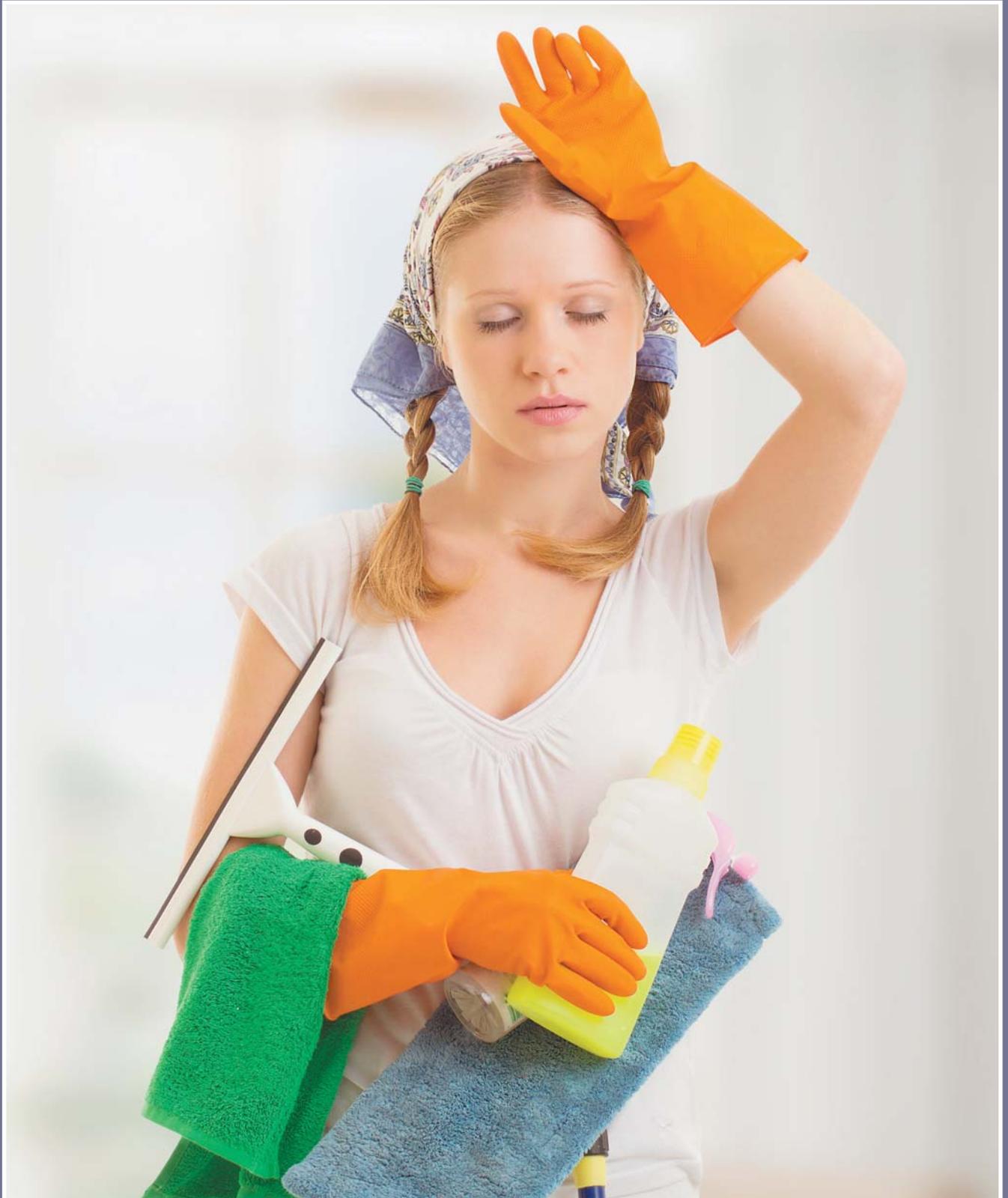


good news

Unlimited

July 2013 • Issue No. 5

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE



| Martha! Martha! | Thanks for What? |

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, 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'.

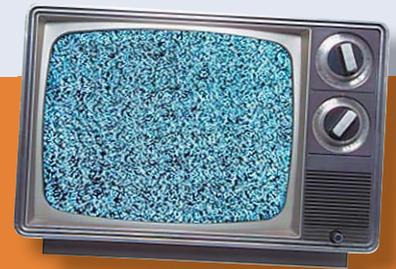
'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life'.

'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

On a ridge not far from our dairy farm in Taranaki, New Zealand, was a Maori Pa or Redoubt apparently vacated hundreds of years ago.

My brother and I spent quite a bit of time playing in the trenches there and trying to imagine what it was like when it was inhabited.

Back when the bush was thick with giant trees populated by flocks of forest parrots and large New Zealand pigeons, and the district abounded with flightless Moa and large rails like Moho, the North Island Takahe, there would have been plenty of food for a tribe. But the forest had been cut down for farmland, and the tens of thousands of birds that inhabited it were now either extinct or reduced to just a few. And the fortified village that had been there was now just a mark on the landscape.

Have you ever been to Petra, in Jordan, the city 'half as old as time'? The amazing thing about Petra is you can see the mansions and temples of the past, but the only people there these days are the sightseers and their guides. The once proud city is dead. And so is Ebla, and the Assyrian capital, Nineveh, and the Hittite capital, Hattusas, and the Mayan, Incan and Aztec capitals of Central and Southern America. As well, numerous other city-

states in North Africa, Mesopotamia and Asia are now just mounds dotting the landscape.

It's an undeniable fact of history that people die, cities die and nations die. The great nations of yesterday, nations like Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Spain, and Great Britain, are no longer great. And the great nations of today will also face the ignominy of age and decay.

The time is not too far distant when Planet Earth herself will also die. Death is the wage that sin pays, and people, nations and our terrestrial home will all reap that reward.

Is there any cure for death? The Bible reveals that there is, and it has given us an example of that cure in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, who took our death upon himself and conquered it by rising from the grave on the third day. Christianity is founded on the ability of God to conquer death in Jesus Christ. The evidence is there in the Gospels for all who would like to check it out. Several sceptics have done so and have been converted—even Jesus' cynical brothers.

But death will eventually conquer everyone who has not been invested with resurrection power by the Lord Jesus Christ. The good news is that when Jesus returns our perishable bodies will be raised imperishable, and our mortal beings shall put on immortality

(1 Cor. 15:42, 53-54). Even Planet Earth will be resurrected after the Final Judgement. The old order of things will pass away and everything will become new (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:4-5).

In spite of the fact that everything in our world is infected with the blight of death the Lord Jesus has countered this by investing all his followers with resurrection power. He said, 'A time is coming AND HAS NOW COME when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live' (John 5:25, emphasis added).

We, who were dead in sin and who responded to Jesus' call, have been raised up to a new life in this world. And if we have risen with him to life in this world, we shall be raised up to eternal life in the new Earth—a world where death will never reign again. ❄



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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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No matter how beautiful you are, however strong you are, however wise you are, life is like walking a tightrope.

Martha! Martha!



IT'S A BIT like the Englishman who was hiking in Scotland and fell into a bog on the mountain Ben Nevis. Seeing a highlander at the fringe of his vision he called out, 'I'm sinking in this bog. How can I get out?' The highland man called out over his shoulder, 'It's not likely that you ever will,' and walked on. All of us at times fall into 'bogs,' and the amount of help available seems as much as in that story. Life is tough.

Today I want to recommend a passage of Scripture that I think gives us a prophylactic, a preventative, a remedy to save us from many falls from the tightrope. It even guarantees that if we fall, ultimately, our outcome will be for good.

Many people live over-extended lives, particularly in this century. Ten thousand things invite our time and attention from which, if wise, we must turn away. Life is too complex; life is too complicated, and it is overwhelming. One in every four people, according to some psychiatric estimates, receives specialised attention because of this overload deficit that brings upon them certain neurotic problems. And at least one in ten has a breakdown. We live a life that is terribly complex.

Human beings are like trees—there is about as much spread out under the ground as there is above the ground. We all have a hidden life. We either culture that life or we neglect it. If we neglect it, the storms of life will certainly destroy us. If we culture the portion that's invisible with the quiet time, the devotional hour, the meditative period, we will survive the storm.

DESMOND FORD

When you consider our era, the words that characterise the 21st century are not words of peace. They are words like aggressive, progressive, dynamic and vigorous. You would never describe this century with words like stable, peaceful, quiet and steadfast. There is a danger in activity.

In Luke 10:38 we read, 'Jesus and his disciples came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him'. I want you to notice that this is her house, not Mary's house. This is Martha's house. She owns it. She has the responsibility for it and she runs it. Martha is a doer; she is a mover and a shaker, and she gets things done. I think highly of Martha and so does Scripture. Martha was not perfect, but Martha walked the tightrope. The problem in her life was balance, and that's the problem in my life, and it's the problem in your life. We are all walking the tightrope. We are all in a land where there are bogs and what we need is balance and some prophylactic that will get us out of the bogs.

Luke 10 goes on to say Martha had a sister called Mary. Now Mary, like Martha, has often been misrepresented. Mary was not just a flower on the wall. This is the woman who scandalised the district

when she got a very expensive jar of ointment and poured the whole lot on a visiting Galilean teacher.

But, you know, we think much more today about what Mary did in that act than about what Martha did in her doings. The thing that pulls at our heart most today is not the very important thing that concerned Martha at this time. Here was the Lord, so tired, so pale, so worn from his ministry, and here were twelve hungry men who needed some sustenance! Martha's response was beautiful. Thank God for Marthas. I have known hundreds of them and been blessed by them, but it is not what we mainly remember about these two sisters.

The second one, Mary, did something so outstanding Jesus said, 'Look, as long as the earth lasts, what you have done will be told. Wherever the gospel goes in the whole world, this thing that you have done, this act of self-abnegation, this great sacrifice, this symbolic parable that you have enacted—it will never be forgotten. It will be taught all over the world'. That was quite something.

Martha is someone whom Jesus loved, and she was a great woman, a generous woman and a kind woman, and we have to have doers, or things will fall apart. Thinking is good, but if that is all you do, you might as well be buried. We want Marthas, but remember too that Mary has been misrepresented. She is not an adornment. She knows what to do at the right time.

Notice, in verse 38, that the scene is Martha's home. She is responsible for its administration. She had a sister called

Mary who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to His teaching. If we sit at Jesus' feet, one day we will sit with him on his throne. Mary's action here symbolises many things, doesn't it? Here is the leisure of love. Remember when you were courting? You didn't count the hours. The leisure of love is what you see in Mary. Here, she is loving, listening and learning. She sits at his feet. Jesus is going to talk, and she wants to hear what he has to say. She has learned this big lesson of life that the main business God is engaged in is giving, and that the main business of his children is receiving, because it is only after we have received that we have anything to give. This is why self-culture is so important; you have to have something to give. And that takes sitting, thinking, meditating, learning and loving—all these are implicit in this picture of the quiet sister listening to Jesus.

Then, the next verse: 'Martha was distracted with much serving'. Please notice there is nothing wrong with serving. If you do not serve, you are not a saint. We are responsible for every jot and tittle of service we can render. You cannot be a Christian without doing it. There is nothing wrong with service and nothing wrong with much service, but there is everything wrong with being distracted from time with the Lord.

