

The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

Vol. 72 No. 12

DECEMBER, 2005

"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith"

Editorial **Jesus the radical**

Last month we discussed the specific provisions of the new Civil Partnership Act. The television news and written media coverage of the civil partnership registrations that have taken place since the 21st December have only served to demonstrate clearly that the true purpose of the Act is to promote what is generally being heralded as 'gay marriage'. This legislation will no doubt come under the general banner of what is known as 'progressive' legislation.

It is already being classed alongside the lowering of the legal age of consent for sexual activity, the 1960's legalisation of homosexual activity and the freeing up of the laws on divorce and abortion as socially progressive. When these types of law are discussed their proponents often cite 'human rights' as being one of the fundamental purposes.

'Progressive' legislation.

The common theme of what is called 'progressive' legislation seems to involve the removal of constraints on human activity. The new Civil Partnership Act removed constraints on the formal recognition of 'gay' partnerships; the abortion bills gave a woman the 'right to choose' (i.e. control over her own body as it is commonly termed); the lowering of the age of consent for heterosexual activity and, later, equalizing the age of consent for homosexual activity is seen as 'liberal' legislation. The late Labour Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, was often regarded as one of the great liberalizing Home Secretaries in the United Kingdom as he oversaw many of these changes during his short tenure at the Home Office.

Not all pieces of 'progressive' legislation could in any way be seen in a poor light. The enfranchising of women when they won the right to vote is a case in point. Laws to ensure that children were not forced into the workplace at a very young age, often in dirty and dangerous conditions, were progressive and worthy causes. These and many other changes, for example the various anti-discrimination laws, have indeed brought about greater equality and social

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justice and made a significant and welcome improvement to the conditions and life-chances of many people.

There is no natural end point to radical, progressive legislation except perhaps a kind of utopian state in which every individual has the right to express him or her self in any way that pleases that person. That is the ultimate expression of human rights and it would work too if every individual acted in a way that was generally acceptable to the rest of society. That of course is fanciful and many new laws are a response to the very fact that there is always a minority that simply refuses to behave in a way that is reflective of the common good. Interestingly, as we have seen recently with the Government's anti-terror laws, which amongst other things called for the detention without trial of terrorist suspects, human rights activists argue vehemently against these measures whilst they often command widespread public support. Perhaps to identify the nearest mankind has come to living in a state of minimal laws, we would need to go full-circle to the earliest point in mankind's history, so far as Christians understand it, back to the Garden of Eden, where there was indeed only one 'law' or prohibition relating to the eating of a particular fruit.

Radicalism in Christ's teaching

It has always been a source of deep frustration that the common representation of Christian belief, by those who stand outside of it and would classify themselves as 'progressives', is that Christianity is restrictive and regressive. To refer to someone as a 'fundamentalist' is to disparage them as illiberal and repressive. A commonly expressed view of fundamentalist Christian belief is that it's adherents are those who take some kind of masochistic pleasure in being repressed and unthinkingly subordinating themselves to the doctrinaire demands of another i.e. God. Yet this stereotype belies the very real radicalism and social progressiveness that Jesus demonstrated during his short ministry, a radicalism that so freaked the religious and secular authorities of his day that they had to resolve to kill him to try to stop the spread of his teaching.

The dominance of the priesthood, reliance on laws and traditions, the religious dogmas of the Pharisees, Sadducees, Epicureans et al, the master/slave relationship, the hatreds and suspicions that existed between the peoples of different regions, the delineation of Jews & Gentiles are all examples of the repression and self-interest that dominated the religious and social world in the time of Jesus. It was into that environment that Jesus came with a fundamentally different message. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be the sons of your Father who is in heaven."

Yet Jesus came along with a message and an ethic that shook the contemporary world to its very roots. His teaching was radical and far-reaching. It did undermine the prevailing religious, political and social dogmas of the day. Such was the concern that even at the very outset of Jesus ministry the 'Scribes and Pharisees were sending representatives to question Jesus about his teaching and purposes. And they were right to be worried because the cosy, familiar certainties, already challenged by the words and preaching of John the Baptist, were very shortly to be undermined by the teaching and practice that Jesus was about to launch into their world. In fact one could argue that the three years of Jesus' ministry represented the most fundamental shift towards a progressive religious and (by application of the teaching) social agenda in the history of mankind. And the reality is that, and this happens far too often for it to be regarded as co-incidental, the teachings of Jesus were so far ahead

of their time and so capable of transcending future generations, that the open-minded consideration of them must strike a chord.

God offers the right to choose

Human rights, the modern mantra for many people, are about equality, justice, and absence of discrimination and freedom of choice. It is the Christian's belief that God created mankind and as the history of our relationship with Him unfolded, and through the disobedience of mankind, God had to make the ultimate sacrifice – and if the unity of the Godhead means anything, then that means that God sacrificed Himself for the salvation of his ultimate creation. Did God then compel mankind to love and honour Him in return for this sacrifice? Did He insist on a defined response as a pre-condition for his sacrifice? Neither God nor Jesus, his Christ, demanded these responses. Rather they freely gave to mankind that fundamental right of choice. Just as God had set out the options to the nation of Israel, so the options, in terms of his relationship with God, are set out for mankind today. On God's behalf Moses described the choice before the nation of Israel, "I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God but turn aside from the way I command you this day, to go after other gods which you have not known." It was the offer to Israel and it remains the offer, the choice before mankind today. God has allowed us the right to choose; the right freely to decide whether to serve God; the right, (and I believe this is fundamentally important to the correct expression of God's gift), to choose to remain in condemnation or choose, through the grace of God, to be saved by his sacrifice. It is worth adding again here that God is not a God of condemnation, as he is so frequently portrayed, but a God who, through Jesus, has laid the foundation for salvation for all people who choose to accept that route. (John 3:16-21)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was accepted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1948. It was, and is, rightly regarded as a seminal declaration of "... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family". It is striking how familiar many of the early Articles seem to the Christian:

1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. (This is part of Article 2)
3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.
5. No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.



