

## Malcolm's Monday Musings : 2 December 2024

Welcome back.

(I hope you benefited from the interim series of Zoom messages on 'The early life of Joseph'.)

I note that this coming Lord's Day marks the anniversary of the home-call of Martin Rinkart, a German Christian pastor and hymn writer, on 8<sup>th</sup> December 1649.

That anniversary has prompted me to reproduce (with a little revision) a brief account of Martin Rinkart's life and, in particular, of his best-known hymn, which I included in one of my early Musings. (The Musings in question were distributed on 3 August 2020, during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.)

*Martin Rinkart was a Lutheran pastor who moved to the walled city of Eilenburg, Saxony at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), perhaps the deadliest religious war in the history of the world—which resulted in the deaths of eight million people.*

*In a country ravaged by war and disease, the city became a shelter for many refugees. The town's population swelled during the times of conflict as people from the surrounding areas sought refuge behind its walls. As a consequence, the city suffered from overcrowding, pestilence and famine.*

*The Rinkart home was a refuge for many, even though Martin was often hard-pressed to provide for his own family.*

*In 1637, a severe plague swept through the city. Four pastors began the year in Eilenburg. By the end of the year, one had fled, and Martin Rinkart had presided over the funerals of the other two. During that one year alone, he conducted the funerals of almost 4,500 residents who had died of the plague, including that of his own dearly-loved wife.*

*Yet, amazingly, despite being surrounded by the stench of death and staring every day at mere scraps of food on his own plate, it was around that time that Martin Rinkart wrote the popular hymn, 'Now Thank We All Our God'.*

*With this historical background in mind, we can profitably ponder some of the words which he wrote:*

*Now thank we all our God  
With heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done,  
In Whom this world rejoices;  
Who from our mothers' arms  
Has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love,  
And still is ours today.*

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*O may this bounteous God  
Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts  
And blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace,  
And guide us when perplexed;  
And free us from all ills  
In this world and the next!*

This hymn was translated into English in the 19th century by Catherine Winkworth.

Miss Winkworth wrote of Martin Winkart: 'So great were Rinkart's own losses and charities that he had the utmost difficulty in finding bread and clothes for his children, and was forced to mortgage his future income for several years. Yet how little his spirit was broken by all these calamities is shown by this hymn and others that he wrote; some, indeed, speaking of his own country's sorrows, but all breathing the same spirit of unbounded trust and readiness to give thanks'. (Source: C. F. Price, 'A Year of Hymn Stories: a Primer of Hymnology', page 29.)

Surely, regardless of any struggles or problems which we are facing, you and I can still sing 'with ever joyful hearts' the words, 'Now thank we all our God', for we know that, in the midst of all the turmoil and troubles of this present world, our God has showered us 'with countless gifts of love'.

You will find that, not surprisingly, the first few items of today's main 'Musings' below continue the important theme of 'thanksgiving'.

Happy reading.

Yours, as ever, in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

## PS

I have a simple quiz question for you:

'I'm the size of a bull elephant, but I weigh nothing. What am I?'

The answer will be in next week's Musings, God willing.

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### (i) Scripture.

Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; and David said:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all.

"Both riches and honour come from Thee, and Thou rulest over all. In Thy hand are power and might; and in Thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

"And now we thank Thee, our God, and praise Thy glorious name".

1 Chronicles 29. 10-13 (*Revised Standard Version*)

### (ii) Food for thought.

**'Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good' (Psa. 106. 1).**

'Not only is God infinitely good, but He is immutably good, unchangingly good. His goodness undergoes no increase or decline, nor does it waver ...

'There is no better version of Him to come, no progress from good to better to best for Him ... God does not, cannot, and need not improve with age. He is as good as He ever has been or will ever be. Perfectly good. Utterly good.

God's evident goodness in creation establishes the guilt of any creature who does not acknowledge it (Rom. 1. 19-21). Conversely, according to the psalms, God's evident goodness in creation elicits the gratitude of any creature who does. The psalmist writes no less than five times: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" (Psa. 106. 1; 107. 1; 118. 1, 29; 136. 1). [See also David's words in 1 Chron. 16. 34.]