Many relationships are destroyed because of the virtue of doing. Many great husbands, many great wives have ruined their marriage because of too much doing. And in the excessive doing, they have become distracted from developing their relationship. In becoming distracted they do what Martha did. She said things she later regretted. What rolls off our tongue in moments of stress reveals the condition of our hearts. And if I am distracted, inevitably my tongue will become a deadly instrument dealing out damage.

Many marriages have been destroyed, many friendships have been destroyed, many business partnerships have been destroyed and many churches have been destroyed because of good people working so hard they became distracted and lost their cool and spoke as they ought not. So, the test of whether I am doing too much is, have I lost my inner calm, causing me to become distracted? If I am distracted, I am doing too much; I am doing things that God has not given me to do.

There is a verse in Colossians that says, 'Let the peace of

Martha! Martha!

God rule in your heart' (3:15). The Greek word is 'arbitrate'. Let the peace of God arbitrate in your hearts. If you are losing your inner gladness, if you are losing your inner joy and if you are losing your inner assurance and certitude, it is very likely it is because you are doing too much. And the more capable you are, the more prone you will be to this error. If your peace is being impaired, you are doing something wrong.

Look how Martha fires off her mouth: 'Lord, don't you care? Get this lazy sister of mine about her main business!' James says, 'If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. For the tongue is a fire, ignited by hell, that can destroy a great deal' (3:2,6).

So here Martha betrays herself. You imagine she loves Jesus; she is distracted because she wants to help him. She knows he is hungry as are the twelve disciples. She loves him! And, yet, look how she talks to him. There is not an instance like this, as far as I know from memory, in the whole Bible where a follower of Christ speaks to him so rudely: 'Lord, don't you care?' And if you and I feel a little superior knowing that we would never do that, I would remind you that you and I both have often said the same words to God, 'Don't you care?' To my regret I have to say that I have. I wouldn't say it out loud. I don't have the courage for that but I have often said it to myself, 'Lord, don't you care? Are you asleep? Are you blind? Here is this poor soul; look at their problem, and you are sitting on your throne up there in all your glory, and you are doing nothing. Lord,

don't you care?' We must not look down on Martha, because we have all done it. And then she presumes to tell Christ how to conduct his business. 'Now, Lord, you can correct this problem by telling my sister to grab a tea towel and get out into the kitchen and help me'.

And so, Martha is not only rebuking the Lord, the King of glory, she's giving him instructions. And, again, as I am tempted to say, 'Martha, Martha, you idiot', I realise that I have done it too, times without number. I've said in my prayers, 'Lord, surely this is the way. Why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? Lord don't let him or her get away with it; do something about it'.

It is better to bite your tongue off than to say something that is going to sear a life-long relationship. It's too late when the furnace is stoked and the fire is rising and the steam is coming out of all the vents. It is very hard to stop then. We must not get distracted. Too much service, too many worries, too many ambitions, whatever it is—we can get distracted by that folly. We can be too ambitious, too greedy.

Like Martha we say things that should never be said, but the Lord answers her, and isn't he sweet? He is so kind. 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things'. He is driving home a lesson. 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed'.

What Jesus first meant was this: 'Martha you are trying to get us a six-course dinner, but I would rather have you in a good temper and just give us some bread or fish. One thing will do, Martha'.

Jesus then added, 'Mary has chosen the good part that shall not be taken from her'. Now, I don't need to tell you, a lot of things will be taken from us. With advancing years the young man loses his strength and the woman her beauty. We begin to lose our hearing and our sight, our teeth

and our hair. Many things are taken from us by nature, by government, or by accident. But there's one thing that cannot be taken from us. Oh, I would like to have something like that! Something that is safe, secure, something that will last. Well, here it is. What is the one thing needed? What is the one thing that cannot be taken from us? It is my relationship with my Saviour who loves me and gave himself for me. That relationship is developed by sitting humbly at his feet to hear his word in order that I might respond joyously to his own love.





A Simple Golden

G

SMUTS VAN ROOYEN

A CHOREOGRAPHER was once asked what her dance meant. She replied, 'if I could say it in English, I would not have said it with motion'. The essence of her rebuke was that there are languages of the heart that surpass mere logic and must not be muddled with words. Art speaks in its own terms. But I am a foolish man specializing in a foolish art, namely, preaching. I do exactly what I should not do, I meddle with words in matters that are beyond words. So it is with apologies to Saint Saenz that I verbalise what I feel in his music.

I do not recall when I first heard this particular piano concerto by Saint Saenz and felt its story. Here is what happened. As the pianist played the magnificent work I had a growing sense that the composer had given the left hand playing the bass clef the specific task of asking disturbing questions that probed the absurdity of our existence. Under its deft/left fingers low notes rolled out in confrontation demanding answers of the right hand. The questions

were strong, primal, unanswerable. The treble hand responded with strident, rapid, even frantic movement, seeking to neutralise the powerful undercurrent of inquiry from the left with rapid staccato and virtuoso. But the answers were not answers, but only futile exclamations of painful anguish.

The pianist's hands continued to argue back and forth until in mutual agitation they reached a profound crescendo. And here at this magnificent height the argument was suddenly and dramatically broken by a gasping pause, a pause for breath, a pause for sense. And in the weight of that pause the right hand forcefully struck a single 'G'. It was a haunting, golden 'G', filled with resolution. It was a 'G' I longed to hear again with unbearable longing. It was a 'G' that for one incredible moment removed the tension of life and satisfied my soul. And even when the tensile argument resumed I understood that even one entity, one living thing, one single person standing alone against the world for just one brief moment is of stunning significance.

When Mary Magdalene came to the tomb of Jesus, the bass clef of her life was already asking urgent questions. Why, God, did you forsake him and let him die? How could you allow the horror of the Cross? How could such a superlative life collapse into ashes? Where is the promised hope of Israel? And, although the treble clef

of her soul answered from the fullness of her splendid love, it seemed to be no more than futile pretension. 'I will make death better', she said, 'I will rub sweet smelling oil on his leather dead skin, I will wash his face this one last time, and then remember him as long as I live!'

But even so fragile an expression of love would be denied her, for when she arrived at the tomb his body was not there. There was nothing for her love to anoint! Now the painful panic of the broken believer overtook her, and she fled in to the dew wet of the garden crying, 'They have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him!' In her confusion and loss she ran headlong in to the risen Lord but mistook him for the gardener. 'Sir, if you have taken my Lord away, please tell me where you have laid him, and I will get him', she sobbed. And at that desperate moment Jesus looked into her frightened eyes and struck a single golden 'G'. A haunting, beautiful, golden 'G'. 'Mary!' he said. One word. One note. Just her name, 'Mary!'

And she knew it was Jesus. He was not dead. He was alive! It was he, for he had spoken her name. Spoken it as he had a hundred times before. But now he spoke it from beyond the grave, from the far side of her death. Now it was a resurrected name spoken by eternal lips and the frantic music of her soul resolved to meaning. ❄

JOB

I ATTENDED a play in our local theatre many years ago. One feature left a lasting impression on me. The principal actor delivered a monologue lasting about twenty minutes. He did not falter. It was a triumph for rote learning and we acclaimed it with a standing ovation. Monologues, however, especially long ones, must be skilfully written and well rehearsed in order to hold an audience. Perhaps for that reason the Book of Job does not lend itself to a modern stage because it contains not just one monologue but about twenty of them.

The book's long and repetitive theme, to the point of boredom, requires extraordinary concentration by an audience. The actors apparently remain in view for long periods. Most possibilities for dramatic action are buried in the unperformed introduction and never really come to the stage. Action on stage seems to be limited to hand gestures. The backdrop and set has no variation. Colourful costumes and the imagery of the narrative are the only elements that would save it from being a box-office flop. The writer depends almost entirely on philosophical argument to hold the audience, a really difficult assignment. Try reading all of it at one time as a bedtime story and see if you can stay awake.

Job's name literally means, 'hated' or 'persecuted'. It was not a name that parents were likely to grant. A person's name was often one they acquired as an adult, one they earned because of some dominant characteristic about them. Who hated Job? The introduction to the play explains that it was Satan who hated him. And his so-called friends turned out to be his persecutors.

The play is not about the patience of Job. The word 'patience' is too mild. James 5:11 refers to Job as an example for those who suffer persecution while waiting for Christ's return. The word is not about passivity. It has a lot of doggedness and grit and boldness about it. Job is feisty

and combative. There are times when Job even becomes angry with his friends and God. He endures the tedious mental persecution and false accusations of the men gathered around him.

Further, we are not to assume that God and Satan play the suffering game with humans as pawns. And we are not to deduce that salvation by proxy is an option just because Job made a sacrificial offering on behalf of his friends. And the play does not teach that if we complain enough then God will return everything we have lost. Instead, theatre is employed to dramatisé our limited understanding of God, pain and calamity.

The Cast

Yahweh Elohim: He speaks from behind the curtain, as it were, both at the beginning and at the end of the drama. His view is the cosmic one, an all-knowing and inscrutable one.

Satan: His voice also comes from behind the curtain. He is the catalyst in the story, the accuser who speaks briefly at the beginning and is never heard of again. He accuses Job, as we would say today, of being a 'rice Christian'.

Job's wife: She provides a rare moment of real drama with a shouting match between herself and Job. She is understandably heart-broken and angry at the death of her ten children, the loss of the family assets, and a husband who does nothing constructive but squat on top of an ash heap. 'Curse God and die', she screams at Job in her loudest atheistic tone. She desperately needs a hug but Job can only wallow in self-pity. Callously, he counters by calling her 'foolish'. This is a mild translation. He literally calls her a decadent or immoral woman or a slut, as we would say today. (Even righteous men can be boarish at times). Did they ever settle their differences? Hopefully, but we miss out on the romantic bits and are simply told they had ten more children. Spare some sympathy for Job's wife and all that nappy changing!

Job: An Uzite and descendant of Shem. He practiced the sacrificial system. In God's eyes he was the bee's knees. He was doing pretty well for himself out on the ranch until disaster struck. Job's viewpoint represents the thinking of those in the line of Yahweh's true believers.

Continued page 8



JOB

Eliphaz: His name means 'God is the giver', a surprising twist because we would not expect a descendant of Esau, as was Eliphaz, to own any residual reference to the Semitic God. He claims divine messages are given to him in his dreams. (My amber lights begin flashing). Later, God labels his messages, among others, as twaddle.

Bildad: Arguably an argumentative chap because his given name means 'son of contention'. He is a descendant of Keturah, maid and later wife of Abraham, therefore a true-blue Hebrew who would be expected to share Job's views.

Zophar: He is the outsider, a Canaanite because of his ancestry through Naamath. His unflattering name means 'the hairy one'. Is there some racism implied here? It is remarkable, however, that his views are very similar to the other men, reflecting some cross-pollination of cultures.

Elihu: Another Semite, being a descendant of Nahor, Abraham's brother. His name means 'he claims to speak for God', a pretentious moniker similar to that of the dreamer Eliphaz.

The Narrative

The repetition of only one survivor from each calamity in the introduction signals that the narrative is not real history. The enormity of the disasters and their swift succession add to the conviction that it is creative rather than chronicle. The conversational style is imaginative for the purpose of moralistic drama rather than the work of a first hand recorder of events. Understandably, the book is not found in the historical or prophetic sections of the Old Testament.

In the wake of Job's calamities four acquaintances arrive to sympathise with him. They ceremonially tear their clothes and wait respectfully for Job to speak first, customs that orthodox Hebrews follow today when approaching mourners.