These are the first 6 of 30 Articles that make up the full declaration. I've not been narrowly selective to make a point; it's simply that the following Articles contain more specific statements about tribunals, freedom of movement, nationhood, freedom of thought etc. It's tempting to say that the teachings of Jesus were ahead of their time

but that doesn't do justice to his teaching. The important point is that Jesus' teaching transcends time. The principles that Jesus espoused were clearly relevant in the first century AD and they remain just as relevant in the 21st century. Now that must say something about the knowledge that God has of his creation and what works for it. Jesus' teaching was radical when he delivered it; if the Human Rights Act is to be considered progressive and radical some 2000 years later then it seems that Jesus teaching is still radical and progressive today.

The universal, radical gospel of love

Think again of some of the principles that Jesus brought into play - the inclusiveness of the gospel irrespective of status, race, colour or previous creed, his teachings on neighbourliness, Christ's non-discriminatory 'fellowship' with 'publicans and sinners, the dignity and respect that he introduced to the master/slave relationship, his teaching on forgiveness, the new and better way heralded by the new covenant were all radical departures from the accepted wisdom of the day and set Jesus at confrontation with many different groups of people. He embraced outcasts, cleansed lepers, protected adulterers, ate with sinners, welcomed foreigners, healed the sick, embraced children, raised the dead, defied dietary laws, worked on the Sabbath - and all of these challenged the teachings and influence of the religious and political authorities of the day. His 'law of love' was a dramatic shift of emphasis in the sectarian world that he inhabited.

Christians need have no reticence or shame about the message of Jesus. It remains as relevant, radical and compelling today as it ever was. When Jesus taught that God's care extended to sparrows he was explicitly challenging the Rabbis who, I understand, explicitly forbade prayers that mentioned birds because they argued that it was dishonouring God to associate Him with something as small as a bird. Yet Jesus' message was that God cares for all, irrespective of how insignificant a person may be considered. When Jesus claimed that God forgives men all sins it was another direct challenge to the Rabbis who had a whole list of 'unforgivable' sins. Jesus didn't condemn murderers, adulterers, cheats, conmen and the like as those for whom there was no hope of forgiveness (as the Rabbis did) - rather he called them to repentance and instead condemned those who considered themselves righteous as, amongst other things, a 'generation of vipers'. And he was out to show that there were no limits to the backgrounds of people who would, through repentance and forgiveness, be called into his kingdom. He told people too that they had to move on from legalistic nature of the laws and traditions and the laws of 'do not touch, do not taste' etc and learn to reject the more subjective but damaging sins of hypocrisy, self-righteousness, judgmentalism, the exclusion of others, pride and the like.

Many people, young and old, are casting around for something that brings meaning to life. Something that offers an alternative to rampant materialism, a focus on self, the falseness and trivialities of much of modern life, the values of affluence, personal achievement, power, consumption, individualism and more. Yet there remains a radical counter-culture in Christ. The teaching is to love all men, not just our friends or self; to seek the spiritual values of God's kingdom rather than the material values of the world; the humble are to be exalted and the proud debased; the 'first' are to be last and the servant made the greatest, the 'unforgivable' are to be forgiven and the unlovely loved. And still the true radicalism is the radicalism of love - the love of Almighty God who gave, and continues to give, the most blessed human right of all, the right to embrace the outstretched loving hand of the one who gave up every right to achieve our eternal redemption.

WONDERFUL WOMAN

Women of the Bible 8

Ann Boland, Germany

As promised in the last issue, I am going to look at the story of Ruth, as there are many lessons to be learned from it. In fact, a whole book is devoted to her story, one of only two devoted to particular women (the other is Esther).

The story begins with a familiar theme: a family moving to another land for a particular reason, in this case, famine. The two sons married women of the area, Moab, and things seemed settled. Then the father died, and Naomi, the mother, was left with the two sons. Only after their deaths ten years later (**Ruth 1:4 and 5**), did Naomi decide to return to her original land. Anyone who has been in a similar position will understand her feelings: her husband and sons were dead, and she lived amongst people who were not really her own. Even those who have not lost loved ones, but have moved away from their country or part of the country can relate to Naomi's feelings.

She told her daughters-in-law to return to their mothers' houses, as she, Naomi, had nothing for them, and that they had families left. Ruth, however, did not want to do this, and we have her well-known words in **v16 – 17 (where you go I will go...)**. Naomi realised that it was pointless to argue, perhaps she was also secretly pleased that Ruth had such affection for her, no blood relation at all. It is one thing to move to another land (or even another part of one land) with a husband, or family, but quite another to go to a strange land with a mother-in-law, when she had bid you go home to your mother.

