

Greetings,

Tomorrow marks the anniversary of the birth of John Burton Jr on 23 July 1803. Although Mr Burton's name is probably unknown to you, in his day he was a very popular hymn-writer, particularly for children and young people.

Mr Burton lived in Stratford, Essex, England, where he served as a Deacon of the Congregational Chapel which he attended. His first known contributions as a hymn-writer were submitted for publication (to the 'Evangelical Magazine' in 1822) before he was 20 years of age. Mr Burton continued to contribute to that magazine and to other periodicals for many years. He died in 1877.

Here are two hymns on the subject of prayer, which Mr Burton wrote specifically for the use of children—but to which we all do well to pay heed:

(1)

***I often say my prayers
But do I ever pray?
And do the wishes of my heart
Go with the words I say?***

***I may as well kneel down
And worship gods of stone,
As offer to the living God
A prayer of words alone.***

(Published in 'Youth's Companion', 7 September 1827, page 60.)

(2)

***To say my prayers is not to pray,
Unless I mean the things I say,
Unless I think to whom I speak,
And with my heart His favour seek.***

***Then let me, when I kneel to pray,
Not only mind the words I say;
But also strive, with earnest care,
To let my heart go with my prayer.***

(*Hymns for Little Children*, 1851, page 45.)

And here are two pertinent quotations from great preachers of a bygone day:

(i) From a 17th-century source.

'God looks not at the elegance of your prayers, to see how neat they are; nor yet at the geometry of your prayers, to see how long they are; nor yet at the arithmetic of your prayers, to see how many they are; nor yet at the music of your prayers, nor yet at the sweetness of your voice, nor yet at the logic of your prayers; but at the sincerity of your prayers ...

'Prayer is only lovely and weighty, as the heart is in it ... God hears no more than the heart speaks. If the heart be dumb, God will certainly be deaf'.

(Thomas Brooks, 'The Privie Key of Heaven: A Discourse on Closet Prayer', 1681, pages 304-306.)

(ii) From a 19th-century source.

'Prayer with the lip, prayer with bended knee and uplifted hand is nothing worth if the heart be absent. Prayer as a mere matter of form and routine is but the husk; heart-work is the kernel. Words are the oyster shell; the desire of the heart is the pearl'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, 'Where True Prayer is Found', a sermon preached on 5 May 1878 at The Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.)

I set out below this week's 'Musings' document.

ADVANCE NOTIFICATION.

Due to a combination of circumstances, **I will not be circulating a 'Musings' document next Monday.** But, God willing, 'normal service will be resumed' on the following Monday (5 August).

But, for today, happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

Behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning.

And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot'. So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth'.

So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

Acts 8. 27-35 (*The New King James Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'The Son of God, who ... gave Himself for me' (Gal. 2. 20).

'How amazingly perverse is my heart, that I can be more affected by a melancholy story in a newspaper concerning persons I never saw, than with all that I read of His bitter passion in the garden and on the cross, though I profess to believe He endured it all for me'.

(John Newton, 'Cardiphonia; The Utterance of the Heart; in the Course of a Real Correspondence', page 441.)

Testimonials to the character of the Lord Jesus by men involved in some way in His crucifixion.

(i) By the man who betrayed Him: 'I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood' (Matt. 27. 4).

(ii) By the man who sat in judgement on Him and who delivered Him to be crucified: 'I find no fault ('no guilt', 'no crime') in Him' (John 18. 38; 19. 4, 6).

(iii) By a man who was crucified alongside Him: 'This man has done nothing amiss' (Luke 23. 41).

(iv) By the man who supervised His crucifixion: 'Certainly this was a righteous man' (Luke 23. 47; cf. the words of Pilate's wife: 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man' (Matt. 27. 19).

'He satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul He fills with good things' (Psa. 107. 9).

'Some one thing or another will be forever lacking to that soul, who has nothing but outward good to live upon. You may as soon fill a bag with wisdom, a chest with virtue ... as the heart of man with anything here below. A man may have enough of the world to sink him, but he can never have enough to satisfy him!'

(Thomas Brooks. 'Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices', page 111.)

Jesus not recognised to be who or what He was, according to the Gospel of John.

(i) The world: 'The world knew Him not' (John 1. 10).

(ii) John the Baptizer ... 'I knew Him not; but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me, "Upon whom you shalt see the Spirit descending and abiding on Him, He it is who baptises with the Holy Spirit"' (John 1. 33).

(iii) The Samaritan woman ... 'Jesus answered her, "If you knew ... who it is that is saying to you" ... The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming ... When He comes, He will tell us all things". Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He"' (John 4. 10, 25-26).

(iv) The healed invalid at the Pool of Bethesda: 'They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, "Take up your bed and walk?"' Now the man who had been healed *did not know* who it was' (John 5. 12-13).

(v) The healed man born blind: 'Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And *who is He*, Lord, that I may believe on Him?"' (John 9. 35-36).

(vi) The apostle Philip: 'Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time, and yet you have *not known me*, Philip?"' (John 14. 9).

(vii) The seven disciples by the Sea of Tiberias: 'Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples *did not know* that it was Jesus' (John 21. 4).

Prayer and praise.

'The lack of mercy sends us to prayer; the enjoyment of mercy sends us to praises'.

(Samuel Bolton, '*The Wonderful Workings of God for His Church and People*', page 13.)

Christians: a marked people.

'The celebrated W. Jay of Bath used to say, that Christ's sheep were marked in the ear and the foot: "My sheep *hear my voice* ... and they *follow me*"' (John 10. 27).