One by one the visitors rabbit on about the spiritual reasons for Job's dilemma. They allege humanity suffers sickness and disaster because everyone is wicked (4:7; 5:7-9; 8:11-13). The same verses suggest that God will protect the righteous. The distinct inference is that Job himself has sinned and attracted God's displeasure. Indeed, it is said Job's suffering has come from an angry God (20:23). These disasters, it is alleged, are a form of divine discipline

to goad him back to serving God (5:17; 33:19-30). It is further proposed that even the elements are used by God to reward and punish him (37:13). If Job stops sinning God will bless him, his comforters promise (11:13-19). They declare prosperity will inevitably come to those who submit to God (4:7), that whatever one sows, one reaps, and God repays people for their works (4:8; 34:11).

There are crumbs of truth in some of these platitudes, e.g., disaster struck the wicked at Babel and in Noah's day. Precedence, however, does not apply to every case. There are also elements of fatalism in some proposals. And no allowance is made for natural causes. That is, there isn't any recognition that nature is no respecter of persons. Nature blesses and troubles everyone alike (Matt. 5:45).



Job makes many false assumptions. He supposes God is angry with him (13:19; 14:13). He presumes God ignores those who suffer and does not bring the wicked to account (24:12). He thinks God does not pardon him (7:21). He fancies God abandons the elderly to illness and friendlessness (30:9-31).

Repeatedly Job claims he has done nothing wrong. His underlying argument is that sickness and disaster come only to the wicked; in fact they come as direct punishments from God. His basic premise therefore matches that of his sympathisers. The only difference is that they accuse him of being worthy of the calamities because he is wicked but, on the other hand, he claims he is not worthy of all the troubles because he is innocent. The philosophical argument is therefore built around two sides of the same coin.

In the depths of despondency Job says some desperate things. 'I would have preferred stillbirth rather than life', he cries out (3:11-16). 'You have sent evil men to comfort me', he despairs (16:10,11; 19:21,22). Only God's direct intervention ends all their ruminating and restores some sanity to the drama.

The stage lights fade and the four comforters disappear into the black

shadows, leaving a weak spotlight on Job. From behind the curtain comes the arresting voice of God once more. 'What bunkum! Piffle and poppycock! Who is mouthing this mumbo-jumbo?' He asks. Of course, He knows who it is but the ancient writer is providing the imagined conversation. The scribe even introduces sarcasm into God's speech (38:21). The origins and mysteries of the natural world become the thrust of God's argument. Job is led to realise that the creative power of God is equal to the task of sustaining and caring for His creation, especially Job himself. It is a call to trust God even though no man can furnish all the proper reasons for personal suffering.

The conclusion raises the question, 'Is there anything else that we don't understand about the spiritual world?' We are prone to rush headlong into answers. We list them as fundamental beliefs. We claim the ability to describe God's nature even though it is Spirit. We feel sure we know everything about our distant origins. We are confident our religious beliefs make us God's preferred caste. We love to detail and synchronise events that must take place in the lead up to Christ's return. We like to forecast the future despite repeated failed attempts in the past. We profess esoteric knowledge about God's manner of judgment in heaven.

The Book of Job should alert us to the peril of pretence. Scripture gives certainty to essentials for salvation but the peripherals merge into conjecture. We must learn with Job to say more often, 'I don't know but nevertheless I trust'. God does not expect blind faith, but, instead, a faith based on the weight of evidences.

Is there a gospel diamond to be found in the grey dust of Job's ash heap? I believe there is. Despite lots of nonsense that comes from Job's monologues there are some gems. In the depths of his introspection he readily admits he is not righteous (9:28-31; 10:15). That's an excellent start for all human beings. He cannot understand how anyone can possibly be regarded as righteous (9:2). He sees his only way out of the predicament is for an arbitrator to stretch hands across the gulf between divinity and humanity and grant him assurance of acceptance by God (9:33,34). In other words he yearns for a mediator.

Later, he is more positive. He declares that he already has a defender and even if he dies on the ash heap that defender will stand on his grave and guard it until he sees God face to face (19:25-27).

He goes to the extreme length of saying, 'Even if God Himself was to murder me I would still put my trust in Him' (13:15). It is hyperbole in order to demonstrate Job's resilient faith, a faith we can crave and strive to emulate. ✨



Thanks for what?

Some years back an ingenious gatherer of statistics found that in a particular Christmas season, thousands of letters from children addressed to Santa Claus reached the dead letter office before December 25, but in the whole month after Christmas, only one letter came addressed to Santa Claus with a message of thanks.

DESMOND FORD

MY FRIENDS, we dare not despise the nine lepers who were healed and did not return to thank Jesus, because it's always been much easier to cry out 'give me' than it has been to give thanks. One of our greatest needs, which, if fulfilled, will multiply our joy, is the need to think and to thank.

The trouble is, of course, this poor human nature of ours. Human nature is as crooked as a corkscrew. To say 'thank you' is just as difficult as it is to practice giving rather than getting.

Let me illustrate. Two boys went out to gather grapes. One was happy because they found grapes. The other was unhappy because the grapes had seeds in them. Two men, being convalescent, were asked how they were. One said, 'I'm better today'. The other said, 'I was worse yesterday'. Two girls examined a bush. One noticed that it had thorns, the other that it had a rose. Two men looked out through prison bars, one saw mud and the other, stars.

Does it not occur to you that misery is simply a synonym for ingratitude, for always there's something to be thankful for. Even on the worst of days we can be thankful for what hasn't happened.

We should thank God not just for prosperity, my friends, but even for the threats to that prosperity which cast us upon Him in faith. We should praise Him for the trials and temptations that keep us from sinking into an attitude of self-content that can destroy the soul. Did you

know that one whole book of the Bible has a theme of thanksgiving? It's there right in the middle. The name of that book is Psalms, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew title of 'praises'. If you look at the last five psalms, and particularly the last, you will find that the theme of thanksgiving is summed up in a great crescendo. Notice Psalm 150:

Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord.

Praise ye the Lord.

Paul, the Apostle, was no stranger to thanksgiving. He wrote that our thanksgiving overflows because God's grace is reaching more and more people (2 Cor. 4:15). And, 'Thanks be unto God for His indescribable gift' (2 Cor. 9:15).

Notice that Paul referred to Christ as 'the indescribable Gift'—'Thanks be unto God for His indescribable Gift'. In Christ we have an indescribable cause for thanksgiving. Have you ever asked this question, 'What if Christ didn't exist?' What if today we could blot out the name of Christ from every book, from every CD, from every newspaper, from

every tongue? What sort of world would it be then, my friend? With Him would go the Bible and also the Ten Commandments and with those, my friends, would disappear the foundations of democracy and liberty and the measure of security that we enjoy because of law. What then? The nights would be filled with screams and the days with fears. Every sane person should be filled with gratitude for the life and death of Jesus Christ. We should be singing His praises, and living His praises.

Let me read it to you from Luke 17, beginning at verse 11:

On the way to Jerusalem, Christ was passing along between Samaria and Galilee and as He entered a village, He was met by ten lepers who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices and said "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed, where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way, your faith has made you well."

So don't feel upset because people do not say thank you. If one in ten thanks you, you're being treated as well as Jesus was.

Look at that story again. I want you to notice that there was some faith in all of

Continued page 10

Thanks for what?

the ten lepers. They set off without a word even though they had not been cleansed at that point. They set off for Jerusalem to see the priests as they were told to do. If their faith had worked by love, all ten would have been given a greater blessing than just the cleansing from physical leprosy. The one trouble with the nine was that they didn't love, or should I say, they loved the wrong object—self. We need to remember that. All blessings received are a test of character.

Now, the nine ungrateful lepers went on their way with their bodies healed but with a more loathsome disease upon them: the leprosy of ingratitude. Have you ever thought of that? If you and I do not give thanks to God, we have spiritual leprosy.

How gentle the Saviour was with the unthankfulness of the nine. He could have said 'All right, may their leprosy return to them forever'. But He didn't. My friends, our God loves even the ungrateful, the thoughtless and the careless. He loves everyone He's made.

Christ asked, 'Where are the nine?' Are we among them? How is it with us?

The moment a man gets what he wants is a very testing moment. Too often there's a sudden reversion, a reaction in the mind when from needing something, we shift to getting it. Firstly, the giver is no longer necessary, so that makes a great difference. Who can believe the quickness with which the memory of sickness and of all its prayerful longings can be wiped out of our hearts when once the tide of returning strength has swept us up again into health?

When we were thrown into uncertainty by ill-health and we couldn't tell what the next minute might bring. In our distress and our impotence we learned how all depended upon the Most High. But in health, the normal solidity returns to the fabric of life. We can be sure now about tomorrow. We can count and calculate and so God seems to fade away. Perhaps, my friends, that's why sometimes trouble must come again for our own good.

Every miracle has its lesson in Scripture and in that lesson lays the reason why it has been recorded. There were many lepers cleansed of whose healing no record is given, but the story of these ten is told because one of them came back. It was the despised Samaritan who returned in contrast to the ingratitude of Christ's own people—the privileged Jews. They had a good excuse, a legal excuse—Christ had ordered that they go. The law demanded that they go to the priest and show themselves. But my friends, sometimes the letter of the law kills, but it's the Spirit that gives life. Love needs to overrule acts of Congress. Nine chose the law, but to the one who chose grace, Christ said, 'Your faith has saved you'. Spiritually now, as well as physically, he received the nobler blessing.

May I remind you that in this story we do

not find Christ made sour or bitter. There's no recoil in Him to the opposite extreme of indifference and hate. I'm glad He's not like me. I'm glad He's always loving and to all people. Oh, for the love of Christ to be understood. Even fruitless human lives He spared when he pled, 'Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing'.

***So don't feel upset
because people do not say
thank you. If one in ten thanks
you, you're being treated as
well as Jesus was.***

The nine, like so many of us, took greedily the temporal benefits. We take sunshine and food for granted, along with a thousand other things—our sight, our hearing, etc. These nine despised the more precious gift the Lord was waiting to bestow. Do we? They snatched the lesser and missed the greater. Do we? My friends, think about these ten men. They all needed cleansing. So do we all. There was a lesson from the nine—the sin of ingratitude. And there's a lesson from the one—the duty of gratitude.

Now, the punch-line: there's only one reason why anyone will miss out on Heaven—not murder, not adultery, not theft, not lying—it is ingratitude. That's the only reason people will miss out on Heaven. Because the issue now is the Christ question, the Son question, not the sin question. The only reason people will be lost from the kingdom of heaven and eternal life is because they have not appreciated Calvary.

Let me read to you from John 3:17, 'God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not condemned but he who does not believe is condemned already'. Do you notice? People aren't lost because of their sins, but because they have rejected Christ, because they have not been grateful for Christ. Those who lack the spirit of gratitude for Calvary will lose eternal life. He has something better to give us than even the thousand gifts in which we rejoice from day to day. We need to see Him there on the Cross for us. That will bring gratitude.

Not long ago a well-known French bishop told this story to his congregation: Three university students of Paris were walking along the road one Good Friday afternoon when they noticed crowds of people going to the churches to make their confession. The students began to discuss this custom of the unenlightened. They talked in rather cynical terms about the survival of religion, which they described as superstition. Suddenly two of the students turned to the third who was their leader and said to him, 'Will you go into this church here and tell the priest what we've been saying to each other?' 'Sure I will,' said he going in.

