

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 13 May 2024

(i) Scripture.

The word of the Lord is right and all His work is done in truth. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.

He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.

For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations ...

The Lord looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling, He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth ... Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine.

Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in Him because we have trusted in His holy name.

Psalm 33. 4-21 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel' (Gen. 3. 15).

'The final antagonist is no longer the seed of the Serpent but the Serpent itself. Implicitly, then, the final seed of the woman is also an individual. Each would crush the other. But whereas the Serpent would crush only the heel of the seed of the woman, the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent—a blow that would prove fatal ...

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3. 8) ... John saw the prophecy of Genesis 3 fulfilled in our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. When Christ appeared, He came to undo what the Serpent had done ...

'And so, these words, almost at the beginning of Genesis, give us an important insight into the whole message of the Bible. It is a library of books that traces an ages-long cosmic conflict between the two “seeds”.

(A. Begg and S. B. Ferguson, *'Name Above All Names'*, pages 19-20.)

The kingdom of Judah: three captivities matched by three returns.

'Parallel to the fact that there were three times when people of Judah were taken captive [on each occasion, by Nebuchadnezzar, 2 Chron. 36. 6-7, 10, 17-18], there were also three times when people who had been in captivity returned to Jerusalem and Judah.

(i) The first came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon, in 538/537 B.C. (Ezra 1. 1), led by Sheshbazzar [possibly, one and the same as Zerubbabel].

(ii) The second came eighty years later in the seventh year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, 458 B.C. (Ezra 7. 7), led by Ezra.

(iii) 'The third came thirteen years after this in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes Longimanus, 445 B.C. (Neh. 2. 1), led by Nehemiah'.

(Leon J. Wood, *'The Prophets of Israel'*, page 366.)

'A naive person believes everything' (Prov. 14. 15: The NET Bible): Jehoshaphat and Ahab (1 Kings 22).

'See Jehoshaphat's naiveté. It's often true that “the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16. 8) ...

'Here's Ahab's ploy: “I will disguise myself and go into battle; but you put on your robes” (1 Kings 22. 30). “Imagine, just like the glory days of David and Solomon, you ride into battle at the head of both armies! Won't that be exciting?”

'I'll say! You might as well paint a bullseye around your heart. Like a giant chess game, everyone goes after the king. “Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel” (1 Kings 22. 31). They all turned on Jehoshaphat'.

(J. B. Nicolson Jr., *'Running All the Red Lights'*, Uplook Ministries: Taste and See, 2 May 2024.)

'The Lord is righteous ... and holy' (Psa. 146.17).

'In the holiness of His nature He abhors and rejects the sin, and in the righteousness of His nature He judges it'.

(J. N. Darby, 'The Prodigal with the Father', Collected Writings, Volume 12, page 199.)

The Lord Jesus 'our ...'.

(i) 'For He is our peace, who has made both ['Jews and Gentiles'] one' (Eph. 2. 14).

(ii) 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear' (Col. 3. 4).

(iii) 'The commandment of God our Saviour and Christ Jesus our hope' (1 Tim. 1. 1).

'My beloved is mine, and I am his' (Song of Songs 2. 16).

If we apply this text to our relationship to our Lord Jesus, we can each truly say, 'He is mine and I am His'.

1. 'He is mine'.

Ponder the following seven blessings which He brings with Him:

(i) 'The Lord is my strength' (Exod. 15. 2).

(ii) 'The Lord is my rock' (Psa. 18. 2).

(iii) 'The Lord is my shepherd' (Psa. 23. 1).

(iv) 'The Lord is my light' (Psa. 27. 1).

(v) 'The Lord is my defence' (Psa. 94. 22).

(vi) 'The Lord is my portion' (Lam. 3. 24).

(vii) 'The Lord is my helper' (Heb. 13. 6).

2. 'I am His'.

