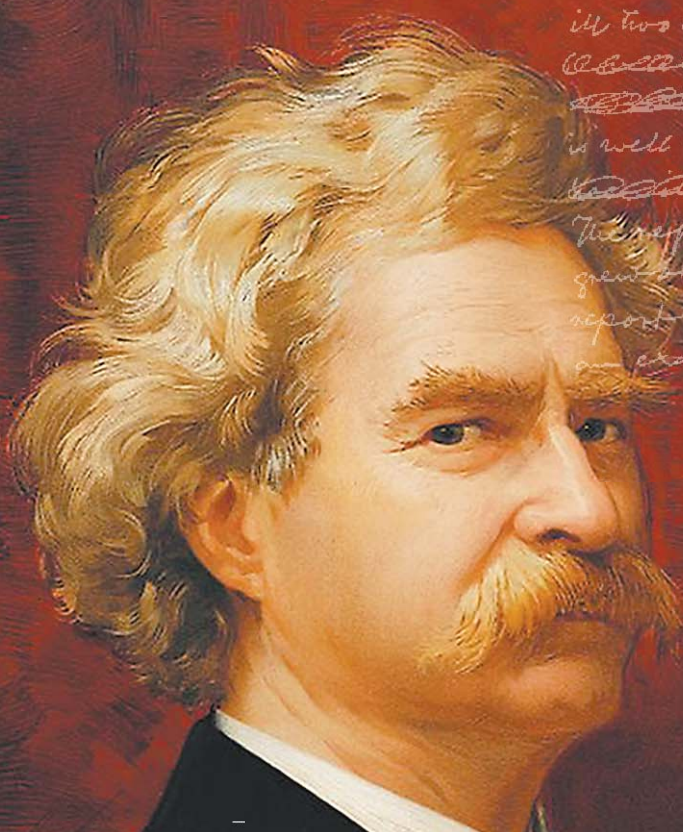


good news Unlimited

August 2013 • Issue No. 6

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE



The grand Antioch Mark Twain

James Ross Clemens, a cousin of mine was seriously ill two or three weeks ago, but is well now.

The report of my illness, the report of my death was an exaggeration.

Mark Twain

WORLD MOURNS TWAIN

Telegrams And Cablegrams Pour In At Stormfield.

TO BE BURIED IN WHITE SUIT

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He Died Worth A Million.

Owing to the royalties he received on his books Mr. Clemens died wealthy, and an estimate by a member of Harper & Bros. places his fortune at more than \$1,000,000.

Russell Morgan Print

Come and Join Us!



On 30 March 2013, at 2:00 p.m., Saturday, Good News Unlimited began a weekly fellowship in Brisbane.

These meetings have replaced our twice-monthly meetings at Peachester.

The last meeting at Peachester took place on the 23rd March 2013.

Des, Gill and Elenne Ford, Eliezer and Ana Gonzalez as well as Ron and Carmen Allen and Good News Unlimited's friends and acquaintances invite you to attend when you are able.

Here is Des's invitation:

The greatest threat for humanity in the 21st Century is not nuclear war, disease, poverty, hunger or economic distress. It is secularism—the practice of the absence of God epitomised by the box, which makes idiots of those that spend many hours a day watching it.

Our only life solution is the One who said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. The world has never known anyone like the child born at Bethlehem, who grew up at Nazareth. He is the only teacher who avoided the trivial, the false and the temporal. He always focussed on the eternal and the universal.

Jesus is the only teacher in millennia whose words need no correction, despite the progress of knowledge over the aeons. When one reads today the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, they contain much that is false and ludicrous. This is not true of the words of Christ.

Consider the heights and depths of His claims: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away'. What is more evanescent than words, and what is more enduring than the heavens and the death? Only Christ out of the ten billion people who have walked this globe could make

such a claim. And the centuries have substantiated it.

'This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come'.

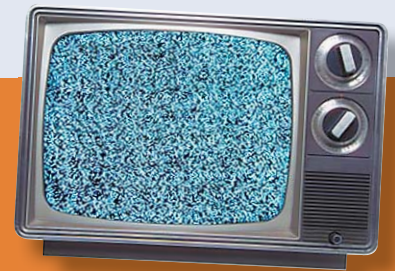
'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'.

'Whoever comes to me I will in no wise cast out'.

'All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men'.

Is it not sanity to put first the One who is the FIRST? Is it not wisdom to attend most to what is most rather than to the puffs of smoke secularism offers us?

'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'



VENUE:

Good News Fellowship
237 Milton Road, Milton QLD 4064

DIRECTIONS:

Opposite Milton Railway station—use pedestrian tunnel under Milton Road and then walk towards XXXX Brewery. Venue is last building on left before brewery.

PARKING:

Limited free parking space is available. Reserve your parking space ahead of time by emailing Carolyn at admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Editorial

THE CLEANSING of the sanctuary is a key theme in both Daniel 8:9-14, 23-26 and John 2:13-22, and for the discerning scholar there is a vital connection between the two. There is also a vital connection between Jesus' cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem and his cleansing of us, the temples of his Spirit.

John reveals that Jesus went to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, which was held about the middle of April each year (John 2:13). Every family in Israel was expected to sacrifice a Passover lamb during this festival. It was big business providing enough lambs of the right age, gender and quality for this festival. The Temple authorities made a 'killing' out of the great demand for suitable sacrifices.

The Court of the Gentiles had been given over to the sale of oxen and sheep for sacrifices and for the exchange of secular coinage for temple coinage. The bawling of the frightened animals, the stench of their urine and dung and the loud bargaining of the merchants and money changers made for anything but a worshipful atmosphere.

Every Jew over nineteen years of age had to pay a temple tax of half a shekel. Most Jews had no objection to paying this tax, but what they did object to was the exorbitant price charged for exchanging

their Roman coinage for temple coinage. Quite often the cost of the exchange was the equivalent of a day's wage, an injustice that made many pilgrims seethe with anger.

To ensure that all animals to be sacrificed during the Passover were without spot or blemish, they had to receive a certificate of approval from the appointed inspectors or *mumcheh*. For this the pilgrim had to pay a fee, equal to about two hours' wages. The inspectors also ensured that the only sacrifices that received their tick of approval were the ones purchased in the temple, which were several times the price of the animals and doves sold outside the temple. This barefaced extortion in the name of religion turned many people away from the God they had come to worship, particularly since they knew that the temple authorities used such unjust methods to fill their treasury.

Money changing and the purchases of sacrifices could have all been done outside the temple, but it would have been difficult for the temple authorities to control them there. So the Sadducees took over the Court of the Gentiles for these purposes.

Now Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey in fulfilment of what the prophet had written, 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, "See your king comes to you,

Ritchie Way

RITCHIE WAY



gentle and riding on a donkey'" (Zech. 9:9). Recognising that Jesus was the promised Messiah the crowds that accompanied him shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! So what was Jesus about to do to signify his authority as king of Israel? Jesus went into God's house and made a whip out of discarded animal tethers and, with a passion not seen before he drove the sheep and cattle out of the temple. Then turning to the money changers he overturned their tables, and demanded that the sellers of doves get their caged birds out of the temple. 'How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!' he shouted at them.

Upset that they had shown such disdain for the non-Jewish believers he reminded them: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for *all* nations [Isa. 56:7], but you have turned it into a den of thieves.'

You are God's dwelling place, his temple (1 Cor. 6:18-20). What is there in your life that Jesus would cast out if he came to you unexpectedly? ❄

Good News Unlimited is published monthly by Good News Unlimited, Ltd.

Good News Unlimited

P.O. Box 6788
Tweed Heads South NSW 2486

The GNU catalogue is available online at www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au
Desmond Ford can be seen live by going to www.desford.org.au, and clicking on Dr Des Ford Live. You can watch or download recent broadcasts in HD also.

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Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all meaning and direction in their lives through a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.



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GNU is supported predominantly by donations from those who believe in its ministry. Gifts are tax deductible in Canada, New Zealand and the USA.

Unsolicited manuscripts of interest to Christians of all denominations are welcome, but without guarantee of return. Under certain circumstances, payments may be made for manuscripts at the Editor's discretion. Please send typed manuscripts to the attention of the Executive Editor, Ritchie Way, by e-mail to admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au or by post.

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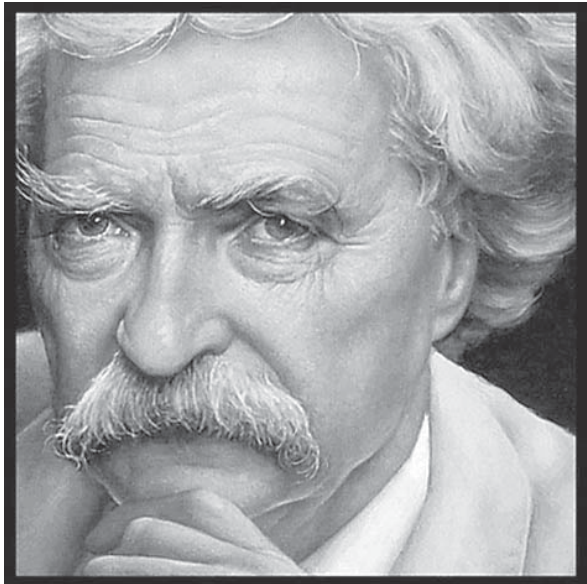
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The Day You **DIED**



Many of you will remember Mark Twain's complaint that the reports of his death had been greatly exaggerated. We think this was written after he had read his obituary notice in a newspaper that was ahead of its time.