He stood in the queue of those who were going to their confession and when his turn came he looked toward the priest and said, 'Father, I've come here merely to tell you that Christianity is a dying institution and that religion is a superstition'. The priest looked at the young man keenly and said, 'Why did you come here, my son, to tell me this?' The student told him of his conversation with his friends. The priest listened carefully and then said, 'All right, I want you do to one thing for me before you go. You accepted the challenge of your friends and came here. Now accept my challenge. Walk up to the chancel. You'll find there a large wooden cross and on it the figure of the crucified Jesus. I want you to stand before that cross and say these words, 'Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn'. The student looked indifferent, but to save face he agreed. He went up and stood before that cross and said, 'Jesus died for me and I don't care a damn'. He came back to the priest and said, 'I've done it'. 'Do it once more,' said the priest. 'After all, it means nothing to you'. The student went back and looked at the cross for some time and then he stammered out, 'Jesus ... died for ... me and I ... don't ... care a damn'. He returned to the priest and said, 'I've done it. I'm going now'. The priest stopped him. 'Once more,' he said. 'Just once more and then you can go'. The young man walked up to the chancel and looked at that cross again and at the crucified. He stood there for a long time and then he came back to the priest and said 'Father, can I make my confession now?' The bishop who told the story concluded it by saying, 'My dear people, that young man was me.' ✱

Thank you!

David's Last Days

Part 7

RITCHIE WAY

WE NOW COME to the last episode of David's life. He is getting old. If we are not already there, that is something we will all have to face ... if we are fortunate. The alternative is not very attractive.

Getting old is a time for reflection. What legacy am I leaving? Will the world be a better place for my having been here? Am I proud of the legacy I have left in my children, in my work, in my service for the Lord?

What do I do if I have not left the world a better place for having been here? I would say, start now; it's never too late. Learn to encourage and bless the people you meet in your daily walk. Compliment the checkout operator for her/his professional service/great smile/friendly manner, etc. Compliment the café for their great food and service. Care for your fellow Christians and neighbours by helping wherever you can. Especially look after those who are old and infirm, and those who are handicapped.

It's amazing how some people accomplish so much with so little. At the end of the evening Channel One news hour in New Zealand there is a segment called 'Good Sorts', about people who do a great deal to brighten the lives of others with very little. They are the stuff that heaven is made of. Try to live a life

that blesses others and one day the Lord will put his hand on your shoulder and say with a smile, 'You're a good sort; you've been a real blessing to others less fortunate than yourself. Welcome into the joy of your Lord.'

When you get old you don't have the strength or endurance you had when you were forty or fifty, but, by God's grace, you should have qualities you didn't have when you were forty or fifty. You should be wiser, more tolerant, more patient, more gracious, more thankful, more understanding, and more loving. Use these talents to bless others.



There is a saying that goes something like this: 'Young men for battle; old men for counsel'. King David's strength was declining with the advancing years but, like most men, he refused to admit it. So when the Philistines marshalled their troops for an attack on Israel, David decided to lead the army down to repel them. During the battle a giant of a man in the opposing army, Ishbi-Benob, noticing that David was showing signs of exhaustion, came at him determined to have the glory of killing the famous Israelite king for himself. Fortunately, Abishai, the son of David's half-sister, Zeruah, came to David's aid and dispatched the Philistine warrior. 'Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished"' (2 Sam. 21:17).

Back in his palace, David—the great warrior who never lost a battle—decided to take a census to find how many fighting men he had in Israel and Judah.

'So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, "Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enrol the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are."'

'But Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?"'

Joab's reluctance to take a census of Israel's fighting men was based on the belief that Israel's trust was to be in the LORD and not in the arm of flesh. He feared that this proposed census could result in Israel glorying in its own strength rather than in the LORD.

However, David's will prevailed, and Joab and the army commanders were sent out to enrol all the fighting men in the country. They spent the best part of ten months taking the census, after which they reported back to the king. Joab omitted to mention, however, that he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering 'because the king's command was repulsive to him' (1 Chr. 21:6).

'David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing"' (2 Sam. 24:10).

The LORD did forgive David, but forgiveness does not absolve the results of sinning. Early next morning the prophet Gad appeared before David to tell him that the LORD was offering David three options: Three years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of plague in the land.

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David's Last Days

David said to Gad, 'I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.'

That very morning a plague began sweeping down through the land killing thousands of people. When it reached Jerusalem David cried out to the LORD, 'I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family.'

At that the LORD called out to the death angel, 'Enough! Withdraw your hand!' The angel, who was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, with his hand outstretched to destroy Jerusalem, withdrew his hand and the plague ceased.



Decisions made by politicians, pastors, leaders in every sphere, have a direct affect on the people under their authority. Last year the driver of a passenger van made a decision to pass a vehicle while approaching a blind corner and ran into a logging truck coming the other way, killing himself and his passengers. Bad decisions by those in control produce bad results for dependants and subordinates. Conversely, good decisions produce good results.

The first Adam's bad choice resulted in death for all his offspring. On the other hand the last Adam's good choice resulted in life for all his offspring (Rom. 5:19).

When a leader makes a wrong decision the people suffer. Tears of repentance will not change that fact. While the Lord will bring good out of the evil, he cannot make the evil good. Never ever forget that. The Lord cannot make evil good, but he can bring good out of the evil.

The crucifixion of Jesus was not good; it was a great evil. But what a wealth of good the Lord brought out of that evil.



What good could the LORD bring out of this plague? He told the prophet Gad to go to David and command him to build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

Araunah offered to give his threshing floor to David, but David said he could not give the LORD something that had cost him nothing. So he gave Araunah fifty shekels of silver for his threshing floor and sacrificial oxen (2 Sam. 24:24).

David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. He called on the LORD, and the LORD answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. Then the LORD spoke to the angel, and he put his sword back into its sheath. ...

Then David resolved, 'The house of the LORD God is to be here and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel' (1 Chr. 22:1).

As the house of the LORD would require much more space than David had purchased, he approached Araunah again and paid him six hundred shekels of gold for the rest of the site (1 Chr. 21:25).

Now that the site for the temple had been decided upon, David decided to make extensive preparations for its construction before his death. Under the inspiration of the Spirit he drew up plans for the temple, and he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for the house of God. Limestone was abundant around Jerusalem; basalt was available in quantity in Galilee and the Golan; and granite could be quarried in the southern Arabah near Eilat.

To quarry large blocks of stone, wooden wedges were driven deeply into saw cuts, and then soaked with water. As the wood expanded it split the rock. The stone was then removed and dressed to exact specifications.

In an arrangement with the Sidonians and Tyrians, large numbers of cedar logs were rafted to the coast from Lebanon and carted up to Jerusalem by teams of bullocks. From these logs, roof beams and intricate panelling for the rooms of the temple were made.

David also provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways, plus a large quantity of bronze for the utensils and temple furniture etc.

David [then] called for his son Solomon and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel. 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 quiet 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).

Because Solomon was young and inexperienced (1 Chr. 22:5), David also organised the priests and administrators who would serve in the temple. Twenty-four divisions of Levites were appointed to supervise the work of the temple, and six divisions were set aside to be officials and judges. Four divisions were assigned to serve as gatekeepers, and another four divisions were appointed as musicians.

David then gave Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms, treasuries, and the place of the atonement. 'All this', David said, 'I have in writing from



David's Last Days

the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan' (1 Chr. 28:12, 19).

David's death

'When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him' (1 Kgs. 1:1). David had outlived some of his wives, and the others were old and ailing, so David's servants said, 'The best way to keep him warm would be for someone to lie next to him, flesh to flesh. The only appropriate person would be a young woman, but it just can't be any woman, she would have to be a very special woman. So a search was made throughout the land, and the woman chosen from the line-up was Abishag the Shunammite—a young woman of great beauty. Abishag was brought to the palace where she nursed the declining king, but even a beauty such as she could not raise David's temperature.

David's eldest living son, Adonijah, a born leader, was self-centred and wilful. Realising that his father would probably not rise again from his bed, he decided to act quickly and take the throne even though he knew well that David had made it clear that Solomon would be his successor. David chose Solomon for his successor because he was humble and had a heart for God, whereas his three older brothers, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, were spiritually and morally deficient.

Nevertheless, Adonijah 'put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him.' Adonijah then conferred with commander Joab and with Abiathar the priest, both of whom gave him their support.

Joab supported Adonijah knowing that if he had the favour of this new king his life would be preserved. It appears that Abiathar, the joint high priest with Zadok, had switched allegiance after being humiliated by the fact that Zadok, who served at the tabernacle on Gibeon where everyone worshipped, had come to be regarded by the people as the real high priest. There were other important officials, however, who refused to support Adonijah in the power struggle, which they knew was contrary to David's expressed will.

Adonijah invited his brothers (except Solomon) and the royal officials of Judah to his coronation ceremony to be held at the En Rogel Spring, at the junction of the territory of Judah and Benjamin. Assuming that his father was now incapable of making judgements concerning the kingdom, Adonijah acted quickly. Once crowned as king he would secure the throne by eliminating his rival, Solomon.



When the prophet Nathan became aware of Adonijah's intentions, he spoke to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and together they went to tell David what Adonijah was up to. Nathan addressed the king, saying, 'Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah will be king after you, and sit on your throne without letting us know? This very day he has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fatted calves and sheep, and has invited the king's sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest to celebrate with him. At this moment they are eating and drinking with him and are saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!'

After a moment's thought David lifted himself up on one elbow and said, 'Call in Zadok the priest and Benaiah the commander'. When they arrived he said to them, and to Nathan the prophet, 'Take the palace guard with you, set Solomon my son on my own mule and lead him down to Gihon, and there Zadok and Nathan are to anoint him as king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then you are to go up with Solomon and seat him on my throne. He is to reign in my place as king over Israel and Judah.'

Zadok collected the horn of oil from the sacred tent, and amidst the crowd down at the Gihon Spring he poured it on Solomon's head and proclaimed him king, as David had commanded. They then sounded the trumpet and all the people shouted, 'Long live King Solomon'. Solomon was then led back to the city by a procession of people playing flutes and rejoicing greatly.

Adonijah and his guests, less than 600 metres away at En Rogel, heard the celebration echoing down the valley as they were finishing their feast. Joab asked, 'What's the meaning of all the noise in the city?' Even as he was asking the question Abiathar's son, Jonathan, came in to report that David had just made Solomon king, and that he was now seated on David's throne.

The shock of this news was palpable. All Adonijah's guests, realising that they could be executed for treason, arose and fled. Adonijah drove his chariot to Gibeon where he took hold of the horns of the altar—the traditional place of asylum. When Solomon heard about this he said, 'If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him he will die!'

Adonijah was relieved to be given a chance to show his loyalty to the king chosen by the LORD. He relinquished that chance however when, shortly after David's death, he asked Solomon if he could have Abishag for a wife. Just as Absalom had publicly asserted his kingship by sleeping with David's concubines, so Adonijah revealed that he had not given up his aspirations to the throne by requesting Abishag for a wife. He had even told Bathsheba that the kingdom was his, and that all Israel looked to him as their king (1 Kgs. 2:15). Solomon's response to Adonijah's treacherous request was to have him executed.