Ponder the following seven grounds on which He can claim each of us as 'His' (cf. 'God, whose I am', Acts 27. 23):

(i) He made us: 'All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made' (John 1. 3); 'I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made' (Psa. 139. 14).

(ii) He bought us: 'You are not your own for you were bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6. 19-20).

(iii) He inherited us: 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1. 18; cf. Psa. 33. 12).

(iv) He found us: 'When he has found it' (Luke 15. 5); 'He found Philip' (John 1. 43).

(v) He worked for us: 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, and to finish His work' (John 4. 34); 'I have finished the work' (John 17. 4); 'He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul' (Isa. 53. 11).

(vi) He fought for us: 'That through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil' (Heb. 2. 14); 'Having spoiled principalities and authorities, He made a show of them publicly, triumphing over them' (Col. 2. 15).

(vii) He was given us: 'My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all' (John 10. 29); 'The men whom you have given me' (John 17. 6); 'Behold, I and the children God has given me' (Heb. 2. 13).

(I know of no other *legitimate* grounds of possession than those I have listed above, each of which the Lord Jesus can claim over me.)

His forever, only His:
Who the Lord and me shall part?
Ah, with what a rest of bliss
Christ can fill the loving heart.
Heav'n and earth may fade and flee,
Firstborn light in gloom decline,
But while God and I shall be,
I am His and He is mine.

(G. W. Robinson)

Blessings experienced in both the present and in the future.

(i) 'We have redemption (Eph. 1. 7; Col. 1. 14) and we await redemption (Rom. 8. 23). Therefore, is the "day of redemption" still future (Eph. 4. 30).

(ii) 'We have eternal life (John 3. 36) and we lay hold of eternal life (1 Tim. 6. 12).

(iii) 'We are sons of God (Rom. 8. 14) and we await sonship (Rom. 8. 23).

(iv) 'We are already in the kingdom (Col. 1. 13) and we enter hereafter into the kingdom (Acts 14. 22); we inherit the kingdom (1Cor. 6. 9, 10; Eph. 5. 5; 1 Thess. 2. 12).

(v) 'God has glorified us (Rom. 8. 30) and He will glorify us (Rom. 8. 17).

'This is the contrast between present and future, being and coming to be, not having and yet having. "Faith brings the fulness of the future into the poverty of the present" ...

'Until the redemption of the body, our coming of age (Rom. 8. 23), our invested capital is reserved in heaven (1 Pet. 1. 4; 2 Tim. 1. 12; Col. 1. 5). And that which we already have is a proof that the capital sum is ours, and thus our present possession is a guarantee of the future, a "firstfruits" of the full harvest (Rom. 8. 23), an "earnest", a pledge of the coming sum total (Eph. 1. 14; 2 Cor. 1. 22; 5. 5)'.
(Eric Sauer, *'The Triumph of the Crucified'*, pages 96-97.)

'Do you not remember ...?' (Matt. 16. 9).

'The Lord warned His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16. 6). He was referring to doctrine but the disciples mistakenly understood Him to refer to their failure to bring food (Matt. 16. 7). He reminded them of the two occasions on which He had recently fed vast multitudes (Matt. 16. 9-10). For Him to feed Himself and the disciples would, therefore, have been a relatively small thing. In the light of earlier events, they should never have imagined that the provision of a meal could prove a problem to Him (Matt. 16. 11).

'When faced with fresh needs, we should consider how the Lord has proved Himself on our behalf in the past and trust Him to do the same again. David provides us with an example of the reasoning of faith, when he said, "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine", 1 Sam. 17. 37. Paul followed the same line of reasoning, 2 Cor. 1. 10'.

(Reprinted, with kind permission, from *'Day by Day through the New Testament'*, Precious Seed Publications, 1979, page 28).

'Give attention to reading' (1 Tim. 4. 13).