Ruth went with Naomi to Bethlehem, and carried out her intention to remain with Naomi, by asking to glean in the fields, so that they may have food in the house. (This was allowed by law - **Leviticus 23:22**, interestingly for the **poor and alien**, a description that fitted Ruth.) Ruth had good fortune (or was guided by God!) to choose a field owned by Boaz, who was a relation of Elimelech, who had been her father-in-law. His workers' report of her conduct showed her to be a hard worker, and Boaz arranged that she would work only in his fields, would eat with his workers, and that they would be allowed to glean from the very sheaves (gleaning was only allowed from the plants that had not been gathered up by the "official" workers, i.e. those paid by the owners of the fields). Thus Boaz allowed Ruth to gather enough food for herself and Naomi.

In **Ruth 3**, Naomi gives advice to Ruth, which confirms Boaz's good opinion of her, and he determines to have her redeemed by one of the kinsmen. This was done by informing the redeemer-kinsman that Naomi had a piece of land to sell, and that if he bought it, he would have to take the widow as wife. (Again, this was according to the law - **Leviticus 25:25**). The redeemer-kinsman was, I assume, the next-in-line to Elimelech, Naomi's husband. This kinsman was not happy to have Ruth as his wife, as he might endanger his own estate (the meaning of this is not absolutely clear, but it is not important in this story). As Boaz was the next-in-line, he redeemed the land and married Ruth. So, even though she had left the country she was born in, she had been blessed - first by finding security, and second by being an ancestor of David, and so, also of Joseph, Mary's husband (**Matthew 15 – 16**).

The whole story of Ruth shines with truth and love. She did not **run after the younger men (Ruth 4:10)**, she provided for her mother-in-law after promising to be with her till death, she worked hard in the fields (**Ruth 2:7**), and she followed Naomi's advice (**Ruth 3:2 – 4**). Obedience and love are truly wonderful attributes to have. Sometimes hard to maintain, but certainly worth practising, as Ruth's reward shows. One of the most inspiring stories in the Bible, and one worth reading over and over again, not only for the lessons learned, but for the sheer motivation it brings.



The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (9)

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

ROMAN SLAVERY

Francis Schaeffer has written: "In many ways Rome was great, but it had no real answers to the basic problems that all humanity faces...All their gods put together could not give them a sufficient base for life, morals, and final decisions." In the end Rome fell. It had become a society in which the citizens were thoroughly apathetic and indifferent. It had grown decadent and gradually it became a ruin. There is much for us to ponder over in the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

I often think of her slaves. They helped make the Empire what it was, but many of them suffered and died along the way. We must never forget that in the Roman world a slave was a chattel. The master had absolute power over him or her. He could put the slave to death, but, of course, most did not destroy their property without a good cause. There were white-collar slaves as well as black-collar ones. They might serve as business managers, overseers, secretaries, clerks, accountants or schoolteachers. Others found themselves as farm workers or mine workers. Life in the mines was very often a living death. Female slaves, for example, worked as hairdressers, perfumers, dressmakers, maids, masseuses, manicurists, etc. Romans relied heavily – too heavily – upon their slave labour. The use of slaves led inevitably to many of the citizens becoming extremely lazy and constantly bored.

The story of Spartacus is an interesting one. He was the leader in the Gladiatorial War (73-71 BC) against Rome. The story goes that he, with seventy of his fellow gladiators, broke out of a training school at Capua and took refuge on mount Vesuvius, where other runaway slaves joined the band. Initially, they defeated two Roman forces in succession and then overran most of southern Italy. By that time their number had grown to several thousand strong. Eventually, they were thwarted by eight Roman legions under the new commander, M. Licinius Crassus. Many of them ended up crucified on the Appian Way. The Romans made an example of them. A clear warning was given: repeat such a revolt and you could end up being tortured in exactly the same way. The knowledge that it could take over a week for a crucified victim to die would surely not be lost on any possible future revolutionaries.

The case of Onesimus is also very interesting. He was the runaway slave, who met up with Paul in a prison in Rome and who became a Christian. Paul wrote a letter of commendation for him addressed to one Philemon of Colossae. This letter is now part of the New Testament canon of Scripture. I'm glad that it is, because it is an outstanding epistle. The letter really is a plea for leniency. Philemon would have had the right to brand Onesimus on his return. The branding would be by the way of a red-hot iron on the forehead with the letter ' F ', standing for *fugitivus*, the Latin word for runaway. Some commentators have also pointed out that Philemon could have gone as far as having Onesimus crucified.