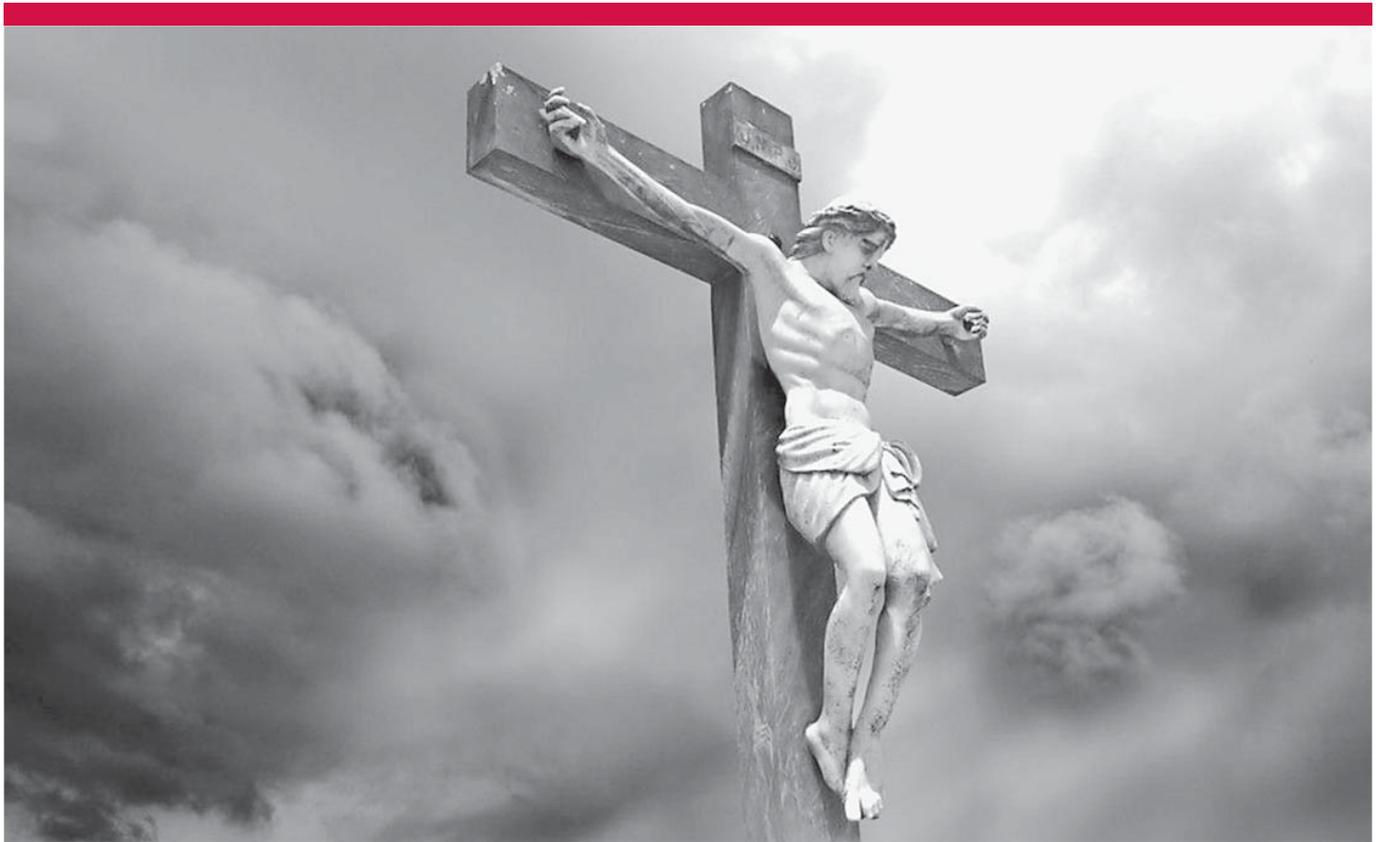
Solomon then removed the aged Abiathar from the priesthood but, out of respect for his office and the years he had faithfully served David, exiled him to his home at Anathoth.

When Joab heard what Solomon had done to Adonijah and Abiathar, he fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar. But the altar gave protection only to those who had slain someone accidentally, whereas Joab was guilty of murdering both Abner, the commander of Israel's army, and Amasa, the commander of Judah's army, two men better and more upright than he (1 Kgs. 2:28-34). So, in accordance with his father's dying wishes (1 Kgs. 2:5-6), Solomon ordered Joab's execution also.

The account of David's life and deeds concludes with these words: 'David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. He ruled over Israel for forty years—seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honour. His son Solomon succeeded him as king' (1 Chr. 29:26-28).

All the events of David's reign, from beginning to end, were recorded by Samuel the seer, Nathan the prophet, and Gad the seer (1 Chr. 29:29).





Jesus: the Messiah

RITCHIE WAY

Prophecies about the Coming One

All through the Old Testament there are prophecies about the coming Messiah. He would be the one whose heel Satan would strike, but he himself would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15); he would be born into our world as a God-child who would rule on David's throne (Isa. 9:6-7); he would become our sin-bearer and would be crushed by our iniquities (Isa. 53:1-11); but the day would come when he, the Son of Man, would be given sovereign power over all nations (Dan. 7:13-14).

Just about everything in the Old Testament pointed forward to the coming Messiah. Even the lives of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament pointed forward to the one who would come to redeem his people. Here are just two examples of many:

Joseph was a type of the Messiah

This Messiah would be a special son, one despised by his brothers.

He would be betrayed and sold for pieces of silver.

He would be accused of being guilty of something he hadn't done.

He would be punished with two others, one of whom would be saved and the other lost.

He would descend into the 'pit'.

He would be raised up from the 'pit' to sit at the right hand of the king.

He would give the bread of life to everyone who came to him for it.

Jonah was a type of the Messiah

Everyone on the ship (which was a type of our world) is doomed to die.

We try our best to escape from death, but our best is not good enough.

We finally come to the realisation that our situation is hopeless and call upon Jesus who is not affected by the raging storm.

Jesus reveals that we will be saved only by his sacrifice.

The moment he is sacrificed our destruction is averted and there is peace.

After three days and three nights Jesus comes forth from his 'tomb' (see Matt. 12:38-40).

The good news is then proclaimed to the gentiles, and thousands repent.

These prophecies and stories, recorded by many people over more than 1000 years, are God's signature in the Old Testament.

God's Sign of Approval for the Messiah

God's sign of approval for the Messiah, in the New Testament, is revealed in several ways. I want to look at just one of them with you.

The figure seven in the Bible has spiritual significance. The word *sheba* in the Hebrew language can be translated either 'seven' or 'covenant' (see Gen. 21:22-34).¹ Many of the most important sevens in Scripture are those that are hidden.² They are like a concealed code embedded in the text to identify the Author as the great covenant-keeping God.

No other book in the world contains God's signature as does the Holy Bible: not the Vedas, not the Tantras, not the Qur'an.

The figure seven, like diamonds in a mine, is found all through the New Testament.

Most of the sevens in the New Testament are centered on Jesus' sacrifice for us, by which he sealed his covenant relationship with us.

Jesus: the Messiah

1. There were seven trials for Jesus.³
2. There were seven accusations made against Jesus.⁴
3. There were seven unjust punishments inflicted upon Jesus.⁵
4. There were seven people who testified of Jesus' innocence.⁶
5. John's Gospel records that Pilate asked Jesus seven questions.⁷
6. The four Gospels reveal that Pilate found no fault in Jesus seven times.⁸
7. Pilate's trial of Jesus had seven parts.⁹
8. The crucified Jesus had seven wounds.¹⁰
9. While Jesus was on the Cross he spoke seven times.¹¹
10. And there were not only Seven Sayings from the Cross, there were also Seven Sayings to the Cross.¹²
11. Jesus' sacrifice took seven hours, the seventh being his time of rest when he was taken down from the Cross.¹³

Now, if people who knew each other well wrote all four Gospels at the same time and place, it could be claimed that there was some kind of collusion with

regard to these sevens.

But that claim can't be made because some of the Gospels were written decades after the others and as far distant from each other as Israel and Asia Minor. And one of the writers, who was not a Jew, probably did not know any of the others very well, if at all.

Yet each of the four Gospels provides unique parts for the jigsaw of the covenantal sevens. If just one Gospel was left out of the Bible, then some of the sevens would be incomplete.

That is evidence that the Divine hand was over it all. Such evidence cannot be found in other holy books, such as the Qur'an.

The last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, which reveals how God has and is restoring his covenant relationship with his people, has several patterns of seven. The Greek word 'seven' (*hepta*) is mentioned there forty times.

So what is God saying in all these sevens? He is offering them to us as Abraham offered seven ewe lambs to Abimelech (Gen. 21:22-34).

He says, 'This is the covenant I want to make with you through the death of my Son. If you accept it you will be my child and I will be your God.'

How good is that? ❄

ENDNOTES

1. Abraham's and Abimelech's names are each mentioned seven times in the Hebrew language of this narrative.
2. I am indebted to Dr Desmond Ford for most of these sevens.
3. 1. Annas (John 18:12-13; 19:24); 2. Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57); 3. Sanhedrin evening meeting (Mark 14:55-56); 4. Sanhedrin morning meeting (Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66); 5. Pilate (Luke 23:1-2); 6. Herod Antipas (Luke 23:7-11); 7. Pilate (Luke 23:13-25).
4. 1. He threatened to destroy the temple (Matt. 26:61); 2. He was a criminal (John 18:30); 3. He was subverting the Jewish nation (Luke 23:2); 4. He opposed paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 23:2); 5. He stirred up the people all over Judea (Luke 23:5); 6. He claimed to be King (Luke 23:2); 7. He claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7).
5. 1. They struck him in the face (John 18:22); 2. They punched him (Mark 14:65); 3. The guards gave him a ritual beating (Mark 14:65); 4. They flogged him (Mark 15:15); 5. They spat on him (Matt. 27:30); 6. They struck him on the head several times with a staff (Matt. 27:30); 7. They crucified him (Mark 15:24-25).
6. 1. Judas Iscariot (Matt. 27:4); 2. Herod Antipas (Luke 23:15); 3. Pilate (Luke 23:4,14); 4. Pilate's wife (Matt. 27:19); 5. The insurrectionist on the cross (Luke 23:40-41); 6. Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-51); 7. The centurion in charge of the crucifixion party (Matt. 27:54).
7. 1. Are you a King? (John 18:33); 2. Am I a Jew? (John 18:35); 3. What is it you have done? (John 18:35); 4. What is the truth? (John 18:38); 5. Where do you come from? (John 19:8); 6. Do you refuse to speak to me? (John 18:10); 7. Don't you realise I have power either to free you or crucify you? (John 18:10).
8. 1. Luke 23:4; 2. Luke 23:14; 3. Luke 23:22; 4. John 18:38; 5. John 19:4; 6. John 19:6; 7. Matt. 27:24.
9. 1. John 18:28-32; 2. Luke 23:5-6; 3. Luke 23:13-16; 4. Luke 23:18-24; 5. John 19:1-5; 6. John 19:6-12a; 7. John 19:12b-16.
10. 1. His back (Matt. 27:26); 2. his head (Matt. 27:29, 30); 3 & 4. his two wrists (Matt. 27:35); 5 & 6. his two feet (Matt. 27:35; Luke 24:39-40); and 7. his side (John 19:34; 20:24-27).
11. Luke 23:34; Luke 23:43; John 19:26-27; Matthew 27:46; John 19:28; John 19:30; Luke 23:46.
12. Matthew 27:39-40; Luke 23:39; Luke 23:40-42; Matthew 27:41-43; Mark 15:35; Luke 23:36-37; Mark 15:39.
13. Mark 15:25, 34.

Don't Worry

PASTOR IAN

DO YOU TEND to expect the worst? Do you panic when you get a letter from the ATO, or when you hear a rumour about layoffs at work?