DR DESMOND FORD

THE TRUTH for most of us is that the day of our death has been greatly underestimated. Let me illustrate. I have just answered a letter from a very fine woman. Her lines to me showed intelligence and earnestness. I quote:

When I first accepted Jesus ... I thought of myself as a normal person who just did sinful things sometimes and that I needed Jesus to forgive these things to make me acceptable to God. ... But about a dozen years ago, I started to see evidence of sinful desires that I could barely control and which seemed to control me more than me containing them. ... Then, a few years ago I heard one of your tapes, where you explained that we are not sinners because we sin, but rather we sin because of who we are. It isn't just the little or big acts of sin that are outside of our core being that makes us sinners, but rather a sinfulness and depravity that exists because our very core is corrupted and rebellious toward God. I felt like a knife had been stuck into me and that my eyes for the first time saw how I must look to God. No wonder

I saw sinful acts coming out of me ... they came from a sinful route. They are only the evidences of a depravity that affected every fibre of my being.

This, of course, is spot on. But it is not all bad news. To understand the disease is to be on the doorstep of the good news. It is sinners that Christ came to save, not the 99 out of every 100 who think they are righteous. This particular letter from which I have quoted goes on to inquire as to the solution of this problem, which we all face. It is that solution that I briefly address at this time.

Everybody is aware of the law of gravity. It is a universal law that is non-discriminating and that everything and every person is subject to. So is the mystery of a plane being able to soar into the air against the law of gravity by virtue of the invocation of other laws—namely, those of aerodynamics.

Even a bird flying, if it suddenly draws in its wings, will gravitate downwards. Similarly, for us all there is a law of sin that pulls us towards the nether regions and away from the heavenlies. A little boy was asked by his mother why he didn't do good things as frequently as he tended to do bad things, and he sensibly replied, 'It is much easier to do bad things'. Thereby, he spoke for all of us. Oscar Wilde mentioned this when he said, 'There's only one thing I can't resist – temptation!'

According to the New Testament, 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death' (Romans 8:2). Now, this statement comes after repeated allusions to the fact that we

all died long, long ago; and therefore, if we understand that fact, there is no need to let a sinful nature legally dead, respond to the solicitation to do evil. Read Romans chapters 6 and 7 frequently. Here are some of the central verses of chapter 6, as found paraphrased in *The Living Bible*:

Should we keep on sinning when we don't have to? For sin's power was broken when we became Christians. ... Through his death the power of your sinful nature was shattered. Your all sin-loving nature was buried with Him by baptism when He died and when God the Father, with glorious power, brought Him back to life again, you were given His wonderful new life to enjoy.

For you have become a part of Him, and so you died with Him, so to speak, when He died; and now you share His new life, and shall rise as He did. Your old evil desires were nailed to the cross with Him; that part of you that loves to sin was crushed and fatally wounded, so that your sin-loving body is no longer under sin's control, no longer needs to be a slave to sin, for when you are deadened to sin, you are free from all its allure and its power over you. And since your old sin-loving nature 'died' with Christ, we know that you will share His new life. Christ rose from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him. ... So, look upon your old sin nature as dead and unresponsive to sin and is instead by alive to God, alert to Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord (*The Living Bible*, Romans 6:2-11).

The same illustration is used again in the next chapter when Paul takes up an analogy regarding marriage and points out that death brings a change in relationship to the law governing matrimony. Again, we quote from Romans, this time chapter 7:

Do you not know, brethren, ... that the law is binding on a person only during his life? Thus, a married woman is bound by law to her husband as long as he lives; but if her husband dies, she is discharged from the law concerning the husband. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law and if she marries another man, she is not an adulteress. Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to Him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:1-4).

Paul is repeating his message of the previous chapter, but uses another illustration. Once, we were married to an old way of life that was contrary to the law of God. When we see that Christ died in our place and that God counts it that we died with Him, then we can look upon that old way of life as dead. Therefore, now instead of being married to an evil life-style, we become married to Christ Jesus our Lord and thus bring forth the legitimate fruit of righteousness.

Romans is a great letter about freedom. In the first five chapters, it talks of our freedom from the wrath of God. Then, in chapter 6 it talks about our freedom from the dominion of sin. In this present seventh chapter, it is saying we are free from law as a covenant, though we are never free from

The Day You Died

it as a standard. It is no longer a method to be used to gain Brownie points with God and to assure us of our righteousness. Seeing the law demands a perfect nature, as well as a perfect behaviour, it is quite impossible to live in this way without deceiving ourselves terribly.

Then, in the following chapter, Paul says we are free from death. Read the last verses of each of these chapters and we find in each case that the freedom is 'through Jesus Christ our Lord'. Similarly, in the book of Galatians about 12 times we find references to the concept of freedom, and we are told that we no longer need to be under the burden of the yoke of bondage, whereby the flesh with its evil desires controls our lives. The only free person in the world is one who wants to do what he or she ought to do. When we really come to believe that God loves us, and that He loved us enough to die for us in Christ, then everything changes. With that glorious faith, the Holy Spirit comes into the life and He writes the law of love in our hearts so that now we want to do what we ought to do. Until then, resisting sin is like holding onto a wolf by its jaws.

The chief cause of unhappiness is not from outside but from inside, from unsatisfied desires and passions. With the incoming of Christ, there is perfect satisfaction and overwhelming joy. 'For the joy thereof, we sell all that we have and buy that field' (Matthew 13:44). Now we lift his yoke gladly and find it is easy and his burden is light, and his commandments are not burdensome. Gladly, we run in the way of his commandments, for the power of sin is broken, and the illusion has been shattered. Now we know that all the fruit of sin is either green or rotten and that everything taken outside the will of God, like the manna that was disobediently kept, turns to worms. What a wonderful freedom indeed!

It is not possible to argue a person into loving God any more than it is possible to hammer open a rosebud. But, if we will look to what God has done for us in Christ, then as the sunshine falling on the closed flower expands, it will grow sun-like by its reception of the light and according to its nature. So, the message of the gospel shining upon us opens our hearts and makes us God-like.

Let us come back to this matter of the day of our funeral—that day on Calvary when our representative died for us. The Scripture says, 'If one died for all, then all died' (2 Corinthians 5:14). So note it well,

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the day of our death was that dark day when the sun was eclipsed, and when the earth shook, and when a penitent thief found paradise.

The truths that enable us to bring forth the fruits of the gospel are these:

1. The truth that we were originally in Adam, our first representative (See Romans 5:18).
2. The truth that we were also in our second Adam—Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:18).
3. The truth that we were in Christ when he arose from the dead (Col. 3:1).
4. The truth that we are now in the divine reckoning 'seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6).
5. The truth that we no longer live purely from our resources, but that the mighty Comforter, the third member of the Godhead, has come to tabernacle within us (Eph. 1:13; Rom. 8:11; see also John 14-16).

The battle of temptation, therefore, can be won if we continually remember that God reckons our old nature to have died with Christ, and therefore, we must. We are to cherish the grand assurance that the Devil is a defeated foe (see Heb. 2:14). He need have no power over us, except that which we give him by unbelief. Instead of obeying the power of sin's gravitation, ours may be a life that soars in the heavenlies through the power of the risen Christ, mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. And so, it is our privilege to be 'more than conquerors through Him that loved us'.

Our God can always cause us to triumph. Hallelujah!

James Ross Clemens, a cousin of mine was seriously ill two or three weeks ago, but ~~was~~ is well now. ~~The report of my illness~~ The report of my illness, the report of my death was an exaggeration.
Mark Twain



Philemon

—the Christian's Answer to Doubt

DR DESMOND FORD

This original article shows the Letter to Philemon to be an important primary document in the quest for Christian Evidences

ANYONE who really studies the letter to Philemon by the Apostle Paul falls in love with it. It is a model of Christian courtesy, tact and sacrificial love. While containing only 334 words, it is unique among the literature of the world and exceeds all the wisdom of philosophers, teachers and religionists.

This casual, unpremeditated message from the imprisoned Apostle encapsulates the whole Bible and authenticates it. Despite 2,000 years of attention and study it has never yet been granted its full worth, for its underlying significance has not been recognized.

The letter falls into three divisions: verses one to seven, sincere praise for the recipient; verses eight to sixteen, a plea for the converted runaway slave and thief; and verses seventeen to twenty-five, a pledge from the writer.

The most well known verses are these:

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked

to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour you do will be spontaneous, and not forced. ...

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.

About the year 62 A.D., a young slave belonging to the Christian Philemon and family absconded without leave, taking with him some wealth stolen from the master. Having made his way from Colosse to Ephesus, he joined a boat crossing the Adriatic, and another crossing the Aegean, finally arriving at that 'drain of misery and vice'—Rome.

Rome, like the London of the nineteenth century, was full of cheap lodging houses occupied by escaped criminals and paupers. Existence plumbed the depths of despair for most, and it would quickly have become that for Onesimus as his paltry remaining funds ebbed away.

Nobody knows how he made contact with the imprisoned Apostle. Perhaps he had seen and even heard him when he accompanied his master to Ephesus. Perhaps through contact with some of the despised Christians of Rome, he learned the whereabouts of Paul. However providence led him, he finally found and confessed to the greatest man of that century and all later ones.

Paul, like God, was no respecter of persons. He embraced the runaway and told him the good news 'which makes the heart to sing and the feet to dance'. Onesimus learned that the Son of God had bound himself with the chains of humanity in order to redeem people like him. He learned that in Christ there was neither 'bond nor free, male or female, Jew nor Greek'. All were one in their Saviour.

