but no promise to Adam in his sin, but a promise of blessing in ... Christ. And it appears that through grace Adam did rest on this interference of God, for he afterwards speaks of Eve as "the mother of all living".

(J. N. Darby, 'Wilderness Grace', Collected Writings, Volume 12, page 277.)

Jesus 'alone'.

(i) He was 'alone' in His *supplications* ... 'He went up into a mountain apart to pray, and He was there *alone*' (Matt. 14. 23).

(ii) He was 'alone' in His *splendour* ... On the holy mount, 'Peter and those who were with him ... saw His glory and ... Jesus was found *alone*' (Luke 9. 32-36).

(iii) He was 'alone' in His *sufferings* ... '*forsaken*', first, by His disciples ('they all *forsook* Him, and fled', Mark 14. 50; cf. John 16. 32) and, then, by His God ('Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ... My God, my God, why have you *forsaken* me?' Mark 15. 34). Prophetically, He could say, 'I ... am as a sparrow *alone* upon the house top' (Psa. 102. 7).

'Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us' (Col. 2. 14).

'The word that Paul uses for "*handwriting*" (meant) a "signature" and then a "written agreement". But it came to mean technically "a written agreement acknowledging a debt", a "certificate of debt", a "bond". In the papyri, a man writes to his friend, "If you can, please get on to Dioscurus and exact from him his bond". (It) was a document which acknowledged *a debt that had to be paid*. It was that that Jesus wiped out for us.

'Let us remember the literal meaning of "*blotting out*". Literally, it means "to wipe out". In New Testament times documents were written on papyrus. The ink was made of soot, mixed with gum and diluted with water. The characteristic of this ink is that it has no acid in it and therefore does not bite into the paper. It will last a very long time and will retain its colour, but if, soon after it is written, a wet

sponge was passed over the surface of the papyrus, the writing could be sponged off as completely as writing might be sponged from a slate.

'Now the interesting thing is this—a commoner word for cancelling a certificate of debt ... means to write the Greek letter *chi*, which was the same shape as a capital X, right across the document. So, after a trial in Egypt, the governor gives orders that a bond should be cancelled, that is, 'crossed out'. But Paul does not say that Jesus Christ 'crossed out' the record of our debt; he says that He 'wiped it out'. If you "cross a thing out", beneath the cross the record still remains visible for anyone to read, but if you "wipe it out", the record is gone, obliterated for ever. It is as if God, for Jesus' sake, not only "crossed out" our debt, but "wiped it out".

(William Barclay, 'New Testament Words', pages 117-118.)

What Christ is and what we are.

(i) Christ is the vine and we are the branches (John 15. 5).

(ii) Christ is the head and we are the members (Col. 2. 19; Eph. 4. 15-16; 5. 30).

(iii) Christ is the bridegroom and we are the bride (Matt. 9. 15; John 3. 29; Rev. 21. 2, 9; 22.17).

(iv) Christ is the cornerstone and we are the building (Eph. 2. 20; 1 Pet. 2. 5-6).

'The fervent supplication of the righteous man has great strength' (Jam. 5. 17-18: literal translation).

'James loves to illustrate his points by reference to examples from the Old Testament. Previously, he had cited Abraham and Rahab as evidence of true faith which expresses itself in works (Jam. 2. 20-26) and Job as evidence of patient endurance in the face of affliction (Jam. 5. 10-11). Now he introduces Elijah as an example of one whose prayer was of "great strength" (Jam. 5. 17-18).

'But what kind of prayers proved to be of such "great strength"? We find that Elijah prayed:

(i) earnestly (Jas. 5. 17). We cannot expect God to hear "prayers" which are cold, lifeless and formal. Do we pray 'fervently'?

(ii) humbly (1 Kings. 18. 42). Do we pray with due reverence?

(iii) intelligently. Elijah prayed in accord with God's will and purpose as revealed by His word (Deut. 11. 16-17; 1 Kings. 18. 1).

(iv) specifically. There was nothing vague or imprecise about Elijah's supplications. Are our requests clear and definite?

(v) expectantly. "Go up now, look ...", he instructed his servant (1 Kings 18. 42). Are we on the lookout for the answers to our prayers?

(vi) persistently. Elijah told his servant to look seven times while he continued to pray (1 Kings 18. 43-44). Do we give in too soon?

('Day by Day in Prayer, Precious Seed Publications', page 363. With kind permission.)

'A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber' (Prov. 24. 33-34).

(i)

*He slept beneath the moon,
He basked beneath the sun;
He lived a life of going-to-do
And died with nothing done.*

(Claimed to be the epitaph which dramatist James Albery {1838-1889} wrote for himself; so 'Osmania Veterinarian', Volume 2, page 52.)