The word worry comes from an old English word meaning 'to choke or strangle'. Of course, that's exactly what worry does to your productivity and happiness. It's a self-defeating waste of time.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave four reasons for not worrying and the secrets for overcoming it (Matt. 6:25-34).

Worry is unreasonable.

To worry about something you CAN'T change is useless. To worry about something you CAN change is stupid! And every time you review a worry in your mind it just gets bigger. Worry

amplifies problems out of proportion. 'Don't worry about the clothes you need. Life is more than what you wear.'

Worry is unnatural.

You were not born a worrier. It is a learned response to life. In fact, you have to practice to get good at it. Fortunately worry can be unlearned. The only species in God's creation that worries is human beings. We don't think God will take care of us. 'Birds do not worry but God takes care of them. Don't you realize you're more valuable to God than mere birds?'

Worry is unhelpful.

It does not work. It cannot change the past. It cannot control the future. It only makes you miserable today. Worrying about a problem never solves the problem. 'Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?'



Worry is unnecessary.

God has promised to take care of you if you'll trust Him with the details of your life. As a child, if you asked your father for lunch money you never worried about where it would come from.

That was his problem. Let God be God in your life! 'God will take care of you, just have faith.'

HOW CAN I BREAK THE WORRY HABIT?

First, trust God with every area of your life. 'Your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well what you need and he will it provide it if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.'

Second, live just one day at a time. 'Don't worry about tomorrow. Each day has enough trouble of its own.'



HUMILITY



DONOVAN CAMPBELL*

THE REPUBLICAN field was stacked with candidates far more accomplished and better known than the circuit lawyer from a backwater frontier state, but Lincoln somehow secured the Republican nomination and then the Presidency.

Immediately thereafter, the Illinoisan did something extraordinary: he formed his cabinet from the same Republican luminaries who had been his rivals for the nomination. One of his most important posts, the Secretary of War, went to one of Lincoln's most bitter adversaries, Edwin M. Stanton, a man who had previously served as the Attorney General of the United States.

Interestingly enough, this was not Lincoln's first close encounter with his future War Secretary. The future President had worked with Stanton six years prior, as a fellow lawyer on a joint case in Ohio. It was not an auspicious beginning. Stanton refused every meal invitation and would not even walk to the courthouse with Lincoln, later commenting to a friend that the future President looked like a 'd—ned long armed ape'. After being appointed Secretary of War, Stanton began to work busily at cross-purposes with his Commander-in-Chief, routinely disobeying orders he considered ignorant or shortsighted.

One day, a congressman arrived at Lincoln's office, reporting that the Secretary of War had not only countermanded a direct order from Lincoln but also called the President a d—nd fool for issuing it.

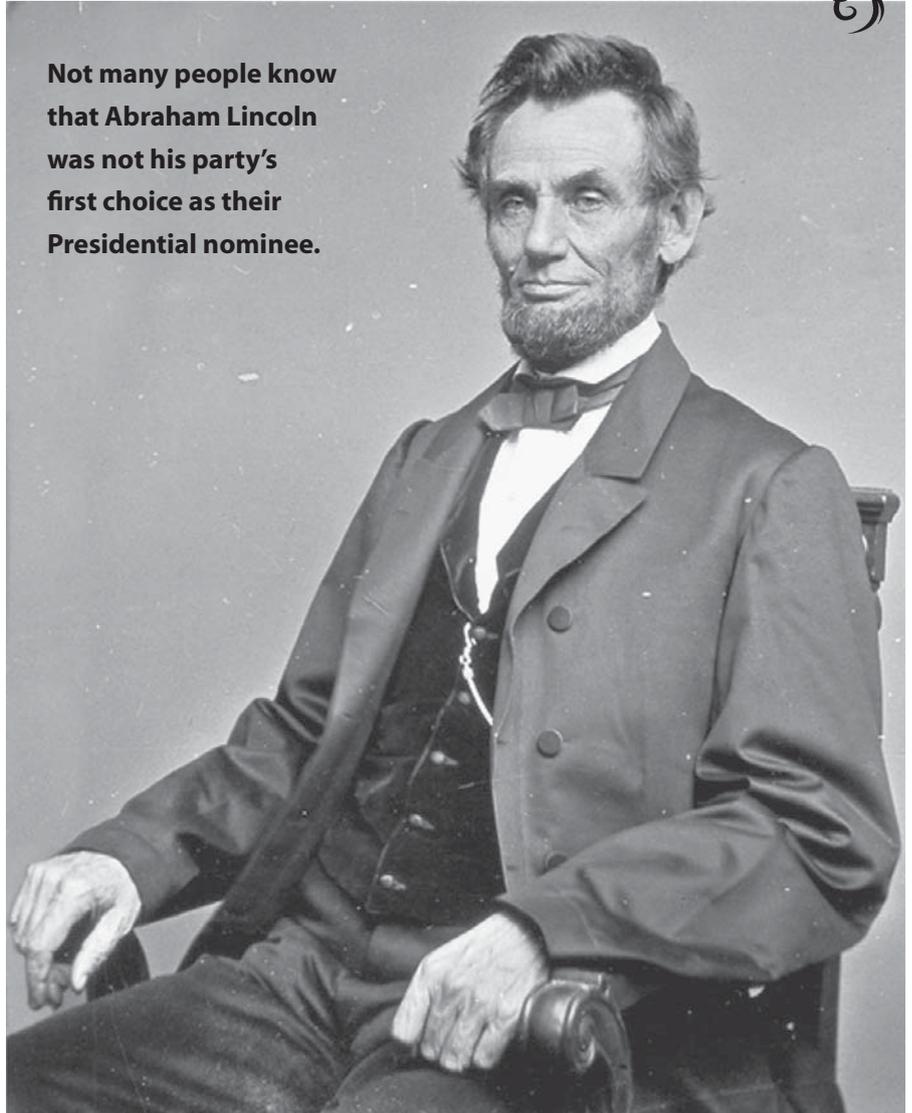
'Did Stanton say I was a d—nd fool?' asked Lincoln.

'He did sir, and repeated it', replied the congressman.

This accusation was no small thing—Secretary Stanton was guilty of mutiny.

Lincoln's response reveals volumes about his character. 'If Stanton said I was a d—nd fool, then I must be one, for he is nearly always right, and generally says what he means. I will step over and see him.'

Not many people know that Abraham Lincoln was not his party's first choice as their Presidential nominee.



There are very few people in Lincoln's situation—brand-new, confronting a national existential crisis—who would have responded similarly. However, Lincoln was known for a singular quality—humility. This virtue allowed Lincoln to build one of the most talented Cabinets in America's history by freeing him from his wounded pride and thus enabling him to make the best use of the best people. Eventually, Lincoln would earn the steadfast loyalty of his team—Stanton came to call the President 'the best of us'—and that team, under Lincoln's leadership, would shepherd America through arguably the darkest time in the country's history. None of this would have been possible had Lincoln not been humble.

What Humility Is Not

Despite its critical importance for leaders, the virtue of humility is neither well understood nor widely sought after. In many ways, leaders, especially business ones, are expected to be larger-than-life figures gifted with superior abilities and marked by few, if any, normal human failings that humility would acknowledge and reveal. The CEO of Gree Electronics, an air-conditioning giant, summed up this philosophy of larger-than-life leadership in a pithy self-assessment, 'I never miss. I never admit mistakes, and I am always correct.'

However, the non-humble are not flawless; rather, they hide their weaknesses

until poor choices compound to a point that the truth can no longer remain hidden. Consider, for example, the politicians who trumpet their family values one day only to be caught involved with prostitutes the next. If we want to avoid the fate of leaders turned laughingstocks, then we cannot hide our failings behind a façade. We have to confront them, both with ourselves and with others.

Because this virtue is so widely misunderstood, it is easier to begin our exploration of humility by identifying what it is not. Humility is not thinking less of ourselves and downplaying our gifts and talents. It is not denying that we are good at certain things, or that we have done good work in certain areas. It is not spending inordinate amounts of time obsessing about what we do wrong every day. However, many of us think that these things are precisely what are meant by this virtue, which gives this character trait a weak, even neurotic, overtone.

Another prevalent misconception about humility is that it is perfectly acceptable to be internally proud of strengths and accomplishments, but the moment the internal becomes the external, the humble virtue vanishes. We have to turn away from all praise, no matter how well meaning. We have to put on false modesty and lie to others. Humility thus becomes a virtue of the deluded or the deceitful.

When we tag the above maladies with the label 'humility', which is common, then our experience with those who practice this 'virtue' only reinforces our negative perception of it. Not only is it misunderstood—it is often confused with vice.

True Humility: A Leadership Accelerator

So what exactly is humility? At its core, humility is nothing more than a realistic view of ourselves and our relationships, combined with an accurate appraisal of our teams and how they view us. There is a story about Oliver Cromwell, the famous seventeenth century English general, that neatly sums up this concept. At the age of forty-four, Cromwell had overthrown the British monarchy and had become the most powerful military and political figure in England. In 1654, this luminary sat for a picture, and the intimidated painter turned out a first draft depicting Cromwell as an idealized Roman god. Cromwell took one look at the painting and rejected it out of hand, for the painter had omitted some noticeable facial blemishes. Cromwell demanded the painting

re-done, realistically, and this time he had some guidance for the painter.

'You will paint me just as I am—warts and all', he said, and thus bequeathed to the English-speaking people a phrase that neatly sums up the concept of humility: 'Just as I am, warts and all'.

Why is humility, properly understood, so important for a leader? First, this virtue serves as a necessary counterbalance to a driving sense of mission. Few people choose to advance causes that they believe are inherently evil. Even the monsters of history—Stalin, Hitler etc.—started with what they truly believed were worthwhile causes. And that is precisely the problem with passionate leaders who pursue their mission without humility. They risk destroying that which they would save. For example, to create a society characterized by liberty, equality, and fraternity, French revolutionary leader Robespierre beheaded thousands of his fellow citizens.

A humble leader, however, is far less likely to take their mission to immoral, illegal, or illogical extremes, because the humble leader is far more likely to hold a balanced view of themselves and to surround themselves with people who will help them hold such a view. 'Faithful are the wounds of a friend', says the book of Proverbs, 'but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful'. Humble leaders enable and encourage their trusted friends to wound them.

Humility also accelerates the pace at which we learn from mistakes, which speeds the pace of learning and innovation. Everyone makes mistakes, and leaders typically make more than most—after all, they have increased scope for decision-making. Humility enables a leader to confront and admit their mistakes quickly—to fail in small ways rather than large ones. It also allows the best ideas of an organization to bubble up to the surface. If a team feels that their leaders will take input from everywhere, then that team will be much more likely to float their ideas in the hopes of having them enacted.

Thus, the 'soft' virtue of humility has some very 'hard' practical consequences. Organizations will find that the rate at which they produce ideas and products significantly accelerated. They will be able to iterate and innovate more quickly than competitors. At the individual level, humility allows us to strengthen personal connections with our teams by acknowledging openly that we are real people with real problems. And last but not least, humility allows us to make big decisions, for it frees us to take

responsibility for failure.

Many people know that General Dwight Eisenhower led the famous D-Day invasion of continental Europe in 1944. Few know that on June 5, 1944 (the Eve of D-Day), General Dwight Eisenhower penned the following note, 'Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone'.

Eisenhower's humility prepared him to shoulder the responsibility for the failure of D-Day, which, in turn, gave him the freedom to order the invasion of Normandy under conditions that were far from ideal. The seas were choppy, the air was foggy, and the invasion date had been twice delayed due to weather. A lesser man might have hesitated, too proud to risk the opprobrium associated with a blighted effort. Eisenhower did not. The rest is history.