To become a Christian was better than to become a king. The forgiven culprit was transformed and gave his loving service to the man who had given him the best news ever. So loving was he that to Paul he became as a son, and so the Apostle could later exclaim that 'he had become a father, even though under lock and key'. Now Onesimus lived up to his name, which means 'profitable'.

But both men knew that his present paradise of friendship could not endure. He must return to the man he had robbed. Had he returned to a pagan master, he might anticipate crucifixion. But how wonderful for him to learn that Paul knew his master and had even been responsible for his conversion.

Philemon—the Christian's Answer to Doubt

In the letter's heart—the letter written to accompany the returning Onesimus—are these words:

Welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back.

Luther with characteristic insight declared, 'We are all God's Onesimii'. Each of us belongs to our Maker, Preserver and Redeemer. But we have robbed him of loving service and lived solely for ourselves. Our guilt is great. The law condemns us. Conscience pursues us. Yet, there is a loving and powerful intercessor—one whom God counts as his equal. And he, Jesus, while bound by humanity, took our guilt and rolled it into Joseph's new tomb. The words of these verses belong to Paul but the real speaker is Christ.

Thus far, the inner truth of the letter has been long recognized. But there is more, and the 'more' has more value than all the wealth of the world. There is much more here than meets the eye.

No one has ever questioned the authenticity of this letter, but it is in itself perhaps the best piece of Christian apologetics that exists, next to the person and claims of Christ.

The letter proves the existence of an outstanding leader of men, who has travelled widely and who has friends and enemies in all the great cities of the Empire. He is the man who transformed what seemed a mere Jewish sect into a worldwide religion. He proclaims one chief message—the gospel of the redeeming love of God. This man has but to express a wish, and it becomes law to his friends. Thus, he can praise Philemon for his anticipated 'obedience'.

If you ask someone who has just read the letter whether God or Christ are mentioned they are quite likely to reply 'I don't know', but God is there, and Christ is referred to nine times. And it must be observed that the name Jesus Christ here repeated means: Saviour, anointed king, priest and prophet.

In other words, Paul claims to serve one foretold in the Old Testament (the true Melchizedek, the 'Messiah' of Daniel 9:24,25 and the antitype of David the king born in Bethlehem, who after universal rejection and persecution was thrice anointed and became king at the age of thirty). This Christ, according to the letter, is the source of grace and peace, and is the equal of God, and similarly worshipped and prayed to. True life only begins as we exercise faith in him, and that faith is always accompanied by love. See verses three to five. This Christ is the fountain of 'every good thing'—verse 6.

Now is the time to recognize that this letter fits the conclusion of Acts as a hand fits a glove. Observe the last words of Acts:

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

These words find further explanation in the same chapter verse 16: 'When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him'. This is his first imprisonment in the great capital of the world, and his living space contrasts strangely with that smelly and restrictive hole, which tradition ascribes as his later accommodation.

Our letter thus confirms what Acts records—Paul the Apostle was prisoner in Rome, but able to converse with all who came to him. Therefore not only is the letter a genuine vignette of real history, but so is Acts, the book which tells of the resurrected Christ, his appearances before men, his bestowal of Pentecost, and his working of miracles—even opening prison doors. The book opens with a reference to all that Jesus had 'begun to do and teach', as recorded in Luke's earlier book. Now, Acts continues the doing and teaching of the Lord Christ. And the letter to Philemon assumes all this as history.

The connections are even stronger. In the last verses of the letter we find reference to Mark and Luke. And the

opening verse speaks of Timothy. Compare with these references Acts 15:37ff. and 16:1-4. Also note the recurring 'we' in Luke 16:15, and how later verses include the physician Luke, as has long been recognized. Even the naming of Demas in verse 24 is significant. See 2 Timothy 4:10 for an unexpected denouement.

The Book of Acts frequently refers back to the Old Testament, endorsing the same. See 3:18-25. Acts 7 presents a résumé of many centuries of Old Testament history, including mentions of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron and Joshua, as well as several passages about Old Testament events.

But there is more. Philemon's letter makes it plain that humanity is deprived. Man perpetually seeks to control his brother—thus, slavery. The evil is so great that even Christians at first take it for granted as normal. Thereby, the need for sanctification—gradual growing in grace and spiritual understanding—is indicated. So, we not only have Calvary and the atonement in verses 17-19, but also the doctrines of justification (verse 17) and sanctification.

As we prayerfully consider the letter to Philemon from the Apostle Paul, chameleon like it changes from a dull grey mass to a sparking star that ultimately glows like the sun. It is not only the Magna Carta of human freedom, it is the whole Bible in a nutshell, giving Christ and his redemption central place, but also alluding to faith (5 times), love (vv.5,7), hope (v.22), prayer (v.22), the church (v.2) and the warfare between good and evil, turning every believer into a Christian soldier (v.2).

As surely as no one has ever successfully challenged the authenticity of this tiny letter, so there are excellent grounds for accepting all that is in the book of Acts, which provides the setting for Philemon. Philemon is primary documentary evidence. It reflects genuine history. Thus it authenticates Acts also as a truthful account of the earliest days of Christianity.

Here is a tiny letter, which is permeated with the doctrine of forgiveness, that central tenet of Christ's gospel. Not only that, we are compelled evidentially to accept the reality of Paul as a historical figure, the viability of the dynamic history portrayed in the Book of Acts, the gospel accounts of the risen Christ and the histories and teachings of the Old Testament, which he endorsed. What more could we ask or need?



Dissenters in my

Tree



MILTON HOOK

MY ANCESTORS attended church in the Old Meeting House at Tenterden in Kent. At that time it was a Presbyterian Church, the minister and elders being elected by the members. These people were neither mainstream Anglican nor Roman Catholic so were classed among the diverse group of nonconformists or dissenters.

John and Susanna Hook had ten children over a span of twenty years from 1736 to 1756, and all were christened at the Tenterden Presbyterian Church. John was a day labourer in the hop fields and fruit orchards. He and his father were also bounty trappers, trying to control field pests and earn a little cash on the side. Pesky birds were culled to stop them pecking holes in plums. Village records tell of paying four pence to the Hooks for 16 magpie heads, seven pence for 7 bullfinch heads and ten pence for 5 hedgehog heads.

King George II, the titular head of the Anglican Church, was on the throne at the time John Hook's family attended the Tenterden Presbyterian Church. Protestants, under Hanoverian rule, enjoyed great freedom of worship.

The previous decades had not been so stable. Roman Catholic Charles I purged the Anglican Church of Puritans and about eighty thousand of them fled England for the Netherlands, the West Indies and the Massachusetts Colony, many leaving from the Tenterden area. Some returned to fight in the Civil Wars. At that time the enactment of the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) and the emergence of Oliver Cromwell brought relief for dissenters. But one of the first

acts of Charles II was to reverse tolerance with parliament ratifying the Seditious Act (1661). The following year the Puritan vicar of Tenterden, George Haw, together with about eighty other ministers in Kent, were dismissed from their churches for refusing to renounce the Solemn League and Covenant. They were lucky to escape with their lives because the Seditious Act allowed for the local hangman to burn them at the stake. Dissenters met clandestinely.

For three years, under James II, the persecution of Protestants continued. William of Orange saved the day. When he took the throne in 1688 and the Toleration Act (1689) was passed, the tables were turned. Despite the name of the Act it was the Roman Catholics who were regarded as lesser mortals and victimised over such things as unfavourable burial rites.

My ancestor's church at Tenterden was built during the reign of William of Orange. In the same spirit of dissent as that exerted by the earlier Puritans in Tenterden there were some individuals who preferred the Calvinistic Presbyterians of Scotland to the north and France to the south. It was a church with robust preaching and open theological discussion. The Hook family witnessed rapid church growth and extensions to their village church at the

time. One of their members was a wealthy cloth maker named William Blackmore. The Hook family, however, were among the poor, trapping or cobbling, milking cows or picking fruit to earn a pittance.

The English churches responded positively to the Enlightenment. The increase of scientific knowledge and rational thought affected religious beliefs. For example, during the eighteenth century there were legal penalties for denying the Doctrine of the Trinity. But the number of non-conformists who disagreed with this doctrine grew strongly, especially in the latter half of the century, both in England and America. The Presbyterian community in Tenterden was one persuaded against the doctrine. When the Unitarian Relief Act of 1813 lifted the penalties then the Presbyterian tag was soon dropped and they adopted the name Unitarian. It remains the same today.

In the 1800s some of my ancestors married into the Anglican Church and continued to worship there. At the same time there was a general move away from Tenterden by the Hooks (the crows and hedgehogs were delighted) to brighter prospects in London and America and later to Australia.

On reflection I think I have the non-conformist spirit in my bones. I do not dissent for the sake of dissent. Instead, I simply like to test my assumptions. I like to ask, 'Am I following a cultural bias?' Or, 'Is my cherished belief based on emotion or sound evidence?' And, 'Is it vital for my understanding of Christ and my salvation?' Often I find myself dissenting with the Milton Hook of 1960. I continually argue with him. The Milton of old does not often win. I have reduced him to a snivelling shell of his former self, a wasted, bent and broken creature. When I can no longer feel his pulse I shall order his coffin. It doesn't sound very Christ-like, does it? But I think there must be a skerrick of Christianity hidden there somewhere.

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me (1 Cor 13:11).





