

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 23 September 2024

Greetings,

As many will be aware, the middle of last week witnessed the combination of a partial lunar eclipse and a supermoon, visible at varying times around the globe.

Many news outlets drew attention to the rare event. For my part, I was particularly struck by a comment made by Dr Sara Webb, an Australian astrophysicist at Swinburne University in Melbourne. 'I think', Dr Webb said, 'people forget to look up a lot of the time'.

Dr Webb's comment reminds me of two salutary quotations:

(i) First, of words written over 350 years ago by a seventeenth-century Puritan.

'King Henry the Fourth (of France), asked the Duke of Alva, if he had observed the great eclipse of the sun which had lately happened. "No", said the Duke, "I have so much to do on earth that I have no leisure to look up to heaven".

(Thomas Brooks, '*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*', 1671 edition, page 131).

(ii) Second, of words written shortly after by another seventeenth-century Puritan, John Bunyan.

When speaking in Part II of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' of Christiana in the House of Interpreter, Mr Bunyan paints a word picture of a man 'that could look no way but downwards, with a muckrake in his hand.

'There stood also One over his head with a celestial crown in His hand, and proffered to give him that crown for his muckrake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor ...

'Then said Christiana, "Oh, deliver me from this muckrake!" "That prayer ...", said the Interpreter, "has been laid aside until it's almost rusty".

(John Bunyan, '*The Pilgrim's Progress: Part II*', published 1684, page 187 in the combined edition).

May God deliver you and me from having part with those whose 'god is their belly ... with minds set on earthly things' (Phil. 3. 19) and enable us, conversely, to set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth' (Col. 3. 2).

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

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

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### (i) Scripture.

He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.

But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, 'Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity'. And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, 'There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore, come and be healed on them, and not on the sabbath day'.

The Lord then answered him and said, 'Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So, ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath?'

And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

Luke 13. 10-17 (*The New King James Version*)

### (ii) Food for thought.

***‘Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth’ (Col. 3. 2).***

We are told twice in the book of the Psalms that the Lord raises up them ‘that are bowed down’ (Psa. 145. 14; 146. 8).

In his Gospel, Luke records one such event, relating how our Lord laid His hands on a woman who had been bent over for eighteen years, unable to lift herself up and how His intervention enabled her to straighten herself and, thereby, to look up (Luke 13. 10-17).

Interestingly, this is the first miracle recorded for two whole chapters—for all of 108 verses. I suggest that, in context, this miracle functions as a ‘parable in action’, a historical event which illustrates and conveys an important spiritual lesson.

I note that the account of this miracle is firmly imbedded by Luke between passages which are largely concerned with lifting the minds of men from earth to heaven and instilling in them an awareness of heavenly values, reward and treasure. I refer, for example, to:

(i) *The ‘parable of the rich fool’*, aimed at a person ‘who lays up treasure for himself’ on earth and who ‘is not rich toward God’ (Luke 12. 13-21).

(ii) *The teaching about anxiety*, concluding with the exhortation to ‘provide for yourselves purses that don’t wear out, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys—for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also’ (Luke 12. 22-34).

(iii) *The ‘parable of the great supper’*, focusing attention on those whose attachment to that which is earthly and visible (to possessions, business and domestic ties) is so great that they miss out on heavenly, gospel fare (Luke 14. 16-24).

(iv) *The ‘parable of the dishonest steward’*, teaching that disciples should so use their earthly wealth as to secure for themselves imperishable riches in heaven (Luke 16. 1-13).

I suggest that this ‘parable in action’ teaches that the Lord Jesus has the power (a) to set men free from Satan-inspired bondage (Luke 16. 13) to ‘things that are on earth’ and (b) to lift their eyes to ‘things that are above’.

***You cannot always trace His hand but you can always trust His heart.***

Mr J. M. Davies (1895-1990), affectionally known as ‘JMD’, served the Lord for 42 years in Kerala State, South India. In one of his published books, he reports

‘Many years ago, I visited an aged saint who had lain on his bed with partial paralysis for many years. Some Seventh Day Adventists had been to see him the previous day and had suggested to him that he was suffering from paralysis because he had not kept the Sabbath!