True leaders are not one-in-a-million celebrities, nor are they special, gifted people on a plane apart from the rest of humanity. Rather, they are everyday people who realize their own flaws, accept correction and seek to learn from those around them. If we can attain humility, then we can be assured that we have gained a character trait that will help us lead well in the long run. As we think about whether we are developing this virtue, we can ask ourselves a few questions to get started:

When was the last time we said, 'I'm sorry, I was wrong, will you please forgive me?'

- To our team at work?
- To our friends?
- To our spouse?
- To our children?

When was the last time we asked for constructive criticism?

- From our teams?
- From our friends?
- From our family members?

Humility is not an easy virtue to cultivate. It requires that we deliberately make ourselves vulnerable to others. And our pursuit of it must never cease—the moment that we think we have arrived is the moment in which this virtue disappears. ✱

* Used with permission. This article is a distillation of a chapter from Donovan Campbell's book on character-based servant-leadership, called *The Leader's Code*, published by Random House.

Immortality

by LORAIN BOETTNER

Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1956.

THIS BOOK is a recent reprint in 'The Student Library' series. Boettner believes, as I once did, that when a Christian dies his conscious immortal soul goes to heaven above, and remains there until it returns to Earth to be united with a new body in the resurrection.

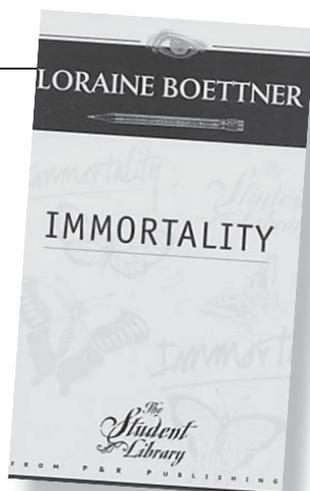
Throughout his book Boettner speaks of the soul as though it were a disembodied conscious entity. According to Desmond Ford, however: 'The original words for "soul" and "spirit" occur about 1,600 times in Scripture, but never with the meaning of something human and conscious that can exist without a body'.

Boettner makes many references to the 'immortal soul', a term that is not used even once in the Scriptures. The word, 'immortality' (*athanasia*) is used only three times in the Bible: once of God (1 Tim. 6:5-16) and twice of the resurrected saints (1 Cor. 15:53, 54). If believers do not put on 'immortality' until they are raised in the resurrection, as Paul says, on what basis can it be said they have souls that are immortal?

It is significant that Paul claims that the expression, 'Death has been swallowed up in victory' (from Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14) applies to the resurrection of the body at the Second Coming, not to the departure of the soul at death.

On page 113, Boettner, writing about the death of Jesus on the Cross, says, 'The spirit of Jesus went immediately to the Father....' Did Jesus' disembodied spirit, as a conscious entity, go to the Father between his death and his resurrection from the dead? Boettner asserts that it did. What then are we to make of Jesus's words to Mary Magdalene after his resurrection, 'I have not yet returned to the Father' (John 20:17)? Any contradiction of Jesus words would be, to a Christian, an echo of what happened at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The only safe course is to put our trust in what the Lord himself has said.

Boettner says, 'The death of the body becomes for His people the gateway to heaven, a transition by which they move out of the body and into the presence of the Lord' (page 20). Such a belief is anti-gospel, for it is not our death that opens the gateway to heaven for us, but Christ's (Matt. 27:50-51; Heb. 10:19-22). It appears



that Boettner is unaware that he is taking the side of Plato against Jesus in this matter.

A key question for me is: If the 'immortal soul' has a conscious existence after death, what was the point of the resurrection of Jesus? Was it not that God had conquered our greatest enemy, death, through the resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:51-56)? But how could death be our enemy if it releases our souls to go to heaven when we die? If, however, Paul is right, then our victory over death will not be achieved in the departure of our souls from our bodies at death, but in our bodily resurrection from the dead.

In order to prove that there is life between death and the resurrection, Boettner calls to the witness stand, in his defence, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (pages 97 and 112-13). To the Jews, who believed that the spirits (shades) of the dead—both good and bad—went down to Hades, this parable needed no interpretation. Boettner, however, somehow raptures the spirit of Lazarus into heaven above, which is contrary to both to the understanding of the people Jesus addressed and the correct interpretation of this parable. To the Palestinian Jews, Paradise—their Elysian Fields—was a place down in Hades, not a place up in the celestial heaven.

This parable (Luke 16:19-31), which was widespread throughout the Mediterranean world at that time, was used by Jesus to teach—not that people's souls (shades) went down to Hades after death—but that the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead would not change the hearts of those who refused to accept what God said in his Word. And history proved him correct. ✱

Healthy Hints

Teeth Care



If you are having trouble flossing your teeth you may like to try this faster, more effective method:

First, make sure you have the correct floss for your teeth. Cramped teeth require a finer, stronger floss. Cut off about 50cms of floss and wrap one end of it securely around your left index finger and the other around your right index finger, leaving about 15cm of floss between the two fingers.

Slide the floss down between two teeth in the bottom jaw so that it just separates the upper edge of the gum from the left tooth. Then, keeping the floss as taut as possible against the tooth, zip it up into your mouth. Do it again, and then repeat the same action twice on the adjacent tooth. Do all the inner surfaces of your teeth using the same technique. When finished rinse your mouth, and notice how clean it feels.

By using an electric toothbrush at least twice a day, and by flossing your teeth every second day, you should maintain healthy teeth and gums.

Beetroot



Beetroot is a good source of folate and is rich in potassium. It is claimed that beetroot are good for tissue repair. In ancient times only the leafy tops of beetroot were eaten. Beetroot leaves contain beta carotene, calcium and iron.

They may be cooked with other greens such as cabbage and silverbeet. When cooked on their own they are milder than silverbeet, and rather delicious.

Recent studies (December 2012 *Nutrition Journal*) showed that men who were given a mix of beetroot and apple juice had a significant drop in blood pressure. The effect is due to beetroot's high levels of nitrates.

Dr. Zinn, dietitian and New Zealand Nutrition Foundation member, says recent studies show that beetroot also helps improve stamina by reducing the oxygen cost of exercise.

Alzheimer's and Blood Pressure



By keeping your blood pressure in check, you may be able to lower your odds of developing Alzheimer's disease, even if you have a genetic mutation that puts

Healthy Hints

continued

you at higher risk for this memory-robbing disorder. Results of brain scans performed on 118 adults age 47 to 89 showed that those whose blood pressure was under control had fewer of the beta-amyloid plaques in the brain that are characteristic of Alzheimer's. As expected, participants with a genetic risk of the disease and high blood pressure had significantly more of the telltale brain plaques than the other study patients, according to researchers at the University of Texas, Dallas. While this study didn't prove a cause and effect relationship between high blood pressure, the genetic mutation and increased amounts of brain plaque, it suggests that keeping your blood pressure under control can do more than just lower your risk of heart disease. It may be the way to keep your brain healthy, too.

The study was published in the March 18, 2013 issue of *JAMA Neurology*.

Activated Charcoal

Charcoal was used in gas masks during World War II because of its very high absorption power. Just one gram of activated charcoal has a surface area in excess of 500 square metres, thus enabling it to reduce the absorption of ingested poisonous substances by 60%. Activated charcoal is stocked in many emergency rooms, ready for those who have overdosed on drugs and alcohol.

Diarrhoea that is caused by a bacterial infection may be countered by taking six charcoal tablets or capsules with two glasses of water.

The charcoal absorbs the toxins that are produced by the infection, thus relieving the body of the need to flush them from your system.

Your stools will be very black, but that is a small price to pay for the relief it offers. Replace lost electrolytes by mixing a sachet of electrolyte (e.g. Enerlyte) in a glass of water and drinking it.

Activated charcoal may be purchased from your chemist as either tablets or capsules.

WARNING: Never take activated charcoal with your prescription medicine because it will neutralise the benefits of your medications. ✨

The Rich Miser

The parable for this month is the story of the rich miser in Luke 12:16-21: Jesus said,

"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops!'"

"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry!'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.

There is a certain security in having money in the bank, but how much is enough, and how much is too much? Jesus' parable in Luke 12:16-21 teaches that being very rich doesn't necessarily give us a fuller and richer life—quite the contrary, riches can make us more selfish if they are used solely to gratify our own needs. The person who counts, in God's eyes, is the person who uses his wealth to bless others.

What many of us don't realise is that we are all wealthy in different ways: some are wealthy financially; some are wealthy musically; some are wealthy technologically; some are wealthy

socially; some are wealthy homiletically; some are wealthy theologically, etc. In every case the true Christian will use his/her wealth to enhance the lives of others. God has riches for all of us, but like the bread, which Jesus broke and gave to his disciples beside the lake, they are riches that are given to us to share, not to keep; the gospel riches are given to us to pass on to others. This life is given to us as the only opportunity to share our riches so that others will get a glimpse of Jesus and be drawn to him.

The Jews were rich in the blessings of God, but like the rich man in this parable, they kept these blessings to themselves and refused to share them with the despised Gentiles. Consequently, God took their riches from them and gave them to the Gentile converts along with the commission to share these riches with the world.

The one Person who made the greatest mark for good upon the world owned nothing but the clothes on his back. But he was rich in every other way, and he was the ideal sharer. And he says to all of us, as he did to the healed demoniac, 'Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you' (Mark 5:19).

A man's life does not consist in keeping, but in sharing, so share the riches of your faith with others. You have a wealth they know nothing about. In sharing lies true joy and satisfaction. ✨





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.



CAN GOD MAKE MISTAKES?

Dear Editor,

You say a lot about the Ten Commandments, which makes me wonder whether or not you realise that these Commandments belong to the old covenant and have been done away with. We now live under the new covenant, so should not be giving the law an equal place with Christ.

A.L.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear A.,

I have never given the Law an equal place with Christ. When here on Earth Jesus was the Law in human form. He lived it perfectly, and where the law had been corrupted or diminished by people he went to great lengths to purify and correct these changes.

When you imply that God made a mistake in giving his people the Ten Commandments, or that there were two different ways in which people are saved – the old covenant way and the new covenant way—you are making a serious mistake. Salvation has **always** been in Christ. No other name under heaven has been given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

In Christ's day most Jews believed they were God's people because they kept the commandments. Paul, however, pointed out that the Law, instead of giving us life, condemns us to death (Rom. 7:10-11), and that life came only as a free gift from Christ (Gal. 2:15-16). However, once a person has Christ in his life, Christ will want to live out his law-abiding life through that person (Eph. 2:8-10). Only those with a living connection to the vine, Jesus, will bear the true fruit of his righteousness (John 15:1-6; Rom. 8:3-4). They will have his Law written in their minds and on their hearts (Heb. 10:15-17). *That* is the new covenant.

The New Testament upholds the Ten Commandments as the standard by which we believers in Christ should measure our behaviour (e.g. James 2:8-12). We Christians will never make God second to anything else, nor will we replace him with a substitute. We will avoid doing or saying anything that will depreciate his character, and because

we value our covenant relationship with the Lord we will observe his appointed time for celebrating and developing that relationship.

As Christians we will respect all lawful authority, we will not destroy another person's life, nor will we dishonour marriage. We will respect other people's property and reputations, and will maintain our own moral integrity by not desiring anything we are not entitled to. Can you find fault with that?