The drying up of the Jordan

The Children of Israel were ready to enter Canaan but weren't able cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land because it was in flood due to the rainy season. Joshua told the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant to take it to the river and step into the roiling water. As soon as the priests put their feet in the water the river stopped flowing and the water drained away. The priests carrying the ark then moved into the middle of the riverbed and stood there until the last Israelite had crossed over before they also moved to the western bank. The moment they climbed up out of the riverbed the river resumed flowing again (Jos. 3:1 to 4:18).

Scripture indicates that a landslide, 30 kilometres upstream in a gorge near a town called Adam, had blocked the waters of the river. Twice in the past 750 years, on 8 December 1267 and on 11 July 1927, landslides at this place blocked the Jordan. The 1267 landslide completely blocked the Jordan for 16 hours, while the 1927 landslide blocked the river for 21 hours.

The miracle in Joshua's day was not so much in the damming of the river, as in the precise timing of the damming. How did God synchronise the arrival of the Israelites at the Jordan with the critical weakening of the hillside at Adam by heavy rain, allowing it to slide into the gorge, giving enough time for the 30

RITCHIE WAY

kilometres of river below the dam to drain away exactly as the priests stepped into the river? How did God arrange for the exact amount of rock and earth to slide into the Jordan so that the dam that built up behind this barrier would overflow at the precise moment that would allow the water to travel 30 kilometres downstream so it would arrive at the ford just as the priests were exiting the riverbed. That's a big call, but it worked perfectly because God had factored in all the elements to ensure it did.

A wife for Isaac

When Abraham sent his chief steward back to his old homeland to get a wife for his son, Isaac, the steward prayed at the spring outside the town of Nahor, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham ... may it be that when I say to a girl, "Please let down your jar that I may have a drink," and she says, "Drink, and I'll water your camels too"—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac'.

Even before he had finished praying, Rebekah came along with a jar on her shoulder. The young woman was very

beautiful. She gave Abraham's steward a drink, then said, 'I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking'. Her offer was sacrificial because the steward had ten thirsty camels and Rebekah had to go down several steps into the spring, and carry the water up for each one. Her willingness to do so revealed to the steward something important about her character.

Rebekah could have been kept from that appointment by many things that day. Or she could have been feeling too off-colour to offer to carry water up from the spring for the steward's camels. God's timing, however, was impeccable.

David is trapped by Saul

Saul had learned that the prophet Samuel had anointed David to be the next king of Israel, which wouldn't have been so bad had God not rejected Saul as king. David's continued existence, therefore, was a threat to Saul's leadership. Several times Saul tried to trap David and kill him, but each time David managed to escape.

When the Ziphites discovered that David and his men were hiding in their region they were not slow in revealing this to Saul. Saul and his forces closed in on David's band and had them completely encircled. Scripture says, 'As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger

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came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land." Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines' (1 Sam. 23:26-28).

When God calls a person to fulfil a position of importance in his kingdom, Satan and his host are powerless to thwart it, for the Lord who is with that person is greater than he who is against him/her. Satan timed well Saul's encirclement of David and his men, but the Lord checkmated him with the timing of the Philistine incursion.

A Persian king with insomnia

The great Persian king, Xerxes, was able to command almost everything but sleep. One night, after tossing and turning for several hours, he called his courtier to read him some boring history in the hope that it would help him to drift off into slumber-land. What he heard, however, instead of putting him to sleep, jolted him awake. It was recorded in the annals that Mordecai the Jew had overheard two of the king's bodyguards, Bigthana and Teresh, conspiring to assassinate the king, and had saved Xerxes' life by reporting their treachery.

Xerxes sat bolt upright in bed and asked, 'What honour and recognition did the Jew Mordecai receive for this?'

'Nothing was done for him, your majesty', the courtier replied.

The king asked, 'Who is in the court?'

After checking the courtier reported, 'Haman, your majesty'.

'Bring him in', the king ordered.

Now Haman had turned up at the palace early that morning to get the king's permission to execute Mordecai. He wanted to get the king's seal on the execution papers before the monarch got bogged down in the details of palace business.

Haman was about to open his mouth to give voice to his petition when the king asked him, 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honour?'

Now Haman thought to himself, 'Who is

there that the king would rather honour than me?' So he answered the king, 'Let that man be king for a day. Have one of your royal robes put around his shoulders, have your royal crest put on his head, have him seated on your favourite stallion, and have one of the most noble princes lead him through the city streets, proclaiming, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour".'

'Great suggestion, Haman! You are one of my most noble princes so do everything you said for Mordecai the Jew'.

The shock was so great Haman would have collapsed into a chair had one been handy. He, who wanted to execute Mordecai, was now to parade his 'highness' through the city proclaiming his honour to the people as they went.

God's perfect timing—to the very second—not only saved Mordecai's life, it also saved the lives of all the Jews living in Persia at that time. Read the story for yourself in the book of Esther.

A situation when it seemed the Lord's timing was out.

A family that lived in Bethany, on the Mount of Olives, had become very good friends with Jesus ever since he had saved the younger sister from a life of prostitution. Whenever Jesus came to Jerusalem he spent time with Lazarus, Martha and Mary. For him their place was a home away from home.

Once, when Jesus was ministering over in Trans Jordan, Lazarus got very ill. In those days, long before the advent of antibiotics, they well knew the signs of approaching death; they had seen it all too often. But they weren't overly worried; Jesus was well able to heal Lazarus, so they sent him a note: 'Lord, the one you love is sick'. Jesus knew that they wouldn't have bothered him unless it was really important. If he hurried he might get back to Bethany before Lazarus succumbed to his infection and died.

But the Lord never hurries because he doesn't need to. He controls time; not the other way round. Jesus then did

God's Impeccable Timing

something completely inexplicable. He stayed where he was two more days before departing for Bethany. When he arrived Lazarus had been dead for four days. Decomposition had advanced so much the spices that had been bound against his skin were no longer effective. Both sisters were distraught over the death of their brother and gently chided Jesus, saying that if he had been there, Lazarus would not have died.

Unbeknown to them Jesus was about to take them on a leap of faith greater than they had ever before experienced. They had faith that he could restore the fullness of life to a sick person, but they did not yet accept that he could restore the fullness of life to a decomposing deceased person.

When Lazarus, bound from head to foot with grave cloths, shuffled to the entrance of his tomb at the call of Jesus, the sisters didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But when the bindings were removed from Lazarus there was their hale and hearty brother with a sparkle in his eye and a cheeky grin on his face. They shook their heads in total disbelief.

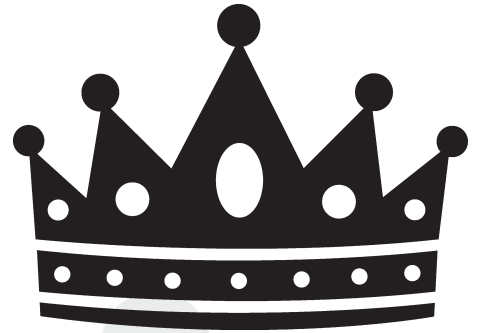
All that was a steep learning curve for the sisters. They thought they knew Jesus well. But even though he was their very dear friend, his answers to their prayers were not exactly what they had in mind. Yet they never complained afterward about his solution to their immense problem.

We, too, can learn from this. Like Martha and Mary, we may grieve deeply that the Lord has not seen fit to answer our prayer, and our hearts may be broken over his apparent failure to respond to our request. But, as it was with Jesus and Lazarus, the Lord often has a better plan for us. So be patient; it is far better to trust the Lord's timing than your own. ❄



David's Royal Son

Part 8



RITCHIE WAY

EVEN before King David had closed his eyes in death two of his sons attempted to seize his throne. The first, Absalom, who took up the sword against his father, was killed in battle. The second, Adonijah, who also sought to arrogate the throne for himself, had his coronation service terminated suddenly by the news that his half-brother, Solomon, had been officially crowned as David's successor.

Solomon was God's choice for the throne—not Absalom or Adonijah—because of all David's sons Solomon was the only one that had a heart for God.

David said to Solomon: "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest on every side. His name will be Solomon, and I will grant Israel peace and quite during his reign. He is the one who will build a house for my Name. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever'" (1 Chr. 22:6-10)

Solomon ascended to the throne about 971 BC and reigned in peace and prosperity as God foretold. The Davidic dynasty, however, including King David's reign, lasted only 425 years, coming to an apparent end with the reign of King Zedekiah when the Babylonians captured him in 586 BC and took him to Babylon where he died. For the next 600 years the throne of Israel remained empty, seemingly in contradiction of God's promise that David's son Solomon would establish a kingdom that would last 'for ever'.

The faithful in Israel, however, even though they could not explain why God's promise seemed to have failed, never doubted God. They knew that one day, someone, born in David's royal line, would restore the throne and government. That is what God had promised.

I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness—and I will not lie to David—that his line will continue for ever and his throne endure before me like the sun. (Psa. 89:34-36)

Also, 'The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: 'One of your own descendants I will place on your throne' (Psa. 132:11).

Inasmuch as the throne had been vacant for longer than it had been occupied, who would David's royal descendant be?

The Son of David

One hundred years before the Babylonian captivity the prophet Micah

prophesied that David's descendant, who would reclaim the throne, would be born in Bethlehem just as David himself had been:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. (5:2)

According to Micah's enigmatic language, the Messiah/King's origin would go right back to the ancient times of King David. But God was also indicating, in Micah's words, that this Messiah's origin would go back forever, because he would be more than just David's human successor—this ultimate king would be a God/Man who existed before his birth.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah just as the prophet Micah predicted. The Lord said of Jesus, as he did of Solomon, 'He will be my Son, and I will be his Father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom ... for ever' (Luke 1:31-33).