‘In the course of relating me the answer he gave them, he said : “I do not read the love of God in circumstances. God has erected one monument to His love. That was at Calvary”.

(J. M. Davies, ‘Romans: The Christian’s Statue of Liberty’, comments on Romans 8. 31-39.)

***Jesus: a better and worthier king than David.***

“We need a better king than David” is a central theme in 2 Samuel. While David surpasses those who came before (and after) him as leader in Israel, he still falls short of what God’s people need.

‘While his good qualities as the man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13. 14; Acts 13. 22) point ahead to Christ, his fall into sin (2 Sam. 11. 2-15) reminds us that we need a worthier king’.

Jim Newheiser, ‘Lessons from David’s Fall and Forgiveness’, accessed at ...

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-lessons-david-fall-forgiveness/>.

***‘Of the cross’.***

(i) ‘The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness’ (1 Cor. 1. 18).

(ii) ‘If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased’ (Gal. 5. 11).

(iii) ‘Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (Phil. 2. 8).

(iv) ‘Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ’ (Phil. 3. 18).

(v) ‘Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself’ (Col. 1. 20).

***An illustration of the text, ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner’ (Matt. 21. 42).***

‘In the late fifteenth century, the Florentine sculptor Agostino d’Antonio di Duccio began work on a huge block of marble with a goal of producing a spectacular sculpture.

'After a few attempts to make something out of it, he gave it up as worthless. The block of marble, now badly disfigured, lay idle for forty years. Forty years!

'But then someone else came along—someone who saw hope in the disfigured stone. His name was Michelangelo.

'He saw beyond the ugly, disfigured block of marble to the magnificent, artistic creation he knew he could achieve with it. And so he began the work of chiselling and cutting and pounding.

'The final outcome was something called "David", widely recognized as one of the most outstanding artistic achievements of all time'.

(Tim Dilena, 'Your Life is God's Story', pages 149-150.)

#### **Five impossible things in the New Testament.**

(i) That anyone can be saved apart from God: 'Who then can be saved? ... With men it is impossible, but not with God' (Mark 10. 26-27).

(ii) That the Lord Jesus could be held captive by death: 'Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was impossible that He should be held by it' (Acts 2. 24).

(iii) That God could lie: 'By two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us' (Heb. 6. 18; cf. Tit. 1. 2).

(iv) That animal sacrifices could remove sins: 'It is impossible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins' (Heb. 10. 4).

(v) That anyone can please God without faith: 'Without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him' (Heb. 11. 6).

#### **'The Father Himself loves you' (John 16. 27).**

"To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater'.

(J. I. Packer, 'Knowing God Through the Year', 2004, page 237.)

#### **'Better for ...'**

(i) 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea' (Matt. 18. 6).

(ii) 'If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire' (Matt. 18. 8).

(iii) 'If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire' (Matt. 18. 9).

(iv) 'The Son of man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born' (Matt. 26. 24).

(v) 'It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them' (2 Pet. 2. 21).

#### **'Lord, in trouble they sought you; they poured out their whispered prayer when your chastening was upon them' (Isa. 26. 16).**

'There is profit in affliction, as it quickens a spirit of prayer ... Jonah was asleep in the ship, but at prayer in the whale's [better, 'the great fish's'] belly'.

(Thomas Watson, 'The Lord's Prayer', 1965 edition, page 175.)

#### **Satan's power in the created world.**

'Having secured the permission of Jehovah concerning Job, Satan displayed a fivefold power over creation in the exercise of his evil purposes:

(i) 'he caused the raiding Sabeans to destroy Job's oxen and asses and to kill Job's servants with the sword (Job 1. 14-15);

(ii) 'he caused fire to descend from heaven and to burn up the sheep and the servants who tended them (Job 1. 16);

(iii) 'he caused the Chaldeans to rob Job of his camels and to kill the servants (Job 1. 17);

(iv) 'he caused the death of all of Job's children by a wind from the wilderness which crushed the house in which they were assembled (Job 1. 18-19); and

(v) 'he smote Job with the most grievous bodily suffering he could impose (Job 2. 7). To this he doubtless would have added death for Job, had not Jehovah restrained him. That he was told by

Jehovah not to destroy Job (Job 2. 6), is evidence that he both could have done so and would have done so had this restraint been lifted'.