There are portions of Scriptures, which give instructions to masters and slaves (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22 to 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; Titus 2: 9,10; I Peter 2:18). "It has always been a point of criticism by the sceptic and infidel that Jesus and the apostles did nothing about slavery. It is affirmed that they made no attack upon it, but rather seemed to condone it. This is due to a misunderstanding of the method by which the Son of man accomplished His mission. He did not come as a social reformer or revolutionary. He was not a loud declaimer

nor a shouting rabble-rouser. He operates not by political upheaval, but by changing the hearts and affections of men. Thus Christianity by its principles has overthrown slavery without creating economic chaos. This was done by altering the attitude of men toward one another until the worth and dignity of every individual was known and respected." (W. Carl Ketcherside)

Disciples of Christ were also called slaves of Christ. To be a slave of Christ is to find true freedom. What a paradox! The early disciples, who lived in an Empire in which there were millions of slaves, would know full well the implications of such a title. "It lays down the absolute authority of Jesus Christ over the Christian...but it is true that the Christian has no will of his own; the Christian has no time of his own; the Christian has no possessions of his own; he is the possession body and soul of Jesus Christ. The title slave does stress and underline the absolute authority of Christ over the Christian, and the absolute submission of the Christian to Christ." (William Barclay)

WOMEN IN ROMAN SOCIETY

Women had a subordinate role in the ancient Roman world. It was very much a man's world. Early Roman law indeed did not hear of a woman as a wife; she was in its eyes the daughter of her husband. As such she could not, of course, exercise any public or civil office; she could not act as witness; she could not sign a will; she could not make a contract; she could not inherit property from anyone dying intestate except from her husband or brother. Owing to her *imbecility* – the exact Latin word – she was given certain minor privileges; for example, she could plead ignorance of the law in some circumstances and she was on occasion exempt from torture. However, Roman law did evolve and Roman history gives us the picture of women attaining gradually more and more liberty, a higher legal status and in general greater power. Many writers have pointed out that the Roman matron, through it all, was always a formidable figure. Good examples of these are Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi; Calpurnia, wife of the younger Pliny; and the two Agrippinas, mother and daughter, the first of whom was the grand-daughter of Augustus and wife of Germanicus, the second the sister of Caligula and mother of Nero. One writer has pointed out: "Christianity appealed first to the slaves and the oppressed, and later to the matrons of even noble families, who had a distaste for their ordinary occupations." It must not be forgotten that Roman women played an essential part in the celebration of Roman religion. The wife shared responsibility with her husband for supervising the household cult. For most people, religious life was based in the home. Daily prayers were offered to Vesta, goddess of the hearth.



ROMAN GODS AND GODDESSES

Jupiter was the chief god. He was the god of thunder. Juno was his wife and the goddess of childbirth. There was Minerva, goddess of wisdom; Mars, god of war; Apollo, god of the sun; Ceres, goddess of corn; Diana, goddess of the moon and hunting; Venus, goddess of love and beauty; Neptune, god of the sea; Mercury, the messenger of the gods and patron of merchants; Faunus and Flora, god and goddess of the countryside; Bacchus, god of wine; and Dis Pater and Proserpine, god and goddess of the underworld. The Greeks had equivalent gods to these. Indeed, the Romans adopted many of the Greek gods and added them to their Pantheon. "The Romans believed their gods and goddesses watched over every aspect of life, although, by the first century BC, many of the ruling classes had begun to lose faith in them." (Anne Millard) "The Greeks and later the Romans tried to build society upon their gods. But these gods were not big enough because they were finite, limited. Even all their gods put together were not infinite. Actually, the gods in Greek and Roman thinking were like men and women larger than life, but not basically different from human men and women." (Francis Schaeffer)

The 'Quasi-trials' of Jesus the Christ

(Ernest Makin, Wigan)

PART 2

"ARE YOU THE KING OF THE JEWS?"

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, philosophers visited Jerusalem seeking the one who was born King of the Jews. Subsequent to its use in Matthew 2:2 this phrase, 'King of the Jews' is next used by Pontius Pilate at the continuing interrogation of Jesus. To Pilate Jesus made the affirmation, "It is as you say", in answer to Pilate's question: "Are you the [King of the Jews]". Pilate was left in no doubt concerning the status of Jesus as the conversation continued. "You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I came into the world that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Whether Pilate understood the fundamental spiritual truth of the words of Jesus is a debatable matter because in the course of this interrogation Jesus had said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from here." Additionally Jesus had already said, "You have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered me to you has the greater sin."

I find it inconceivable that a Roman Governor, backed by the military, worldly power of the Roman Empire could appreciate such revelatory spiritual statements about the power of God. "The book of the genealogy of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham." Thus opened Matthew's narrative of the life of Jesus. Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus back to Abraham to show that he was Jew, and through David to illustrate that he was qualified to rule on the throne of David. Nathan the prophet, as commanded by God, speaking to David, said, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body and I will establish His kingdom.. And I will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever." I suspect that the wider implications of Jesus' statements were lost on Pilate.

Christ's true identity

The genealogy of the Christ is fundamental to Christianity and the redemptive work of God through Jesus. In the family tree of Jesus one can trace the whole relationship of God with a sinful humanity, and the prophetic utterances concerning the Messiah. During his interrogation, after answering three questions from the Sadducees, Jesus responded with a theological question of his own to them, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose Son is he?" Their answer was, "the Son of David." Jesus then responds again: "How does David in the spirit call Him Lord saying, the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I make your enemies my footstool?" The true identity of the Messiah and the answer to the question asked of the Sadducees by Jesus is found in Psalm 89:3,4, Psalm 89:34-36, Isaiah 9:6,7; 16:5 and 55:3,4.

Jesus affirmed that the Messiah would be both Lord and Son and that even though he would be a descendant of David he would be superior to David. This represents an extremely strong attestation of the fact that Jesus, the Messiah revealed in prophetic statements, is both human and divine. One day King David will, as will the whole of the created universe, make obeisance at the foot of the King of Kings. "God has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus the Christ is Lord, to the glory of God."