When Jesus appeared, healing the sick and raising the dead, the people, realising that he was no ordinary person, speculated that he was the long promised 'Son of David' (Matt. 9:27; 12:22-23; 21:9) who would sit on David's throne. So strong was this belief, the New Testament begins with the words, 'The record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David' (Matt. 1:1), and finishes with these words of Jesus: 'I am the Root and Offspring of David' (Rev. 22:16).

Continued page 12

David's Royal Son

On one occasion the people tried 'to make him king by force' (John 6:15). What the people of that time did not understand, however, was that the Messiah would be much more than just the king of Israel; he would be King of all kings and Lord of all lords (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). His kingdom, which would begin in Jerusalem like a tiny mustard seed, would grow to fill, not just Israel, but the whole Earth (Matt. 13:31-32; Matt. 28:18-19).

And, unlike David's kingdom that had its share of unconverted citizens, Christ's kingdom would consist only of those who, like the Messiah, were a union of the human and the divine. The only people who would enter Christ's kingdom would be those in whose hearts the King reigned (Luke 17:20-21). Only those, who like the Messiah himself, were a union of the human and the divine, would be citizens of David's eternal kingdom (Rom. 8:9-11; Col. 1:27; 1 John 5:11-12).

Why David?

Why did God choose David as the progenitor of the dynasty that would produce the Messiah/King? What qualities did David have that would recommend him to God as the one who would become the forefather of the great Messiah/King, Jesus?

The first quality that recommended David to the Lord was his faith. The author of Hebrews wrote: 'David ... through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised' (Heb. 11:32-33). It was David's incredible faith in the LORD that enabled him to defeat the Philistine warrior Goliath, and it was his faith in the LORD that sustained him in times of crisis. After the Amalekites

sacked Ziklag, David's men were bitter because their wives and children had been taken away to serve in a foreign land as slaves, 'but David found strength in the LORD his God' (1 Sam. 30:6).

The second quality that recommended David to the Lord was his faithfulness. The Scriptures say that David lived an exemplary life before God all his days (1 Kgs. 15:5). David never let go of the Lord, even when he failed greatly. When rebuked for doing wrong he willingly confessed his sin and quickly turned back to the Lord.

There are few sins as great as David's. He, the moral leader of Israel, committed adultery with the wife of a man who had served him faithfully for many years, and then tried to cover his tracks by having the man murdered. But because David repented the Lord forgave him. Jesus himself would pay the penalty for David's sin.

Lest we feel that the Lord gave special consideration to David that he wouldn't give to us, the prophet Isaiah says to all of us:

Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and

milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen that you may live; and **I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David.**

(Isa. 55:1-3 NASB emphasis supplied)

No matter how far we may have fallen into sin, God is always willing—and even anxious—to forgive those who are truly sorry for what they have done. If he can forgive the king of Israel for such heinous behaviour, he can forgive you. The 'faithful mercies' he extended to David, he will extend to you when you repent as David did. Just as the rising sun dissolves the morning mist, so the Lord promises to sweep away your offences so they are no more (Isa. 44:22).

On what basis was the Lord able to forgive David? On what basis is he able to forgive any of us? Every sin, without exception, was atoned for when Jesus died on the Cross, and when we accept that fact by faith, we are counted as being 'holy and blameless' (Eph. 5:27) and 'without fault before the throne of God' (Rev. 14:5 NKJV). This holiness was earned for us by Jesus, and is offered to all who will receive it as a free gift (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:10). Because David, the great sinner, accepted that gift he was declared to be blameless before God. In the same way the Father will put his robe of righteousness around the shoulders of every penitent prodigal son who returns to him.

Psalm 51 is David's prayer of penitence, his plea that the Lord would wash away his sin and create a new heart within him.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ... Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within in me. (vv. 1-2, 10)

God says to all his people, 'I will make an everlasting covenant with you, according to the faithful mercies shown to David' (Isa. 55:3). Note that God's covenant is based on his mercy and forgiveness, not on our performance.

As long as we cling to his mercy and forgiveness we remain in a covenant relationship with him who says to us, as he did to David's generation: 'I shall be your God and you shall be my people'.



FACEBOOK AND TWITTER ACCOUNT



*New times present new challenges.
And new challenges call for new methods.*

For this reason, Good News Unlimited has just set up some new ways of communicating, not just with you, but with the big wide world out there.

And what will we be communicating? Simply the message that you know and love: the gospel of Jesus Christ—of his grace and righteousness. And of course we will be able to let you know about Good News Unlimited events in a much faster and direct way than ever before.

For those reasons, we have set up a Facebook account and a Twitter account. To access these you will need to set up your free accounts with either Facebook or Twitter, or both!

Facebook

If you don't already have a Facebook account, you can get one at www.facebook.com. Once you have your Facebook account, you can go directly to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/goodnewsunlimited/> to find the GNU Group.

Twitter

If you don't already have a Twitter account, you can get one at www.twitter.com. Once you have your Twitter account, you can go directly to: <https://twitter.com/GoodNewsUnlimit>

If you don't have access to these, don't worry! We will continue to keep in touch with you in the same way that we have done so until now.

But we have already started putting spiritually uplifting messages and important announcements on Facebook every day.



WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ONLINE SOON!



God's Odds

PART 2*

DR DESMOND FORD

Uncomfortable Facts and the Wager

The challenge to decide about who we are, why we are here, and where we are going is made urgent by obvious intruding facts. For example, actions have consequences and life is short. If every action has a corresponding reaction, I dare not be careless or frivolous in my inquiry regarding ultimate truth. And if there are a thousand gates to death, and there are; and if only a few out of every hundred die of old age, I should hasten to find out what is truth. I must not be like Pilate who asked that question but did not wait for an answer. He ended his life by suicide.

The solid facts of daily life are as closely related to our personal philosophy as the hard earth beneath us to the ethereal sky above us. It is possible to argue against the heavens as intangible and imaginary, for such they seem in contrast to the substantial earth we tread. But consider what the earth would be without the sky. It would be a place of darkness and despair. We need the heavens for light, for water, for breath, for warmth and life, despite its occasional forbidding aspect in times of storm.

Unconsciously, we rest in the conviction that the sun, even if invisible, is still there, and therefore we are safe.

Similarly our daily actions would be sheer chaos without our acknowledging constellations of convictions, which guide us in our constant decision-making. Those constellations may seem as intangible as the heavens above, but they are just as indispensable. Mark this point well: there can be no expression of a fact that does not include theory—a metaphysical element.

Absolute Proof and The Wager

Have we any right to disclaim responsibility for wagering on the grounds that nothing can be proved? No, all our decisions in the practical affairs of life are based on a weight of evidence, never on perfect demonstration. One hundred percent certainty in any area of enquiry would only be possible on the conditions of an infinite number of observations, perfect measuring instruments, and unimpaired objectivity. These, however, are not available to humans. Thus the famous theorem of Godel, which is recurrently invoked by scientists as they propose hypotheses that fall short of absolute proof:

'The three final postulates of thought are God, the world, and ourselves; and they are all incapable of absolute metaphysical proof. Who limits his belief to that which can be demonstrated, in terms of formal logic, must deny them all; and all, as a matter of fact, have been denied.

W.H. Fitchett, *The Beliefs of Unbelief*, p.31

Truth is always polygonal, many-sided, but our intellectual vision is ever linear. Thus we never can perceive the whole truth about anything. But we can find

enough evidence as a basis for action in most of our concerns. 'There are nettles everywhere but tall green grass is more common still.' Usually the blue of the sky above is greater in dimensions than the clouds that may threaten.

Therefore, intuitively most people refuse absolute pessimism. Robert Louis Stevenson said he believed that there was decency behind the universe, and moreover, that he would still believe that if he woke up in hell.

Surprise! Surprise! So, Wager!

But surely we are not compelled to accept beliefs on a par with the idea that the moon is made of green cheese. No, but we may need to consider ideas which at first sight seem groundless. We need to remember Shakespeare's admonition that there are more things in heaven and earth than dreamed of in our philosophy. Science has been making that point for years. Consider a few of its surprises, which are no longer doubted. E.g., if all the spaces were taken out of any one of us only a pinhead would remain. (Remember that the volume of the nucleus of an atom is less than one millionth of the whole.)

There is a very strange and elusive sub-atomic particle called a neutrino. It is capable of passing through a block of lead many light years in thickness, and every second 600 billion neutrinos pass unnoticed through every square centimetre of your body.

John Polkinghorne, former Cambridge Professor of Mathematical Physics, has pointed out:

Once two electrons (or any other pair of quantum particles) have interacted with each other, they possess a power

God's Odds PART 2

to influence each other, however widely they subsequently separate. ... If one electron stays around here in the laboratory and the other goes, "beyond the Moon" (as we say), then anything I do to the electron here will have an immediate effect on its distant brother". —*Quarks, Chaos, and Christianity*, pp. 55-56

The universe is a far more marvellous affair than any of us has ever imagined. For example, consider what the Hubble telescope has brought to light. Focused on an area like a grain of sand, 4,000 perfectly developed galaxies are found. Coming nearer home we find that the computer perched on top of our shoulders is making about five trillion decisions every second, and in a typical body cell over a thousand processes are simultaneously functioning in the same minute fraction of time.

With My Stumbling, Bumbling Brain—Wager?