(J. Wilkin, '*In His Image: 10 Ways God Calls Us to Reflect His Character*', accessed at ... <https://mailchi.mp/crossway/give-thanks-to-the-lord-for-he-is-good>.)

**'Pass the salt'.**

'Persons with wealth, health, strength, and surrounded by every comfort, are often of such a crooked disposition, that they complain they know not why, and are most disagreeable companions. God save you, who are His saints, from ever falling into a murmuring spirit; it is clean contrary to what God can approve of.

'Give thanks always for all things. Whenever the salt is put on the table, let us see in it a lesson to us to season our conversation with thanks, of which salt we cannot use too much'.

(C. H. Spurgeon, '*Always and for all things: Eph. 5. 20*', a sermon preached on 2 February 1873 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London.)

**'In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you' (1 Thess. 5. 18).**

'This verse shows that gratitude is not optional. It encourages you to rejoice, pray, and give thanks in every situation—not because life is always easy, but because gratitude is God's will for you ... This passage teaches you that gratitude is not about denying difficulties but about recognizing God's presence within them. Even in disappointment, you can thank God for the strength, wisdom, and unconditional love God gives you.

'Reflect not only on the joyful moments but also on the ways God has sustained you through struggles. Practicing gratitude in all circumstances doesn't mean pretending hardships don't hurt. Instead, it's a way of lifting your eyes beyond temporary struggles to focus on God's enduring goodness ... You can start to see how God is at work transforming your challenges into opportunities for growth. It shifts your focus from "Why me?" to "How is God helping me grow stronger through this?".

(W. Hopley, 'Five Scriptures to Help Guide Your Gratitude', accessed at ...  
<https://www.crosswalk.com/slideshows/scriptures-to-help-guide-your-gratitude-this-thanksgiving.html>.)

### **'In the beginning was the Word' (John 1. 1).**

"In the beginning"—no Bible reader could see that phrase and not think at once of the start of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth".

In Genesis 1, the climax is the creation of humans, made in God's image. In John 1, the climax is the arrival of a human being, the Word become "flesh".

(N. T. Wright, 'John for Everyone: Part 1', page 3.)

### **The miracle and the mystery of the incarnation.**

It is here, in the thing that happened at the first Christmas, that the profoundest and most unfathomable depths of the Christian revelation lie; "The Word became flesh" (John 1. 14).

God became man; the divine Son became a Jew; the Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. And there was no illusion or deception in this: the babyhood of the Son of God was a reality.

The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is the truth of the Incarnation.

(J. I. Packer, 'Knowing God', page 53.)

### **'The Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God' (John 5. 18).**

There are passages in the Old Testament where the language of fatherhood is used of God, but they are relatively few (see, for example, Isa. 63. 16; 64. 8; Deut. 14. 1) ... Jesus never appealed to those passages to support His teaching, and those who heard Him were astonished and upset because what He said seemed to indicate a degree of familiarity with God that they thought was blasphemous.

What provoked (the unbelieving Jews) was the fact that Jesus was healing people on the Sabbath day. This is significant because Israel kept the Sabbath rest out of respect for the completion of the divine work of creation in six days (Exod. 20. 8-11). In this way, the Israelites sought to order their national life according to the pattern laid down by God when He made the world. By resting on the seventh day they observed a sacred time that reminded them that God's work was complete and all-sufficient.

But in spite of that deeply ingrained tradition and its spiritual significance, Jesus did things on the Sabbath that *apparently* contradicted the law of God and its teaching about creation.

He justified healing people on the Sabbath day by arguing that God was still at work, not in creating new things but in restoring a world that had been corrupted by human sin. When the Jewish leaders challenged Him over His behaviour, Jesus replied, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5. 17) ...

The implications of that claim were not lost on His audience: 'This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because ... He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God' (John 5. 18).

(G. Bray, 'Christian Theology Began When Jesus Called God His Father', accessed at ...  
<https://www.crossway.org/articles/christian-theology-began-when-jesus-called-god-his-father/>.)