When Pilate asked his question, the answer of Jesus was a stunning one (and I think an answer that was barely understood), as well as a fundamental affirmation that He was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and that, as the Messiah, he laid claim to all the names in scripture given to the Son of God, including 'King of Kings' and 'Lord of Lords'.

I find no basis for a charge

Accused of blasphemy, of denying the kingship of Caesar, of perverting the nation and claiming to be a king, Jesus was led by Pilate to face the baying multitude. The ferocious animosity towards Jesus overcame the attempts of Pilate to release him. These are some of the statements that the various gospel writers attribute to Pilate:

- > "I find no basis for a charge against him."
- > "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis of a charge against him."
- > "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."
- > "Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, 'If you let this man go you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.'"

Inadvertently, Pilate was stating the verdict of the innocence of the historical Jesus and this would be reinforced later by a centurion who was present at the crucifixion of Jesus who, when he saw what had happened, was moved to say, "certainly this man was a righteous man".

When Pilate discovered that Jesus was a Galilean he saw a way out of his vacillating dilemma. Herod Antipas was in Jerusalem for the Passover so Jesus was handed over to him. Herod had heard about Jesus and had long wanted to meet him and see some sign done by him. Denied this however, and faced with a silent Jesus who answered none of his questions, Herod along with his soldiers resorted to humiliating Jesus, treated him with contempt, clothed him in a 'gorgeous robe' and sent him back to Pilate.

Prophecy terribly but gloriously fulfilled

The writings of Isaiah now come to mind, the same prophet who spoke of the Messiah as a King with an everlasting kingdom:

"He was despised and rejected by men."

"He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

"He was wounded for our transgressions."

"He was oppressed and he was afflicted."

"He did not open his mouth in his defence."

"He was led as a lamb to the slaughter."

What a Saviour and King! Here is a picture in all its inhumanity and yet, perversely, its loving grandeur, of the continuing fulfilment of the redemption by God. "It pleased Him to bruise him; he has put him to grief."

What we are witnessing as we see Jesus before Pilate, Herod Antipas and then Pilate again, is the fulfilling of the prophecies of Isaiah of the suffering servant. He, the King of Kings, who came to serve and to be served, will be exalted, disfigured by his suffering, widely rejected and will bear the sin of humanity as well as our sorrow. Jesus is a substitutionary sacrifice who voluntarily went to the cross to die alongside criminals. A brutal scourging, itself a life-threatening punishment, was not enough to satisfy the blood lust of the crowd: "then they released Barabbas to them and when they had scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified."

Finally, in a seeming irony, the superscription on the cross gave a definitive answer to the question asked by Pilate. Each of the four gospel narratives contains a description of this superscription and listed the alleged presumption of Jesus. The superscription would have been written in Hebrew/Aramaic, Greek and Latin:

"this is Jesus, the King of the Jews", in Aramaic recorded by Matthew;

"the King of the Jews", in Latin by Mark and Luke;

"Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews", in Greek by John.

Thus the answer to Pilate's question, ringing down the passage of time for nearly twenty centuries, which even the implacable enemies of Jesus confirmed by writing the answer that Jesus had given to Pilate. **"This is Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews."**

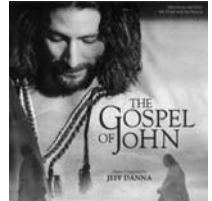
(In part 3 we will consider the illegalities that occurred during the interrogation of Jesus)

Understanding the Life of Jesus

The Messiah Revealed

(Robert Marsden, Wigan)

Jesus did not simply appear out of nowhere when he began his public ministry. His birth had been heralded by several groups of people though, apart from the incident in the synagogue on the way back from the census in Jerusalem, his life seems to have been unremarkable with an air of complete normality in his hometown working with his father. Indeed John's gospel record says nothing of the early 'domestic' life of Jesus.



The Preaching of John the Baptist

However just as his birth had been heralded, so the commencement of his public ministry was being prepared and announced beforehand. John the Baptist, a contemporary of Jesus who had been born around 6 months before Jesus to Elisabeth and Zacharias, was preaching the imminent arrival of the Messiah and baptising people in the area around Bethany 'beyond the Jordan'. Just as Jesus was of a Jewish lineage so both of the parents of John the Baptist are regarded as being of descendants of the tribe of Levi, the lineage of course from which the priesthood was drawn. In fact it was whilst Zacharias was executing his priestly duties in the Temple that the angel Gabriel told him that his wife would bear a son.

Although John clearly knew by God-given knowledge **of** Jesus, there is no scriptural evidence that they actually knew each other on any kind of personal basis, something that John himself makes clear: "I myself did not know him; but for this I came baptising with water, that he might be revealed to Israel."

Despite the fact that John the Baptist appears to have been careful not to claim any authority or messianic powers for himself, save the divine command to preach the coming of Jesus, it is clear that people were responding to his preaching, being baptised and becoming disciples of John. Inherent in his preaching his recognition that he (John) was not the one, but that he was preparing the ground for one who was greater than he.