Sometimes we are overly sceptical, and on other occasions we miss much by taking certain things for granted that should never be so treated. Let me illustrate. What are we doing right now? Thinking!

Have you heard of Darwin's doubt? Here it is:

And then arises the doubt – can the mind of man, which has, as I fully believe, been developed from a mind as low as that possessed of the lowest animal, be trusted when it draws such grand conclusions.

The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809-1882, W.W. Norton and Co., p. 93

Surely, that's a good question. But we use our brain as we use a window. Looking through the latter we only see what it reveals, not what it is. If the workings of the brain are mere chance processes, its conclusions should no more be called true than the shape of a cloud. But we do trust it, taking its accuracy for granted without ever asking why.

Stephen J. Gould affirmed that the brain was a fortuitous arrival, the result of fifty billion coincidences. Fifty billion to one!

Now Mr. Gould, you remind us of the fundamentalist Christian who affirmed that if the Bible said that Jonah swallowed a whale he would believe it. Since when has chance ever been the way to great achievement? Read Michael Denton's disavowal of any such possibility in his *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*.

Suppose now we use our brain to affirm that after all is said and done there is no such thing as free will, for everything is determined by natural unthinking forces. The trouble with that is that it wipes out any chance of our conclusion regarding determinism being true, because that conclusion itself was determined by irrational forces!

Thus all rumination about the nature of things is grounded on the amazing and yet adequate functioning of this thing we call the brain. And once we come to that awareness the rest can be comparatively easy. Never forget Einstein's whimsical statement that the most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible. How is it that there is something in our heads that harmonizes with the great universe beyond? The skeptic David Hume had this to say: "Consider the peculiar privilege of that little agitation of brain that we call thought, that we must make it the model of the whole universe".

The Universe Is Not Eternal—So, Wager!

We have received many shocks in recent years. One such shock is far more important than talk about evolution and missing links.

I refer to the recent pronouncements that the universe is not eternal, but had a beginning. That has upset many philosophical and scientific applectarts. If the universe had a beginning, does that

not mean it had a Beginner? Many think so. Even the secular magazine *Time* had this to say:

'In a quiet revolution no one could have anticipated God is staging a comeback. After by consensus he had been dismissed by philosophers... now many of the brightest philosophers are theists.'

Article: 'Modernizing the Case for God', *Time*, April 7, 1980

Not only philosophers, but many others in the academy, including astronomers, have of late become believers in a Creator. Moreover, many also grant that such a Creator must be personal, otherwise there is something of cardinal importance in the summit of creation that is not in its cause.

Robert Jastrow has been described as 'the greatest writer on science alive today.' Without professing any form of evangelical faith he has written a popular book, in which the most famous comment is the following:

'For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.'

God and the Astronomers, p. 116. ❄

* This article is from Dr. Ford's book, *God's Odds* (2006), which is available from the Good News Unlimited Office.



Dr Eliezer Gonzalez



THE BOARD of Good News Unlimited has in recent months prayed and meditated on how to better fulfill the gospel commission through GNU.

The challenge has become more urgent for two reasons. The original supporters of GNU in the early 1980's have been growing older and in many cases departing this life. This affects significantly the financial backing of GNU and its capacity for influential pursuits. The other obvious reason is my own increasing age.

Out of the blue came Dr Eliezer Gonzalez—an evangelical Christian of conservative Adventist background with wide experience in business, scholarship and in public and private presentation of the gospel.

Many providential events led him to us at a time when we were deeply perplexed as to the Lord's will for the future. His way to us was threatened by attempts to divert him elsewhere. He has joined us with great sacrifice to himself and his family.

Dr Gonzalez is well known in many scholarly centres of the world. He has given presentations at the Universities of Oxford and Amsterdam, and at other centres in countries that include the USA and South America. He is an excellent writer and preacher—a combination that in all centuries has been rare.

Dr Gonzalez and I have walked, talked, eaten and prayed together as well as served at our Milton auditorium. I thank God for him. His arrival at this critical juncture is a divinely bestowed sign of encouragement for us. We are in the midst of plans and prayers for a new GNU—a new website, new offerings of sermons and books, new plans for small groups around the world meeting to share the gospel hope. (We are not interested in criticism of other organisations and sharing wounds).

To implement these plans requires much financial backing and for that we

depend on you. The sign of the new birth is the wish to be a gospel blessing to those who do not know Christ. A life spent on self is only sewage. Rather, let us be lights in the world radiating the good news attested by loving words and deeds.

Pray for Dr Gonzalez and those of us working with him. Work without prayer is fruitless.

Thank you for your years of giving that have made possible the preaching of the word in many countries in person, in the magazine and by tapes, CDs and DVDs. The heavenly goal draws nearer with our hope of meeting around the great White Throne. None will be alone there.

None will be in distress, penury or pain. We will sing together with those we have invited to kneel at the Cross. ❄

'We are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made'

to two per cent of DNA. It was believed that the rest was just 'junk DNA'—remnants from our evolutionary past.

It has since been discovered that our genome consists of two incredible parts: (a) A complex system of about 30,000 genes, and (b) an even more complex system of about four million gene switches (the so-called 'junk DNA').

Suddenly neuroscientists are faced with a tsunami of information. It appears that each gene is operated, on the average, by 130 switches. Unexpectedly, life became a lot more complicated and inexplicable from an evolutionary point of view.

A mere comparison of the genes of Homo sapiens with those of lesser creatures is insufficient to establish an evolutionary link.

Whereas it used to be believed that relationships between species depended upon the similarities of their genomes, it is now recognised that the genes are just the building blocks of life. Just as the same materials can be used to build a bus shelter or an office block, so similar genes can be used to build a worm or a human being.

What makes the difference between a worm and a human being, however, is the switching sequences between these genes. Which brings us to the question, 'Who or what manipulated these switches to produce something as marvellous as Homo sapiens?'

It is much more credible to believe that such wonderful changes are due to divine wisdom and love than to mere chance. ❄

THE COMPLETION of the project to decipher the human genome, by Francis Collins and team in April 2003, was truly an amazing accomplishment. It was believed that science was on the final lap to understanding the building blocks of the human body.

Much genetic science, and most genetic testing, however, has focused on just one

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE



The parable for this month is the story of the unfruitful fig tree in Luke 13:6-9. Jesus told this parable:

A MAN HAD a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

"Sir," the man replied "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."

In this parable 'the unfruitful fig tree' represented the Jewish nation. Jesus came from heaven to check out this barren fruit tree, and when, for three years in a row, after all his teachings and miracles, he didn't find any fruit of the Spirit on it, he ordered the tree to be cut down.

What kind of fruit was the Lord looking for? According to verses 1-6, he was looking for the fruit of repentance. The

Lord was persuaded, however, to leave the tree another year, during which time the keeper of the vineyard would loosen the soil around it and fertilise it. If the tree did not respond with a crop of fruit, it would be cut down so that it did not cumber the ground. In spite of the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, the Jewish nation was still as barren as ever, and so the fruitless tree was cut down.

Consequently the Romans destroyed the cities of Israel in AD 70, and the survivors were sold as slaves all around the coast of the Mediterranean.

This parable also has an application to Christian churches, which are pictured in Revelation as lampstands (Rev. 1:12-13, 20). The church at Ephesus, for example, was given a second chance.

The Lord said to the messenger of the church there, 'You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent, and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place' (Rev. 2:4-5).

This parable also has an application to us as individuals. William Barclay calls it 'the gospel of the second chance', because fruitless Christians are given another opportunity. God ministers his grace to them in the hope that they will respond with changed lives—lives that are full of the fruit of the Spirit.

There is a limit, however, to God's patience. If we do not respond to his appeals to change for the better, our day of grace could close as suddenly and unexpectedly as it did in the lives of the eighteen people upon whom the tower of Siloam fell (Luke 13:4-5).

The door of opportunity for us to turn again to the Lord will not remain open forever. We have no idea when it will shut, we only know that it will shut, and that we must enter that door before it closes. Tomorrow could be too late, so don't gamble eternity on the foolish risk that you can ignore it for a bit longer. You may not be given that extra time. ❄



Living within your Income



PASTOR IAN

When your output exceeds your income, your upkeep will be your downfall!

THE BIBLE says, 'Stupid people spend their money as fast as they get it' (Prov. 27:20, GNB).

What motivates us to live beyond our means? Why do we spend ourselves into debt? Why are we rarely satisfied with what we have?

Three myths that drive us into debt:

Myth #1: Having more things will make me more happy.

FACT: 'He who loves money will never have enough. The foolishness of thinking that wealth brings happiness! The more you have, the more you spend...' (Eccl. 5:10-11, LB)

Myth #2: Having more things will make me more important.

FACT: 'Be on your guard against greed in any shape or form. For a man's **real** life in no way depends on the number of his possessions' (Luke 12:15, Phillips).

Myth #3: Having more things will make me more secure.

FACT: 'The rich man thinks of his wealth as an impregnable defense, a high wall of safety. What a dreamer!' (Prov. 18:11, LB)

When we buy into these myths, we always overspend.

How to enjoy life more, on less:

1. Find my happiness in helping others.

Jesus said, 'There's more happiness in giving than in receiving' (Acts 20:35, GNB). Just look around you and you will see this is true. The happiest people are those who help the most, not those who have the most. Misers are always miserable.