### **'Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4. 25).**

1. 'The cross and resurrection of Jesus cannot finally be separated from one another. He was not only handed over by God to death because of our sins, but "He was raised because of our justification" ...

'To say that Jesus was raised because of our justification is to say that His resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured. The resurrection of Christ constitutes evidence that His work on our behalf has been completed.

(T. R. Schreiner, 'Romans: Baker Exegetical Commentary', Page 244.)

2. 'Just as the delivering up of Jesus to death was the consequence of our sin, so His resurrection was the consequence of our justification (that had been achieved by his death, Rom. 5. 9 f.) ...the conceptual sequence would then be: our sin - Jesus' death - our justification - Jesus' resurrection—with the resurrection being here regarded as the inevitable consequence of, and the seal of divine approval on, Christ's procurement of our justification'.

(M. J. Harris, 'The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology', Volume 3, page 1184.)

3. 'When Christ was raised from the dead, He was declared by God to be righteous (1 Tim. 3. 16; cf. 1 Pet. 3. 18) ... Of course, Jesus' justification (or "vindication") differs from ours in one unique way: He never sinned, never needed forgiveness, and never lacked righteousness ...

'Yet our justification is closely tied to Jesus's justification/vindication. We see this in Paul's description of Jesus as the one "who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4. 25).

'A dead Christ is an unjustified Christ, and an unjustified Christ means an unjustified believer. Conversely, a raised Christ is a justified Christ, and a justified Christ means a justified believer ... And that righteous verdict can never be overturned. It has no expiration date. It is the same verdict rendered to Christ, which is His forever. Through our union with the Beloved, what is His is ours'

(D. Briones, 'Already, Not Yet', accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/already-not-yet#fnref3>.)

**'I saw on the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne a book, written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals ... the Lamb opened one of the seven seals' (Rev. 5. 1; 6. 1).**

'There is a remarkable similarity between the progress of chapter 6 as a whole and the description given by our Lord of the end of the age in Matthew 24. 4-31.

'In both passages the order is (1) war (Matt. 24. 6-7; Rev. 6. 3-4), (2) famine (Matt. 24. 7; Rev. 6. 5-6), (3) death (Matt. 24. 7-9; Rev. 6. 7-8), (4) martyrdom (Matt. 24. 9-10, 16-22; Rev. 6. 9-11), (5) the sun darkened, the moon darkened, and the stars falling (Matt. 24. 29; Rev. 6. 12-14), (6) a time of divine judgment (Matt. 24. 32—25. 26; Rev. 6. 15-17) ...

'The six seals seem to unfold successively in a chronological pattern. Out of the seventh seal will come another series of seven trumpets and out of the seventh trumpet will come another series of seven vials or bowls of the wrath of God ... Actually, however, the seven seals comprehend the whole, as all the trumpets and all the vials are comprehended in the seventh seal. The seven-sealed book therefore is the comprehensive program of God culminating in the second coming of Christ'.

(J. F. Walvoord, 'Revelation', 1966, page 123-124.)

**'God, who is rich in mercy' (Eph. 2. 4).**

'He is the spring of all mercy, so it is natural to Him ... it is His nature and disposition, because when He doth shew mercy, He doth it with His whole heart'.

(T. Goodwin, 'An Exposition of Ephesians: Chapter 1 to 2. 10', reprinted 1958, page 709.)

**Riches deposited in God's 'Ephesian' Treasury.**

(i) 'The riches of His grace' (Eph. 1. 7; 2. 7).

(ii) 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints' (Eph. 1. 18).

(iii) 'Rich in mercy' (Eph. 2. 4).

(iv) 'The unsearchable riches of Christ;' (Eph. 3. 8).

(v) 'The riches of His glory' (Eph. 3. 16).

**'In Christ'.**

'In these two words we have ... the master key to heaven's treasury. The wealth of the church and of the Christian is deposited wholly and only in Christ ... "In Christ":

(i) denotes our position—where He is, we are.

(ii) defines our privileges—what He is, we are.

(iii) describes our possessions—what He has, we share.