(C. S. Chafer, 'Satan's Authority over the Cosmos', Systematic Theology, Volume 2, page 86.)

**'Do all things without grumbling ... Be thankful' (Phil. 2. 14; Col. 3. 15).**

'The best way to combat a complaining attitude is with a thankful heart.

'We can choose to lay down our complaints and thank God for everything. Thank Him for His provision, for the air in our lungs, and for His gift of salvation. Suddenly, those things that made our day seem so bad don't become our focus. God does'.

(B. Shannon, 'I Will Give Thanks', page 71.)

### **Righteousness.**

If you want to wear 'the crown of righteousness' someday (2 Tim. 4. 8), you will first need:

(i) to walk in 'the paths of righteousness' (Psa. 23. 3; cf. Prov. 8. 20; 12. 28; 16. 31; Matt. 21. 22),

(ii) to put on 'the armour of righteousness' (2 Cor. 6. 7; cf. Eph. 6. 14) and

(iii) to produce 'the fruit of righteousness' (Phil. 1. 11; Heb. 12. 11; Jam. 3. 18).

### **Why is the summary of Saul's military achievements recorded where it is?**

Scripture says, 'And Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and warred against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and, wherever he turned himself, he routed them. And he gathered an army, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them' (1 Sam. 14. 47-48).

There is nothing exceptional in such a synopsis and yet, in many ways, this particular summary of Saul's exploits and reign, together with the family details which follow (1 Sam. 14. 49-51), seems strangely out of place.

In normal circumstances, we should expect to find any such summary material after the record of a person's death.

[The same word translated 'warred' occurs in the following instances (being only examples), where reference is made to a king's exploits only after the record of his death:

(i) 'the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned ...', 1 Kings 14. 19;

(ii) 'the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he showed, and how he warred ...', 1 Kings 22. 45;

(iii) 'the rest of the acts of Jeroboam (Jeroboam II, that is), and all that he did, and his might, how he warred ...', 2 Kings 14. 28.]

I would suggest that, by placing this section where He has, the Holy Spirit is telling us that Saul's disobedience in the following chapter (1 Samuel 15) is pivotal. I note, in particular, that Samuel there tells Saul: (i) that 'the Strength (or 'Hope' or 'Glory') of Israel' would not repent (1 Sam. 15. 29); (ii) that Saul had muffed his last chance as king ('from being king', 1 Sam. 15. 23, 26—though not, of course, as a person); and (iii) that the kingdom he had sinned away could not be recovered (1 Sam. 15. 28-29).

In other words, that, as Israel's first king, it is all over for Saul, long before his life actually comes to its sad and tragic close. It is for this reason, I suggest, that the Holy Spirit sets out the positive achievements of Saul where He does.

(Adapted from notes of a message on 2 Samuel 1, taken at a Men's Bible Study at Camp Horizon in Florida many years ago.)

**'The cup which my Father hath given me' (John 18. 11); 'Behold, O Lord, and consider! To whom have you done this?' (Lam. 2. 20).**

(i) To my beloved One: 'You loved me before the foundation of the world' (John 17. 24).

(ii) To my Servant: 'Behold, my servant ... the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 52. 13; 53. 6).

(iii) To my own Son: 'He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?' (Rom. 8. 32).

(iv) To my sinless One: 'He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5. 21).

### **(iii) Go on, smile.**

1. As Bill was getting up one morning, his wife, Becky, said glumly, 'Life is so very short'. 'I want more of it', she added wistfully.

Bill thought about this for a moment and then ventured to say, *'Try waking up earlier!'*

Later that morning, Bill's doctor told him that the bruise on his face would take at least a week to heal.

2. An elderly bearded Jew enters a delicatessen. Pointing to a slab of ham behind the glass counter, he says to the young assistant, 'A quarter pound of that corned beef, if you please'.

The assistant, observing the elderly man's distinctive appearance, thinks it only right to inform him of his error.

'I'm sorry, sir', he whispers discreetly, 'but that isn't corned beef; that is ham'.

'Young man', the elderly gentleman retorts, 'and *who asked you for your opinion?*'