'Give attention to ("Devote yourself to") reading'—to *public* reading that is. (Note that 'he who reads' is distinguished from 'those who hear', Rev. 1. 3; cf. 'everyone who hears', Rev. 22. 18.) It seems clear that, in their church meetings, the early Christians followed the practice of the Jewish synagogues in having the scriptures read publicly, followed by appropriate practical application and exhortation and/ or doctrinal instruction (cf. Col. 4. 16; 1 Thess. 5. 27).

In my library, I have an old volume entitled, 'The Burden of the Lord', in which the author (Ian Macpherson) quotes Dr Campbell Morgan as having once complained, 'I do not know anything that is worse done in the church today than the reading of the Bible by preachers' (page 142). Hmm—I very much doubt that this has improved since Campbell Morgan's day!

One little story which I enjoy from the same section of the book concerns a preacher, who 'thinking that the words printed in italics in the Authorised Version were intended to be emphasized, severely taxed the gravity of his listeners in a public reading of the following sentence from the Bible, by loudly stressing the last word: 'And he said unto his sons, Saddle me *the ass*; and they saddled *him*' (1 Kings 13. 27). Hopefully, we do better than that!

Surely God's word deserves the very best we can give it. And those of us who do read *publicly* would do well to prepare both ourselves and our planned reading in advance *privately*.

The following four 'Musings' represent examples where non-biblical sources provide helpful background material to the text of scripture.

1. Abraham's land purchase at Machpelah (Gen. 23. 4-20).

'Through the death of Sarah, Abraham had to acquire a family burial place. He sought to buy the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite, but eventually bought not only the cave but also the plot of land in which it lay.

'The main facts are clear, but their implications (are) made evident (by) the Hittite Laws. These state that when a landholder disposes of only a part of his property to another person, the original (and principal) landholder must continue to pay all dues on the land. But if a landholder disposes of an entire property, then it is the new owner who must pay the dues.

'Thus, Abraham wanted only the cave, without complications; but Ephron knew that Abraham must buy quickly (to bury Sarah), and so he insisted that Abraham should acquire the whole plot of land (and so have to pay the dues as well). Abraham evidently shouldered this responsibility without complaint, for the sake of family needs'.

(K. A. Kitchen, *'Ancient Orient and Old Testament'*, pages 154-155.)

[Compare the statement that 'David bought *the threshing floor and the oxen* for fifty shekels of silver' (2 Sam. 24. 24) with the statement that 'David gave to Ornan for *the place* six hundred shekels of gold by weight' (1 Chron. 21. 25.)]

2. 'Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil soup' (Gen. 25. 33-34; cf. Heb. 12. 16).

Compare the following interesting parallel recorded in the so-called 'Nuzu (or 'Nuzi') Tablets' (Akkadian cuneiform clay tablets dated 1450-1350 BC).

'A man by the name of Tupkitilla transfers his inheritance rights regarding a grove to his brother Kurpazah in exchange for three sheep ... The main part of the text reads as follows: "On the day they divide the grove (that lies) on the road of the town of Lumti ... (there follow the dimensions and the exact location), Tupkitilla shall give it to Kurpazah as his inheritance share. And Kurpazah has taken three sheep to Tupkitilla in exchange for his inheritance share" [Nuzi Tablet N 204, ironically labelled, 'A Document of Brotherhood!'] ...

'It is hard to imagine that any reason other than dire lack of food induced Tupkitilla to sell his patrimony for three sheep. But just as Kurpazah exploited Tupkitilla's hunger, so did Jacob take advantage of the famished Esau'.

(C. H. Gordon, 'Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets', The Biblical Archaeologist, Vol. III, No. 1, page 5.)

3. 'If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us' (1 Sam. 17. 51).

'A contest of champions must not only involve single combatants; the encounter must take the place of a general engagement by two larger forces. This distinguishes it from a simple duel between individuals.

'In a Hittite example, Hattusilis, a general who later became king, engaged the "one who marches in front" ... representing the enemy force. Then, when Hattusilis killed their champion, "the rest of the enemy fled", as did the Philistines (1 Sam. 17. 51).