It is clear from John's account that John the Baptist was already stirring up a fair degree of interest with his preaching. Not only were the people responding, but the Jews were also beginning to take an interest. They of course had long looked for the coming of the Messiah and it was perhaps inevitable that as news spread that John was preaching that 'Messiah is coming' they would have a keen interest. Could this be the very news that they had waited for, the culmination of their religious (and political) longing? If so, they wanted to know more. The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" John quite explicitly told them that he was not the Christ but, quoting the prophet Isaiah, that he was, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord"". He gave the messengers a very clear message to take back to the Pharisees that they should look out for and expect to arise from 'one who stood among them' the real Messiah, the one 'thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie'.

The Messiah identified and revealed

It was the following day that John the Baptist publicly identified Jesus as the Messiah for the first time. In doing so he said several things in affirmation of Jesus that were shortly to become the battleground between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities:

- He said that Jesus was the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world'. The phrase Lamb of God had a particular emphasis for the Jews and would point to Jesus'

unblemished character. And in saying that Jesus would take away the sin of the world he was implying that Jesus had the authority to forgive sin, though some Jewish Rabbis considered some sins to be unforgiveable;

- > He said that Jesus ranked before him 'for he was before me'. John the Baptist was of course older than Jesus so in saying Jesus was before him he was pointing to the pre-existent, divine nature of Jesus, who was later to tell the Jews 'before Abraham was, I am';
- > John implied that the authority of God was with Jesus as he bore witness to the fact that he 'saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven and remain on him.' God had already revealed to John that whomever he would see this happen to he would know was the Messiah, the one who would baptise with the Holy Spirit;
- > He bore absolute and authoritative witness to the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, something of course that the Jews would come to regard as blasphemy.

There would seem to be no doubt that these words of John and his attestation to the true nature of Jesus, would quickly find their way back to the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and that they would cause disquiet amongst them and that in his identification of Jesus the seeds of confrontation had been sown. It is no coincidence either that the three persons of the Godhead all played a part in this first revealing of Jesus as the Messiah by John immediately confirming his divine origins.

The Response to the revelation

It is also interesting to note the very different responses to what John was now revealing between 'the people' and the Jewish authorities. They had asked of John, "Who are you? What do you say about yourself? Are you Elijah? Why are you baptising? Are you the prophet? There seems to be no desire to want to understand what John was saying to them. Compare this to the response of others. The day after John had first identified Jesus, he was standing with two of his disciples as Jesus passed and John said, "Behold the Lamb of God." The two disciples immediately and without hesitation followed Jesus, asked to see where was staying and after spending the bulk of the day with him were so convinced of his true identity that one of them, Andrew, went of to find his brother, Simon Peter, to tell him the glorious news, "We have found the Messiah!"

Philip was soon called to follow Jesus and Philip then found Nathaniel to tell him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Is there an element of familiarity and surprise in Philip's words? That the one of whom Moses and the prophet's spoke is someone they already knew, Jesus the carpenter's son from Nazareth? Nathaniel took a little convincing that the Messiah could arise from a small town as apparently insignificant as Nazareth, but was soon persuaded of the nature of Jesus, when Jesus revealed to Nathaniel he had known his whereabouts before he could rightly have had that knowledge. "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Is this a case of 'there are no so blind as will not see'? Whilst the Jews with all their knowledge of the ancient Scriptures, steeped in the prophetic word, aching for the coming Messiah apparently vacillated and failed to accept the revelation that John brought, others gladly and openly embraced the news that the Messiah had come. "We have found the Messiah." "We have found him of whom Moses wrote." "Rabbi, you are the Son of God." There seems little doubt that within three days of John revealing Jesus publicly, the battle lines had been drawn and the tone had been set for the challenges that Jesus was to face as he sought to demonstrate the truths of what John had revealed. And in those three days, the physical boundaries of Jesus ministry had largely been drawn too, from Jerusalem and its environs in the south to Galilee and Bethsaida in the north. The Messiah had come, the Son of God had been revealed, Jesus' claims as to his nature and purpose had been publicly announced, the revolution had begun – and the world was never, ever going to be the same again.

What Ever Happened to Sunday?

I feel bad when I even think this, much less say it, but sometimes I dread Sundays.

Not because I don't want to attend a church service and worship the Lord and be encouraged and uplift others, but because of all the other things that get tacked on to my schedule because it's Sunday.

We seem to schedule our share of church dinners, meetings, rallies, and practices for Sunday afternoon or evening, and there are always family obligations. It seems, in our family anyway, we always reserve birthday or any other celebrations for Sunday afternoon.

By mentioning these things, I'm not complaining about them, just stating all the things we try to cram into one day — a day the early Christians used to honour the Lord.

I have to admit by Sunday evening, I've sometimes used up my energy and patience and am not fit to be in the same room as another person, much less bring honour and glory to God.

Why is that? What happened to the Sundays of my childhood when we came home from church and had dinner, lazed around with a book or played all afternoon, and then went to a short Sunday night service? (My mother even took a nap if she could sneak away from us for an hour!)

I don't remember my parents having a lot of meetings or practices scheduled on Sunday. We sometimes watched ballgames on TV, but we didn't schedule dinner around them. And the store hours were very limited. In our small town, in fact, only one store was open on Sunday. It was Sunday, after all!

Now several of the kids in my youth group are scheduled to work during Sunday school and/or church at local stores or restaurants. Some have even had football scheduled on Sunday mornings because that's the only time they play. Obviously our culture has changed in the last twenty-five years and the retail industry will place money above all, but I think those of us within the Church are more at fault than society in general. We are supposed to understand what it means to take time for the Lord, to need a time of refreshing.