(E. Foster, '*New Cyclopædia of Illustrations*', 1875, page 107.)

'Agrippa said to Paul, "Almost you persuade me to be a Christian". And Paul said, "I would to God, that not only you, but also all that hear me this day, were ... altogether such as I am" (Acts 26. 28-29).

'Paul saw two boats, and one was called "Altogether", and the other was called "Almost", and he saw the "Altogether" go into port, flags flying, and he saw the "Almost" founder at sea.

'Not quite a Christian is to be no Christian at all. To lift one's hand toward Christ and yet not to take hold of Him, is to be a castaway'.

(T. De Witt Talmage, '*Every-day Religion: Sermons Delivered in the Brooklyn Tabernacle*', page 157.)

Faith and the Holy Trinity.

'The Trinity is purely an object of faith; the plumbline of reason is too short to fathom this mystery; but where reason cannot wade, there faith may swim.

There are some truths in religion that may be demonstrated by reason; as that there is a God: but the Trinity of persons in the Unity of essence is wholly supernatural, and must be believed by faith. This sacred doctrine is not against reason, but above it.

Those illuminated philosophers, that could find out the causes of things, and discourse of the magnitude and influence of the stars, the nature of minerals, could never, by their deepest search, find out the mystery of the Trinity'.

(Thomas Watson, '*A Body of Divinity*', page 112.)

Faith and questions.

'Faith does not eliminate questions. But faith knows where to take them'.

(Elisabeth Elliot, '*A chance to die: the life and legacy of Amy Carmichael*', page 55.)

'Praise the Lord! Praise the name of the Lord ... Blessed be the Lord from Zion, He who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the Lord!' (Psalm 135).

'As the writer ... builds his exuberant hymn of praise, consciously or unconsciously he interweaves phrase after phrase, sometimes whole verses, drawn from other Scriptures.

'A similar phenomenon was once not uncommon amongst praying evangelicals. As men and women poured out their hearts to the Lord in prayer meetings, both praise and petition were cast in the language of Scripture. Of course, at its worst this sort of thing was a canned recitation of the same half-dozen texts. But at its best, such praise and prayer roamed through ever wider vistas of Scripture, as the people's knowledge of Scripture was itself growing.

'There is something mature and biblically evocative about such praise, and as different from today's narrow themes of clichéd sentimentalism as Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is from "Mary Had a Little Lamb"'.

(D. A. Carson, 'For the Love of God', Volume 1, reflections for 4 July.)

The Bible and other books.

'Make careful choice of the books which you read. Let the Holy Scriptures ever have the pre-eminence ... Let Scripture be first and most in your hearts and hands, and other books be used as subservient to it'.

(Richard Baxter, 'Christian Ethics: Chapter II, Direction XVI', included in 'The Practical Works of the Rev. Richard Baxter', Volume II, page 150.)

'Mortify the (sinful) deeds of the body' (Rom. 8. 13).

'True Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; they must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation, persecution, suffering, and death; they must be tried with fire, and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by killing their bodily enemies, but by mortifying their spiritual enemies'.

(Conrad Grebel, quoted by H. S. Bender in 'The Anabaptists and Religious Liberty in the Sixteenth Century', page 7.)

'He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth' (Isa. 53. 7)

'It was said of the Lord Jesus that, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7. 46). And how true this was. The "carpenter" from Nazareth startled men with His *authority* (Mark 1. 22), with His *wisdom* (Mark 6. 2) and with His *gracious words* (Luke 4. 22). But if it is true that nobody ever spoke like Him, it is equally true that nobody was ever silent like Him.

'Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod each noted His silence. He maintained His silence before Caiaphas, except when to do so would have been a denial of His Messiahship, and before Pilate, except when to do so would have been a denial of His mission—as a witness to the truth. And He had nothing at all to say to him who had silenced the voice of "one crying in the wilderness" ...

'He made no attempt to vindicate Himself. He voiced no complaint to God—either about men's mistreatment of Him or about God for having allowed it. He appealed for no help—though He could have summoned more than twelve legions of angels. He called for no vengeance on His persecutors. He "reviled not" in return, but rather "committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2. 23).

'Never was silence so eloquent—expressing, as no words ever could, His meek and willing submission in the face of extreme provocation, humiliation and suffering.

'The One before whom the whole world stands guilty, with every mouth stopped (Rom. 3. 19), Himself stood silent before the injustice and brutality which that very world dispensed Him. The silent Saviour took the place of the silenced sinner!

'Ah, but at His second advent the King will not be silent. For "out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations" (Rev. 19. 15). With what Isaiah calls "the breath of His lips" (Isa. 11. 4), He will visit withering destruction on His foes. Yes, once, as the Lamb of God, He was dumb before the shearers (Acts 8. 32). But then, as the Lion of Judah, He "shall roar" and destroy the assembled heathen armies (Joel 3. 16).

('Christ Foreshadowed', Precious Seed Publications, page 305; reproduced with kind permission.)

(iii) Go on, smile.

An old couple, Gilbert and Molly Smithers, were eating breakfast.

Gilbert was reading the morning paper. To his delight, he came across the report of a study which said that women use more words than men.

Thrilled that he could now prove his long-held contention that women in general (and Molly in particular!) talk too much, Gilbert showed Molly the result of the study, which stated: 'Men use about 15,000 words per day, but women use 30,000'.

Molly thought about this for a while and finally she said to Gilbert, 'That's only because we have to repeat everything we say'.

To which Gilbert replied, 'Missed that. What'd you say?'