'One finds a final parallel after the battle, when Hattusilis took the weapon he used and devoted it to the goddess Ishtar in her sanctuary, as David dedicated the sword he used to kill Goliath in the sanctuary of Yahweh (1 Sam. 21. 8–9).

(B. Seevers, 'Warfare in the Old Testament', Note 46 on page 177.)

4. 'We labour and suffer reproach, because we hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe' (1 Tim. 4. 10).

Paul and his colleagues can confidently give of their very best because their hope is fixed ('is continuously fixed' is the force of the tense the apostle uses) on 'the living God'—a divine title he is on record as using seven times in all (Acts 14. 15; Rom. 9. 26; 2 Cor. 3. 3; 6. 16; 1 Tim. 3. 15; 4. 10; 6. 17).

This 'living God' is, Paul says, 'the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe', by which he means, I suggest, not that He has provided eternal salvation which is available to all (although that is most gloriously true, 1 Tim. 2. 3-6) but that He is 'the Saviour of all men' in the sense that He is their great Preserver and Benefactor, whose providential care extends to all (Psa. 36. 6; 145. 9; Acts 14. 17; 17. 25.) ... to the evil as well as the good, to the just as well as the unjust, to the ungrateful as well as the thankful (Matt. 5. 45; Luke 6. 35).

At the time that Paul writes, the state religion was what has been called 'the Imperial Cult', in which the emperor was given the title 'saviour of the world', because he was deemed to be the preserver of mankind on account of his beneficent reign. Surviving Greek inscriptions from Ephesus (where Timothy resided at the time, 1 Tim. 1. 3) often use the word 'saviour' as a title, not only of emperors but also of supposed gods (for example, *Zeus* and *Artemis*), as well as of proconsuls and of leading civic officials, usually because they were regarded as having delivered men from some great calamity or supplied some great need.

By way of example, the inscription on a statue base in honour of Julius Caesar includes the words, 'The cities of Asia ... (honour) Julius Caesar, high priest, imperator, and twice consul, god manifest ... and universal saviour of men'. [Source: an honorary inscription for Gaius Julius Caesar found at Ephesus, 'Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum', number 2957.]

In this case, Caesar earned himself the title 'saviour of men' because he had prevented monies deposited in the temple treasury of Artemis from being confiscated during the Roman civil war, which would have represented a disastrous drain on the local economy.

Compare the preamble to a decree by the council of the province of Asia, which reads: '... the greatest good and bringer of overwhelming benefaction, the emperor Augustus; the father who gives us happy life; the saviour of all mankind, whose provident care has not only fulfilled but even surpassed the hopes of all'. [Source: C. G. Starr, 'The Ancient Romans', page 121.]

Timothy would have been familiar with many such pagan inscriptions and would, therefore, have readily understood Paul's use of the title 'the Saviour of all men' to describe—not lifeless idols, fictional 'gods' or emperors (living or dead)—but the only true and 'living God'.

(iii) Go on, smile.

Children and money.

1. Sarah and Rachel are having coffee together. As usual, the topic of conversation revolves around their children.

'Have you heard recently from your David away in University?' Rachel asks.

'Oh yes', Sarah says proudly. 'Our David is so clever. He is studying English and, every time he sends us an email, we have to go to the dictionary'.

'I envy you', Rachel replies. 'Every time our Gavin sends us an email, *we have to go to the bank!*'

2. Little Emily Wilson comes home from the local park when her mother is busy getting lunch.

'Mummy', Emily asks, 'can I have two pounds to give to an old lady in the park, please?'

'Of course, you can', Mrs Wilson replies as she gives Emily the two pounds. 'This is very thoughtful of you, Emily', she continues. 'But, tell me, do you think that the lady is all right? She probably isn't able to work anymore'.

'Oh yes, mummy, the lady is well', Emily replies. 'I know she can work. *She sells ice cream*'.