We know that God rested on the seventh day after creating the world and everything in it, and that the Sabbath was to be observed by his people for spiritual and physical reasons. Even though the Sabbath was eliminated with Christ's death and resurrection, the early Christians still observed a day to honour God.

So why is it so difficult for us to say no to all the extras and have a leisurely meal with our family and relax for a few hours reading the Bible or even just a good novel?

Acts 20: 7 says, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people ..." Whether they observed this as a time of rest is not clear, but it was a time to be renewed and refreshed through scripture study and fellowship.

I have been guilty of scheduling practices and activities for Sundays, but the busier I become, the more thought I give to taking up someone else's time on Sunday. It's almost like taking up the Lord's time, so it had better be for a good purpose!

Susan McGrath

A Right Royal 'Do'!

Una Birch (Morley)

On one occasion, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II visited Wakefield Cathedral to distribute the annual 'Maundy Money'. The recipients were neighbourhood pensioners who had given voluntary service' mainly to the church' and the local community.

John, the husband of one of my friends was due to be a recipient in recognition of his ringing the cathedral bells on special occasions. His wife was asked what she would be wearing for the ceremony and whether she could go as she pleased.

"Definitely not," she replied. "We are told what we can and cannot wear. It must be formal attire, including ties for men and hats for ladies." That will probably mean a new outfit then we commented. Looks like it, I must comply with protocol she answered.

PROTOCOL

Adherence to protocol happens less often these days. I remember in the Queen's Jubilee Year. A formal group photograph was taken 'for the record'. Included in the photograph were the nation's dignitaries, Government officials etc. But it was the Prime Minister's wife, not the Queen, who hit the headlines! Why? Because Cherie ignored the usual protocol and decided not to wear a hat! She was the only woman in the group who chose not to do so and the media took up on that. Had Tony Blair not worn his tie or chosen to go in trainers it would have had the same effect. Protocol is that activity we participate in when we show courteous regard for those of higher status/authority than ourselves.

When I was a child, my father who was working class, owned two suits. One was his 'best suit, the other his 'shifting suit'. When this second suit was worn out it served as his working clothes. Each passed down as it became shabbier. On Sunday morning it was automatic that he wore his best suit so that he was 'decently dressed' as he would say. He was going to worship. MY mother did the same. Her clothes weren't always the latest so it never became a fashion parade. She had the same outfit for years but they were her best clothes. In those days when people were out and about on a Sunday morning, you could always tell who the worshippers were by the way they were dressed. Dressing respectfully was their way of honouring the Lord and it was a witness to me, my brothers and our neighbours.

Thankfully this activity can still be seen amongst many Sunday morning worshippers. However, regrettably not all dress 'worshipfully' or respectfully. I use the word regrettably because one wonders sometimes, just what witness we, the Lord's Church, make. I can testify that some turn up to worship in clothes, I imagine, they would not be seen in for a secular formal activity.

Isn't it the case that in everyday social and business affairs, if the situation requires it, we automatically present ourselves respectfully. On my way to worship I pass a Kingdom Hall, and although I do not embrace their way of thinking I honestly admire the way they all turn out for their Sunday service. Now I know that 'clothes maketh not

the man' and that we all afford differing wardrobes. I know too that if the poor man comes into our meeting then we do not humiliate him because of his clothing. But ...

CASUAL CLOTHING

At least in Western society, this now seems to be the norm, and I must admit a personal preference to 'dressing down' when it is appropriate, rather than being all 'dressed up'. I hate that. However I wouldn't dream of meeting my Lord dressed down. He is my King and I can do no less that honour his authority. He is more dignitary than any earthly King or queen. I hope I will always conform to protocol in His presence.

I am saddened by some 'Sunday clothing'. To me at least, and I am expressing my opinion here, casual clothing in our fellowship with the Lord degrades the familiarity, (perhaps best expressed in being able to call him Abba, Father), that we are privileged to have with him. Familiarity, it is said, breeds contempt and I feel that casual clothing is extremely disrespectful. Perhaps the attitude is has become "Oh, it's just another Sunday!"

Well it isn't. Every first day of the week is a very special occasion, to which, as followers of Christ, we are invited. Grasp that fact. Cling to it. And embrace your birthright! Our Lord said, "I will not eat this bread or drink this wine till I eat it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." In this earthly kingdom we, in our fellowship, commune with the King of Kings. The plea is that we practise vigilance and avoid congregating in second best.

I had to give a lot of thought before writing this article, but I feel it has to be addressed. In my mind I try to compare today's conduct with that within the Church when I first became a member. Are things changing? *Is there apathy? Is there indifference and dereliction? Is there a misplaced 'modernism' toward our Royal Headship?* I hope not. Surely we Christians should never need a briefing about correct conduct. Love and respect in what we wear in the presence of our Saviour, King and Redeemer should be an automatic response.

A RIGHT ROYAL DO

When we come together each Sunday, isn't that too 'A Right Royal Do'? When the Queen came to Wakefield everyone could tell out of those out and about who had been requested to attend the cathedral, because of the way they were dressed. **All in honour of the Queen.** I am not advocating a fashion parade each Sunday. I am convinced though that we, as the Lord's Church, should be dressed reverently, accepting with humility formal protocol in homage to the great I AM. Isn't it our reasonable duty to remember our position in the life of His Church; to remember that it is His 'cathedral' and that when we meet together it is a very special ceremony indeed that we attend?