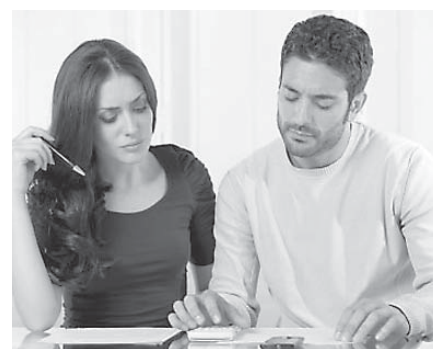
2. Find my self-worth by getting to know God.

The Lord says, 'You are precious in my sight!' (Isaiah 43:4). You matter to God. He made you for a purpose. Genuine self-esteem comes from establishing a relationship to God and becoming all he meant for you to be.

3. Find my security in trusting God, not my bank balance.

'Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have because God has said, "I will never leave you nor abandon you"' (Heb. 13:5, GNB).

Real security can only be found in something that can never be taken from you. While there are many ways to lose your possessions, Jesus said that God will take care of you if you trust Him. ❄



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Eduard C. Hanganu

'The Year-Day Principle Re-Examined'



\$10.00

including P & H
Code: 4TY0001

THE HISTORICIST approach to prophecy depends entirely on the Year-Day Principle—a principle not accepted by those respected by their scholarly peers. Only sectarian groups cherish it, and of these just two are well known—Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Year-Day principle flies in the face of Acts 1:7, which forbids all attempts at date setting. No New Testament writer gives any hint of anticipating significant events based on calendrical dates. The chief New Testament book on the sanctuary, Hebrews, knows nothing of such.

Eduard Hanganu, who attended a meeting I took in the Bronx New York years ago, has written a splendid article on the Year-Day Principle. It is the most thorough and the most comprehensive that I have ever seen. You may not only obtain it to read, but you might distribute copies of it to all you think would profit by it.

Over 35 years ago, when asked by the denomination to write a commentary on Daniel, I gave Adventism the benefit wherever there was a doubt. I supported the YDP. After many years of further study climaxed by an unforgettable experience in the Library of Congress, I was forced to relinquish that sectarian prop. I handled every book on Revelation in that great Washington DC library, particularly noting the hermeneutics used. I found that in almost every case writers projected the end as near to their own date of writing. I realized that Uriah Smith had done the same.

Only in recent decades have Bible scholars come to understand the relationship between Inaugurated Eschatology (the Christ Calvary event) and Consummated Eschatology (the Second Advent). The many texts affirming that the last days began with our Lord's resurrection have only in recent times been given their full worth. Thus date-setting has been superseded by a growth in understanding the New Testament. The YDP may have been a providential prop for centuries for Christians puzzled over the delay in our Lord's return, but to teach it now is to deny our better understanding of Scripture.

Dr Desmond Ford

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If you would like Eduard Hanganu's 92-page document on the Year-Day Principle, it is available from Good News Unlimited, as a laminated booklet, for \$10.00, including P & H. The code number is 4TY0001.

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Letters from Readers

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IN DOUBT

Hi Ritchie,

Are you aware that the original Gospel of Mark finished at Mark 16:8, and that the final eleven verses were added much later? After Mark's original ending the New International Version has this note: 'The most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20'.

Some scholars say that, as Mark was the first Gospel to be written, the implications of this for the actual resurrection of Jesus are quite significant. If the resurrection of Jesus was so crucial to the faith of the early Christians, why doesn't Mark describe any of the events involving Jesus after he rose from the dead?

B. M.

Ritchie's Reply

Hi B.,

My caution would be, you can't build a theological case on what Mark did **not** write. For example, Mark also says nothing about Jesus' birth. Does this imply that Jesus wasn't born?

If the only Gospel we had were Matthew's, we'd all believe Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem prior to Jesus' birth. That, however, would not mean our assumption was correct. Matthew, Luke and John are also Scripture. Each provides details not found in the others. Even Paul records in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8 that Jesus, after his resurrection, appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve, then to 500 brothers at the same time, then to James, then to himself. And this Epistle was written only ten years after Mark wrote his Gospel.

Your question implies that Mark did not support the resurrection of Jesus, however in verses 6 and 7 in his final chapter Mark makes a strong case for Jesus having risen from the dead.

Blessings,



CONFLICT OF OPINION

Dear Ritchie,

I have two questions for you. The first is this: Why is it that so many people resist new information that conflicts with what they already believe? For example, Christians once believed that the world was flat, and that the sun revolved around the earth. Galileo was put under house arrest by the papacy for daring to suggest that it was the Earth that revolved around the sun.

My second question, which is related to the first is this: Will anyone be kept out of heaven because they choose to reject the truth, even though they have had all the evidence clearly presented to them?

I look forward to your insights.

C. C.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear C.,

Warren Buffett, an American business magnate, who has pledged to donate 99 per cent of his immense fortune to philanthropic causes, once said, 'What the human being is best at doing is interpreting all new information so that their personal conclusions remain intact'.

In other words, what counts most with many people is not the truth, but their personal beliefs. But in putting themselves above the truth they are exalting themselves above Christ who is the truth. All truth, whether it is truth about the natural or spiritual world, comes from Christ. Just as the rich young ruler chose his property above Jesus, so others choose their opinions above Jesus. To knowingly and wilfully reject truth—any truth—is therefore to reject Christ.

37:20, there were several cisterns in that place and they put Joseph in one of them.

Do you know why there were cisterns out there in the desert? Cisterns, which were dug and plastered to hold water, are associated with villages and cities. But, according to the story there were no dwellings at all in that area. Do you think this might have been a mistake?

M. C.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear M.,

According to Professor John Sailhammer, 'Before Abraham came into the land of Canaan, large cities with fortified walls dotted the horizon. By the time Abraham left his homeland and made his way there, however, those cities had been abandoned and destroyed'. Sailhammer goes on to say that the abandonment of cities in Canaan was probably due to 'changes in climate and [consequent] aborted relations with major centres of trade' (*Biblical Archaeology*, Zondervan [1998]) 41).

I am aware that there had been a significant shift in the climate of Canaan in the distant past because I have driven through valleys south of Jerusalem that have terraced slopes, but nothing grows there now. They are bone dry, and have been that way for centuries, maybe millennia.

So when climate change forced most of the inhabitants of Canaan to move away, they left behind evidence of their habitation such as cisterns that could not be moved.



WHO ARE HER OFFSPRING?

Hi Ritchie,

I trust all is well with you? I have a question that has been niggling away at me for years. It concerns the interpretation of 'the rest of her offspring' referred to in Revelation 12:17. Who are they?

The traditional explanation, that they are simply the final remnant, seems to me to raise some serious logical inconsistencies.



IN A HOLE

Dear Ritchie,

I've been reading the stories of the patriarchs in the Promised Land but came to a stop when I read about Joseph's half-brothers putting him in a cistern out in the desert. In fact, according to Genesis

Revelation 12:5 identifies the woman's first offspring as Jesus. If that is the case there should be some connection between her first and later offspring. This woman is taken off into the wilderness and protected from Satan. Her offspring is interpreted as a group now separate from the woman and left to face Satan unprotected.

Furthermore, I notice in the letters to the seven churches that in every case it is the faithful within the church who are addressed; there is no shadow of a concept of a remnant separate from the church,

A recent commentary, for which I have a high regard, sees the rest of her offspring of Revelation 12:17 as coming into existence at the end-time.

What do you think?

God bless,
I.R.

Ritchie's Reply

Hi I.,

I confess that I have not given this issue serious thought in recent times so had a good look at it with the help of my commentaries. Here is what I discovered:

Revelation 12:7-17 pictures the woman with two distinct sets of offspring: her 'male child' (v. 13), and 'the rest of her offspring' – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus' (v. 17).

If we can answer the question: Who is the woman? it will help in our identification of her offspring.

There are several options, each of which may have been true for the persecuted faithful in their particular situation:

1. The woman was Mary, Jesus' mother. Her first child, Jesus, 'was snatched up to God and to his throne'. After this the apostle John took the woman (Mary) to Ephesus to get her away from the persecution she faced in her own country. The 1260 days represents a time of persecution, regardless of its length. Satan, no longer able to attack Mary's first child, focused his attacks on the 'rest of her offspring' (Jesus' brothers), who fled from persecution in their homeland to work elsewhere as Christian missionaries (1 Cor. 9:5).
2. Eusebius taught that the flight of the woman may initially have been the flight of the Palestinian Church in AD66 from Jerusalem to Pella in Trans Jordan, where she received protection. The dragon's war against

'the rest of her offspring', would therefore refer to the persecution of Gentile believers who obeyed God's commandments and held to the testimony of Jesus.

3. The woman represents the spiritual mother of Jesus and God's people. After Satan had been cast down by the death of Jesus (v. 13) he pursued the woman who, like the children of Israel escaping from the Egyptian dragon, was carried away on eagle's wings (Exod. 19:4) into the desert where she was taken care of. As this prophecy is apocalyptic in nature, the dragon's war with 'the rest of her offspring' would refer to the final battle of Armageddon against the faithful who have refused to receive the mark of the beast in their hands or foreheads. As this final battle is yet future, 'the rest of her offspring' cannot yet be identified.

No doubt there's a great deal more in this prophecy than I have seen.



THE REMNANT

Hi Ritchie,

Thank you for your reply, but I still have this question: How can the woman and her seed (Rev. 12:17) be separate yet co-existent identities? In other words, if the woman is the Church, then how can her seed be the Church also?

The faithful remnant of Israel (the followers of the Jewish Messiah) did not replace Israel, they become the Christian Church, which was the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel.

In the letters to the seven churches,

the call is never to the faithful remnant to replace the Church. Their faithfulness guarantees the continued existence of the Church.