PREDESTINATION

Dear Ritchie

Is it true that God has predestined some people (the elect) to be saved and everyone else to be damned?

I can't believe that God would punish an unconverted sinner with eternal damnation if that person was predestined to be lost, as that would be so unfair. It would be like requiring someone to fly by flapping their arms, then killing them because they couldn't.

A.P.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear A.,

The Bible says, 'God desires all men to be saved' (1 Tim. 2:4), and that Jesus 'gave himself as a ransom for all men' (1 Tim. 2:6).

Everyone is predestined to be saved, but, unfortunately, not everyone will accept that.



THRONE OR FOOTSTOOL?

Dear Ritchie,

I was surprised, recently, while reading a book by a notable theologian, to find that he refers to the Ten Commandments as 'God's footstool' rather than God's throne. And he does this in more than one place.

I shrugged it off as the opinion of just one man, but since that time I have come across another author who also refers to the Ark of the Covenant as God's footstool.

This sparked my interest, but I haven't been able to resolve the problem, so wondered if you, in your busy schedule,

could find time to sort this problem for me? Hope you can help.

F.D.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear F.,

Both David and Solomon understood that if the omnipresent LORD God could not be contained by the heavens, how much less by the temple they were building for him (2 Chron. 6:18). They understood that the house they were building for him would serve as nothing more than his footstool. When 1 Chronicles 28:2—the text that has led to this misunderstanding about what constitutes God's footstool—is read carefully, this problem is solved. It quotes King David as saying, 'I had intended to build a permanent home for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God' (NASB). In other words, God's footstool was the permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant.

There are several clear statements in the Bible that refer to the Ark of the Covenant, not as God's footstool, but as his throne. First Samuel 4:4 says, 'They brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim'. See also Exod. 25:22; 2 Kings 19:15; Psa. 80:1; 99:1.



POGROMS

Pastor Ritchie,

Can you help me understand why God let Hitler destroy the Jews as he did?

When I was in primary school in Germany my teacher took our class to one of the places where the Nazis slaughtered the Jews so we could see for ourselves. I asked my Mom about why God let this happen but she told me that when I was older I would understand.

Well, I am much older now, but I still can't understand why.

I.G.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear I.,

God was not against the Jews any more than he was against the Christian Armenians who died in the hundreds

of thousands at the hands of the Turks during the First World War. Sin does not discriminate between the good and the bad.

Many innocent people die daily because of the actions of guilty people. Justice has been denied to millions in this life, which is why there is a judgement in the life to come.

In this life our understanding of these things is limited and often wrong, but what is encouraging is that in the next life our understanding shall be complete and satisfying.



TRUTH SANS EXPLANATIONS

Hi Ritchie,

The thought came to me the other day that the Bible gives us truths but not explanations.

For example, God created the heavens and the earth, but does not explain the process. Daniel 2 gives the bare facts but some of the interpretations that fit historical events into these facts, seem to leave the facts behind.

We are also told that there will be a resurrection of the dead, but we are not told how this will be made possible.

What I would like to know is this: What is the implication of this for us as people who uphold the Scriptures as God's Word? I would be very interested in your reply.

God bless, I. R.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear I.,

The implication is that we need to constantly keep in mind the difference between the divine Word of God and our human interpretations of it. The first is the rock on which we build our faith, the second is often but sand. This is not to say that we should avoid interpretations, but wisdom would suggest that our personal and denominational interpretations of God's Word should always be held in suspension and not be allowed to set in concrete.

I have modified or discarded a number of my earlier beliefs, something that would not be possible had I set them in concrete. If we acknowledge that truth is infinite, we finite beings would have to be very arrogant to settle on a final understanding of a particular passage of Scripture.

If we allow the Spirit to lead us into truth our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture should be dynamic rather than static; there should always be room for development.



ARE THE PLAGUES LITERAL?

Dear Editor,

Just a quick question for you: Are the seven last plagues of Revelation 16 literal?

It was the devil who covered Job with boils so I find it hard to believe that a loving God—who said we should love our enemies and do good to those who hate us— would cover his enemies with 'ugly and painful sores,' and turn their drinking water into blood, etc.

L. N.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear L.,

If 'the seven bowls' (v. 1) aren't literal bowls; if 'the mark of the beast' (v. 2) isn't a literal mark; if 'the throne of the beast' (v. 10) isn't a literal throne; if 'the great river Euphrates' (v. 12) isn't a literal river; if 'the frog-like spirits' (v. 13) aren't literal frogs; if 'the dragon' and 'the beast' (v. 13) aren't literal animals; if Armageddon (v. 16) is not a literal place; and if 'the great city' (v. 19) is not a literal city, then there's a strong possibility that the plagues aren't literal either.



REINCARNATION

Dear Ritchie,

I would like you to look at the enclosed book on reincarnation by Herbert Bruce Puryear.

I believe it has an important message for Christians, and I think you will be blessed by it.

L.V.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear L.,

Thank you for the opportunity to have a look at your book, *Why Jesus Taught Reincarnation: A Better News Gospel*. Puryear teaches that 'one of the main strengths of reincarnation is that 'it is only with the concept of reincarnation that we may truly assume full responsibility for all that we are and all that we are experiencing' (p. 5).

According to the Bible the only way to accept the 'full responsibility for all we are', is to give it to Jesus who fully atoned for our wickedness on the Cross. Apart from that there is no possibility of anyone ever atoning for their past.

If the foundation of reincarnation depends upon the individual atoning for his/her own sinfulness, and if the foundation of Christianity depends upon Jesus atoning for our sinfulness (Rom 5:18-19), then the gospel of reincarnation is totally contrary to the Christian gospel.

Reincarnation, by its own definition, is anti-Christian. The author professes love for Jesus (p. v.), but his Jesus is not the Jesus who said, 'No man comes to the Father except by me'. Saving ourselves through reincarnation is absolutely impossible simply because reincarnation cannot change our natures, which means that each reincarnation would add to the burden of our sinfulness, rather than subtract from it. Besides, how do human beings, who rely on incarnation to make them perfect, atone for their past sins?

Reincarnation is a teaching that will bring you heartache and disappointment further down the track if you continue to cling to it. The only One you can trust in is the incarnate Jesus who loves you, and who has already paid for all your sins and bestowed on you his free gift of divine perfection (2 Cor. 5:21). You don't have to go through aeons of incarnations to become 'perfect' because perfection is granted you immediately you put your trust in Jesus. 'By one sacrifice [Jesus] has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy' (Heb. 10:14).

Put your faith totally in Jesus, L., and you will be purified of your sin immediately, not aeons down the track after innumerable incarnations. 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin' (1 John 1:7). What could possibly be better than that?

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2013 SEMINARS

PEACHESTER SEMINARS

Fellowship meetings are held at 11

PEACHESTER SEMINARS HAVE NOW CEASED. SEE RIGHT ...

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.

6 and 20 July
3 August
7 and 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.

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CITY AND COUNTRY SEMINARS

Ballina

13 July 2013, 10:00 am – 4:00 pm

Venue:

Ballina Island Motor Inn
Pacific Highway, Ballina NSW 2478

First meeting: 10:00 am
Speaker: Pastor Doug Martin
Topic: *The Crucifixion of Truth*

Second Meeting: 11:15 am
Speaker: Pastor Ron Allen
Topic: *Jonah: Man NOT on a Mission: Bus Drivers and Their ilk.*

Third Meeting: 2:00 pm
Speaker: Pastor Ron Allen
Topic: *Jonah: Man NOT on a Mission: To Hell and Back*

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*

Ballina

2 November 2013, (provisional)

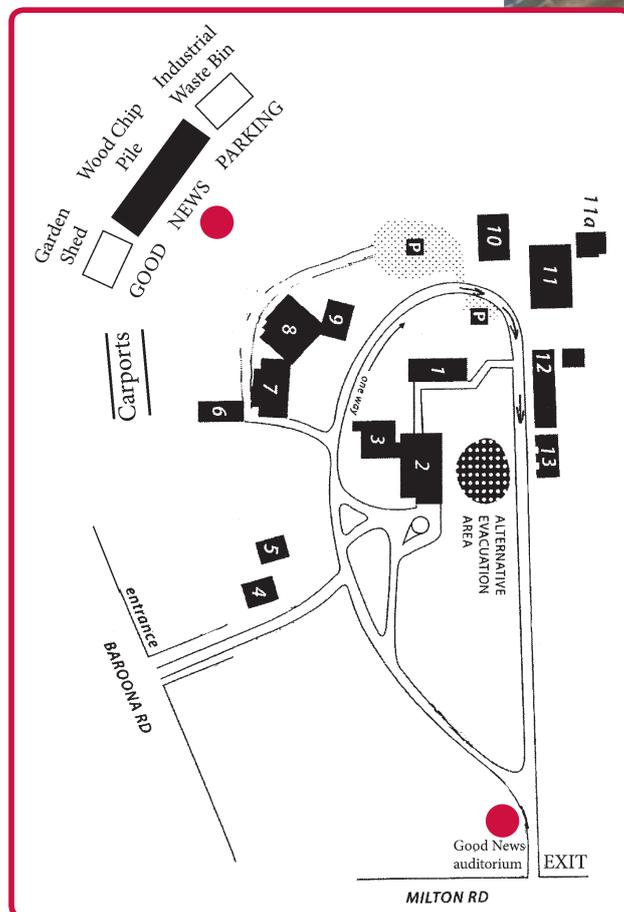
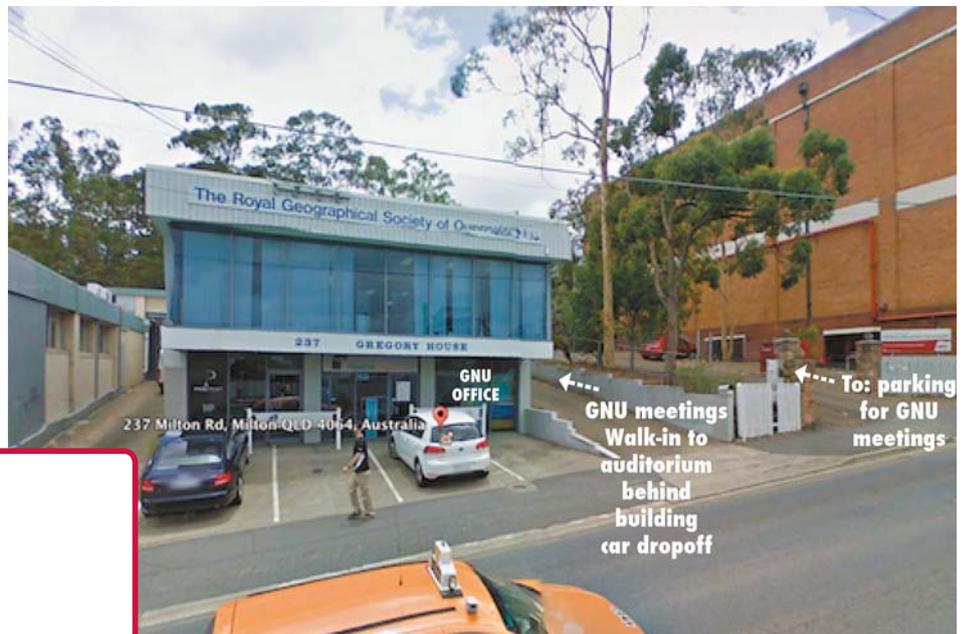
Venue:

Ballina Island Motor Inn
Pacific Highway, Ballina NSW 2478

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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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).