Honour your King and don't give those who see the 'Lord's Church' coming together for worship the opportunity to say, "Can't be anything special on there today, look at the way they are dressed!" Let us demonstrate to them in a dignified manner that there is always something special on, and we, as invited guests, know how to dress for the occasion.

! Corinthians 11:23 says, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me. In the same way, after supper he took the bread and said, This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me. **This means every time you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**" (Writer's emphasis) Proclamation and public announcements in their many forms are very effective activities indeed. Dress, I believe, is one of them.

News and Information

Ghana Appeal

Your donations have served the Lord's Church in Ghana well and careful consideration goes into allocating funds. As we have mentioned before, so many of our brethren and their children are still alive and serving the Lord who would otherwise be dead. You have also supplied bibles, hymn books and other material for infant churches, as well as funding repairs to meeting houses. By contributing to evangelising expenses you have helped the Church to grow and all this work is continuing.

Since our last report there has been considerable damage to brethren's dwelling houses. In the north dry conditions have caused bush fires which have destroyed homes and this has also affected their food supply. Further south there has also been severe damage to property and homes demolished, but this was caused by severe gales. Whether this is due to climate change or not, in both cases it leaves brethren homeless and destitute because their personal belongings have been lost along with their homes. Help is needed urgently.

We thank you for all your help in the past and plead that it may continue.

Those wishing to help, please make cheques payable to: **Dennyloanhead Church of Christ Ghana Fund** and send to treasurer, **Mrs. Janet Macdonald, 12 Charles Drive, Larbert, Falkirk, Stirlingshire. FK5 3HB Tel: 01324 562480**

Question Box

There is no Question Box feature again in this month's edition following Bro Frank Worgan's recent surgery. However Frank

tells me that his surgeon is extremely pleased with his progress and that he is making an excellent recovery from his operation. Hopefully Frank will be able to re-commence his QB articles in the near future.

Editor

What do you think? A response

Does God invoke direct action?

Sis Rose M Payne writes in response to last month's question:

"In Luke 13, Jesus answered a very similar question. He dealt with two events, one man made when Pilate had some Galileans slain, and the other, probably a natural event, when a tower fell and killed 18 people. His answer was that these people were not greater sinners than their neighbours.

Then he added "except ye repent, ye shall all like wise perish." This statement could refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70. It could also have a wider meaning, in that if God individually punished all sinners while on earth, none of us would escape. It is by the mercy of God that we continue to live in safety. Therefore it is a mistake under the New Testament dispensation to attempt to link disaster to one particular person or event as this preacher (Rev Pat Robertson - Ed) is doing."

Editors Notes

Once again I offer my apologies to readers for the inconsistent timing of the receipt of SS issues. This is the December 2005 issue that you are reading in mid-January 2006. I am making efforts to get back on stream and hope to achieve this with the February 2006 issue.

The reality is that I am being forced to

adopt a policy that is not in the tradition or the best interests of the SS. Without the regular monthly contributions of Frank Worgan and Ian Davidson and the frequent contributions of Ernest Makin there simply would not be an SS. Other articles are essentially what I specifically ask for or what I can cull from archives (albeit previously unprinted material). If articles are what I ask for then the bulk of the SS, apart from QB and Ian's input, is what I am interested in rather than what you are interested in. That is not what the SS is about.

The 'What do you think' series is an attempt to generate some input. I'm grateful to Sis Rose Payne for this month's response but other inputs are extremely rare. I am determined that I will not personally 'fill the pages' by writing more and more. The more time spent writing, the less spent developing ideas and improvement.

Thanks to all those who have sent contributions over the last 3 years or so – you can't imagine my pleasure (and relief) when a letter or email arrives with an article.

Coming Events

European Christian Workshop

**Lancaster University:
31st August to 2nd September 2006**

Speakers are:

Alastair Ferrie (Dundee)
Mark Hill (Loughborough, UK)
John Griffiths (Wembley, UK)
Trevor Williams (Bristol, UK)
Tony Coffey (Dublin, Ireland)
Earl Lavender (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Mike Williams (Lipscomb Univ., USA)
Evertt Huffard (Harding Graduate School of Religion, USA)

For more information visit our website:
www.christianworkshop.net

Alternatively you can email for information to:

paulhalliday@yahoo.com
stephen.woodcock@tesco.net

We are in the process of finalizing costs but will provide that information as soon as possible.

**Paul Halliday (Newport)
Stephen Woodcock (Wigan)**

Tranent, Scotland

Annual Social to be held on
18th March 2006 in
St. Martins Hall, Tranent.

Speakers:

Niall Scobie, Dennyloanhead
Graeme Pearson, Dunfermline.

THE SCRIPTURE STANDARD is published monthly.

PRICE PER COPY – POST PAID FOR ONE YEAR

UNITED KINGDOM. £9.00

OVERSEAS BY SURFACE MAIL. £10.00 (\$16.00US or \$20.00Can)

OVERSEAS BY AIR MAIL. £14.00 (\$22.00US or \$28.00Can)

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