(iv) determines our *practice*—what He does, we do’.

(R. Paxson, ‘*The Wealth, Walk, and Warfare of the Christian*’, pages 7-8.)

**‘That we ... may grow’ (Eph. 4. 14-15); ‘that you may grow’ (1 Pet. 2. 2).**

‘Giving your life to Christ is an essential first step—but it is only the first step. God’s will is for you to become spiritually mature, growing stronger in your relationship to Christ and your service for Him ...

*‘Conversion is the work of an instant; spiritual maturity is the work of a lifetime’.*

(Billy Graham, ‘*Nearing Home*’, page 149.)

**Testimony which spans the past and the present.**

1. In **John 9. 1-33**, we read the testimony of a man who had been born blind but who had been healed by Jesus.

Initially, the healed man testified to his *questioning neighbours*, ‘A man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes, and said to me, Go to Siloam and wash. I went and washed, and I saw’ (John 9. 11).

He later testified to the *questioning Pharisees*, ‘He put mud upon my eyes, and I washed, and I see’ (John 9. 15).

2. In **Phil. 3. 7-8**, Paul used the verb translated ‘count’ three times.

In verse 7, he uses a tense (the perfect) which signifies that at one particular time he made a decision to exchange his natural privileges and performance for his position and standing in Christ: ‘what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ’.

In verse 8, he twice uses a tense (the present) which indicates that he is continuously reliving this decision every day: ‘Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ... and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ’.

Happy are those who can to testify to a time *in the past* when they first believed in Jesus as the Son of God and came into the enjoyment of God’s salvation but happier still those who can testify to their faith and their enjoyment of that salvation *in the present*.

**‘With me’—words spoken to two men shortly to die.**

(i) The word of Samuel to Saul at Endor: ‘tomorrow you ... will be with me’ (1 Sam. 28. 19).

(ii) The word of the Lord Jesus to the repentant malefactor at Golgotha: ‘today you will be with me’ (Luke 23. 43).

**The function and place of Christian apologetics.**

1. ‘The purpose of apologetics is at least twofold. First, to bring glory to God. Secondly, to remove from critics any excuse for not repenting before God ...

‘One never “argues” another into becoming a Christian. We gently refute error; then we preach the gospel, for men are saved by the power of the gospel’.

(E. J. Carnell, ‘An Introduction to Christian Apologetics’, pages 7-8.)

2. ‘Apologetics . . . are not the gospel, but if a man has a prejudice against the gospel, it is the function of apologetics and evidences to remove that prejudice ...

‘No well-grounded apologist will state that the philosophic demonstration of Christianity will save a man, but it is, to the contrary, quite evident that no man will give the necessary credence to the Word if he has certain mistaken notions and biased opinions about the facts and nature of the Christian religion.

‘Apologetics and Christian evidences cut down these objections to enable the gospel once again to directly confront the consciousness of a man’.

(B. Ramm, ‘*Protestant Christian Evidences*’, pages 13-16.)

**Strange?**

(i) ‘They think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot’ (1 Pet. 4. 4).

(ii) ‘Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you’ (1 Pet. 4. 12).

**Two quotations about Bible translations.**

(i) A ‘variety of translations is profitable for finding out the sense of the Scriptures’,

(Augustine, quoted by ‘N. S.’ in ‘*The Judgment of the Foreign Reformed Churches*’, 1690, page 30.)

(ii) 'We do not deny, nay we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English, set forth by men of our profession ... containeth the word of God, nay, is the word of God ... We never thought from the beginning, that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one ... but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one; that hath been our endeavour, that our mark'.

(The original preface to *the King James ('Authorised') Version* 1611.)

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

"When I was little, my mother taught me how to use a fork and knife. The trouble is that *mother forget to teach me how to stop using them!*"

(Attributed to—no, not obese Eglon (\*), but—H. McDaniel.)

(\*) 'a very fat man', Judg. 3. 17; cf. 'fat around the waist', Job 15. 27 and 'ten thousand men, all fat', Judg. 3. 29 (J. N. Darby and Jubilee Bible).