(ii) "Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy" (Ezek. 16. 49). It is still true that Satan finds mischief for idle hands to do, as David found to his cost (2 Sam. 11. 1).

(C. A. Coates, 'The Paths of Life', page 52.)

Habits.

'Our habits will not change God's love for us. But God's love for us should change our habits'.

(J. W. Earley, 'Habits of the Household', page 68.)

Two perceptive quotations from D. A. Carson:

1. Abraham said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" (Gen. 15. 8).

'Some of the details of God's promise Abram has trouble imagining. God tells him of a time when his descendants will possess all the land around him, and Abram wavers and asks for a sign.

'Graciously, God provides one: in a vision, Abram is enabled to see God entering into a covenant with him.

'Probably the pieces of the animals between which "a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch" (Gen. 15. 17) passes represent a way of saying, "May those who enter into this covenant similarly be torn apart if they break the terms of this covenant". What is a visionary act of kindness to anchor Abram's faith is

also an instance of God's long-range plans ... He is establishing his covenant with Abram and his offspring, a covenant relation into which Christians enter today (Gal. 3. 6–9).

'There is one more strand in this chapter that depicts God's long-term view of things. One reason why Abram cannot begin to take over the Promised Land immediately is that "the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure" (Gen 15. 16). God's sovereign timing so matches His moral sensibilities that by the time the children of Abraham are ready to take over the Promised Land, the inhabitants of that land will have so sunk in degradation that judgment must be meted out. That time, God says, is coming, but ... it has not yet arrived'.

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God'*, Volume 1, Meditation for 14th January.)

2. 'Jesus took ... Peter and James, and John ... and He was transfigured before them' (Matt. 17. 1-2).

'Peter ... rightly recognizes that it is an enormous privilege to be present on this occasion: "Lord", he says, "it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17. 4).

'Then he puts his foot in his mouth: "If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah". He entirely misunderstands the significance of the presence of Moses and Elijah. He thinks that Jesus is being elevated to their great stature, the stature of the mediator of the Sinai covenant and of the first of the great biblical prophets.

'He is utterly mistaken. Their presence signified, rather, that the law and the prophets bore witness to Him (cf. Matt. 5. 17-18; 11. 13).

'God Himself sets the record straight. In a terrifying display, God thunders from an enveloping cloud, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!" (Matt. 17. 5). By the time the three disciples recover from their prostrate terror, it is all over: "When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus" (Matt. 17. 8)'.
no one except Jesus

(D. A. Carson, *'For the Love of God'*, Volume 1 Meditation for 17th January.)

Paul's two exhortations to pray 'for all'.

(i) 'I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men' (1 Tim. 2. 1).

(ii) 'Praying always with all prayer and supplication for all saints' (Eph. 6. 18).

'Justified by faith' (Rom. 3. 28; 5. 1; Gal. 3. 24); 'justified by works' (Jam. 2. 21, 25).

'As to the doctrine of justification, Paul stresses its freedom from all dead, legalistic works. James, on the contrary, lifts into relief that, at the same time, true justification is a new life and therefore reveals itself in living works. Paul looks at the contrast to the false Judaism which he denies; James stresses the connexion with the true Judaism which he accepts. Therefore, Paul speaks of freedom from the law but James of the law of freedom.

But at bottom both emphasize the same truth; for Paul also speaks of the necessity of works of faith (Gal. 5. 6).

'In general, what Paul contrasts is not so much the carrying out of Old Testament legal regulations in themselves, but much rather the false motive for doing so. He contends against circumcision, sabbath observance, and the like, only if they are regarded as means of justification or sanctification, and so fall under the Pharisaic misuse of the law (Gal. 5. 12; Col. 2. 16 ff).

'Otherwise, the apostle left sabbath observance free (Rom. 14. 5), indeed himself circumcised Timothy (as being a national Jewish custom, Acts 16. 3), and took upon himself certain sacrifices of the Levitical law (Acts 18. 18; 21. 26), when his doing so had value as a means of winning souls ("on account of the Jews", Acts 16. 3; 21: 24; 1 Cor. 9. 20)'.
on account of the Jews

(Eric Sauer, *'The Triumph of the Crucified'*, page 77.)

(iii) GO ON, SMILE

Five quotations by 'senior citizens':

1. 'I exercise every morning without fail. Up, down! Up, down! ... and *then the other eyelid*'.
2. 'I don't want to end up in an old folks' home ... *I'm still compost mentis*'.
3. 'My doctor recently told me that jogging could add years to my life. I think he was right. *I feel ten years older already*'.
4. 'The face is familiar, but I *can't remember my name*'.
5. 'Old people have one advantage compared with young ones. They have been young themselves, and *young people haven't been old*'.

(Source: R. Jarski, *"Wrinklies' Wit and Wisdom"*, pages 68, 88 and 213.)