Ephesus and Laodicea were both churches that were close to extinction in John's day, but which will survive if God can find a faithful remnant that will heed the message of the Holy Spirit.

I await your reply to direct me in my search.

Regards
I.B.

Ritchie's Reply

Hi I.,

I have no solution to **your** problem except to say that apocalyptic is not always as logical as we would like it to be. How can garments be made white by being washed in the blood of the Lamb? How can Jesus be both the Shepherd and the Lamb? How can 10 horns fit on 7 heads? How can the guests at the wedding be also the bride? How can the woman be the Church and her offspring be the remnant?

Maybe the Church and the remnant are like a mother and son where the son outlives the mother. Actually, you may have answered your question yourself when you pointed out that the followers of Jesus were a remnant that came out of mother Israel. Paul describes this remnant as those who have been 'chosen by grace' (Rom. 11:5).

As all churches—which cut themselves off from the Vine, Jesus—are subject to the second law of thermodynamics, which results in them becoming less reliant on God's mercy and more reliant on observing human tradition for their salvation, the remnant will always consist of those who are 'chosen by grace'.

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2013 SEMINARS

PEACHESTER SEMINARS

Fellowship meetings are held at Milton

150 C

**PEACHESTER SEMINARS HAVE
NOW CEASED. SEE BELOW ...**

by **Pastor Desmond Ford.**

TWEED HEADS BIBLE CLASS

Fellowship meetings are held
9:30 a.m. on selected Saturdays,
led by **Pastor Ron Allen.**

Call GNU office for new venue details.

3 August

7 & 21 September

19 October

16 November

7 December

**CLASSES
STILL
RUNNING**

GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP

Dear members and supporters

The GNU premises at Industry Drive, Tweed Heads
South has been sold and was closed on 22 April 2013.

All GNU operations will continue as normal under the
administration of Carolyn Wagemaker from her home
not far from Tweed and operations will gradually be
moved to the Brisbane office.

The GNU P.O. Box number and phone number will
remain the same until further notice.

CITY AND COUNTRY SEMINARS

Brisbane

17 August 2013, 1:00 pm – 4:30 pm

Venue:

Good News Fellowship
237 Milton Road, Milton Qld 4064

*DIRECTIONS: Opposite Milton Railway station—use pedestrian
tunnel under Milton Road and then walk towards XXXX Brewery.
Venue is last building on left before brewery.*

*PARKING: Limited free parking space is available.
Reserve your parking space ahead of time by emailing Carolyn
at admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au.*

First meeting:

1.30pm

Speaker:

Pastor Desmond Ford

Topic:

The Gospel and Immortality—1

Second Meeting:

3.00pm

Speaker:

Pastor Desmond Ford

Topic:

The Gospel and Immortality—2

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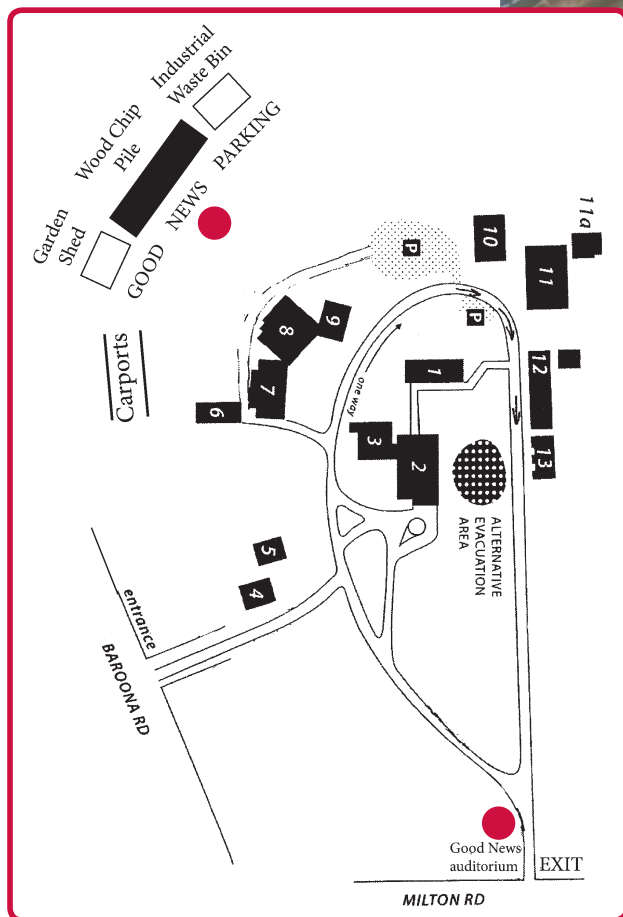
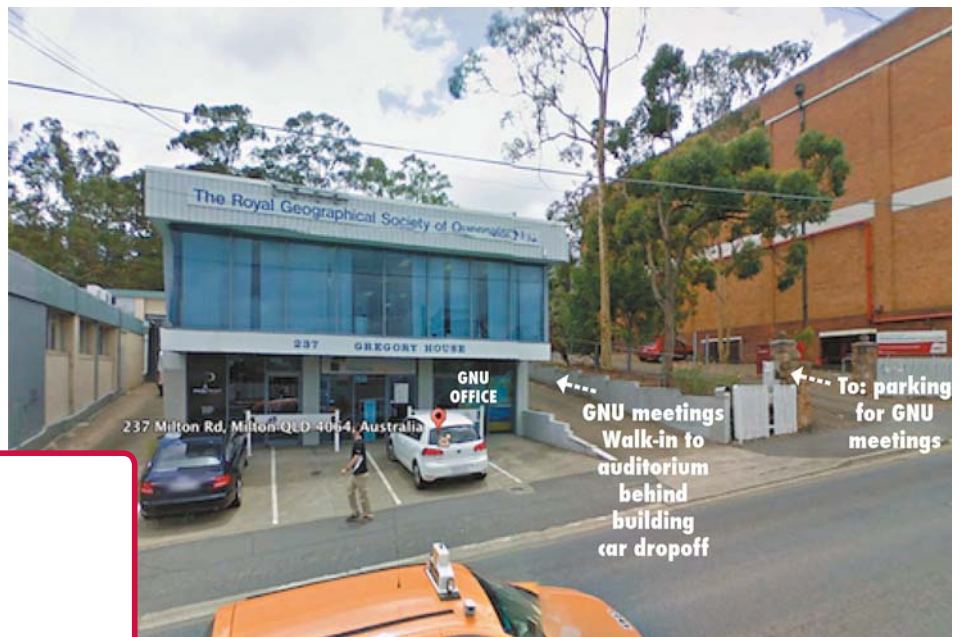
IF JESUS CHRIST'S death
and resurrection were on my
behalf, I don't have to be a
good person, I don't have to have
great faith; I don't have to have a
surrendered heart, I don't have to
have a perfect life. I just have to
grab the branch and am saved.

Tim Keller

GNU new Milton HQ

*Dear members
and supporters...*

The GNU Office at Industry Drive, Tweed Heads South, has been sold and closed as of 22 April 2013.



In the interim, all GNU operations will continue as normal under the administration of Carolyn Wagemaker from her home nearby, as operations are gradually moved to the Brisbane office.

The GNU P.O. Box number and phone number will remain the same until further notice.

The previous Peachester meetings led by Dr Desmond Ford are continuing on a weekly basis from 2:15 to 4:00 p.m. at the auditorium behind the

Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) building at 237 Milton Road, Brisbane.

The early starting time is because the building must be cleaned up and vacated by 4:30 p.m.

The venue is opposite Milton train station and next door to the XXXX Brewery).

The Tweed meetings led by Pastor Ron Allen held its last meeting at the Tweed office on 6 April. An alternative venue for future meetings will be announced soon.

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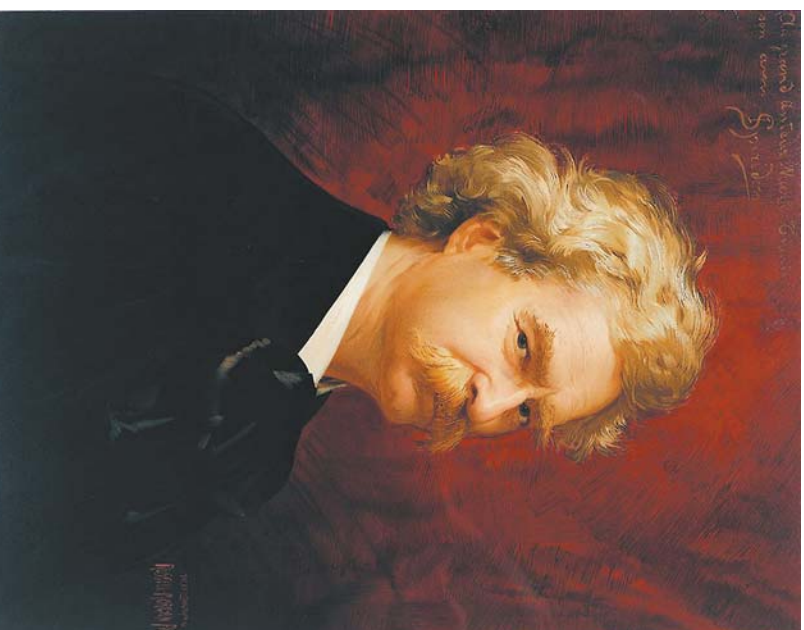
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The heart of the gospel is forgiveness. Jesus' last words to his disciples were: 'Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations ...'

— (Luke 24:46).