

# The SCRIPTURE STANDARD

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

## BE INSPIRED...

When Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy from prison in Rome it seems clear that he sensed that the end of his life was drawing near. We are not sure why he was imprisoned on this occasion but many believe that it was ultimately simply because of the fact that he was a Christian in accordance with the policy implemented by Nero in AD64. He was beheaded in AD68, dying a martyr to the cause of Christ.

Yet Paul's declaration of faith in Christ, expressed at the start of the letter, exudes the confidence that he had so often expressed in his Lord. **"For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day."** It is a momentous declaration of the object of Paul's trust and one that we should observe carefully.

For Paul's faith was not in a 'thing' but a person; it was a belief not vested in a religious creed, but in the person of the Redeemer; his faith was not in Christianity, but in Christ, and not just in Christ only, but the Christ of God; he trusted not in a 'plan of salvation' but in the Saviour. Notice that Paul does not say that he knows 'what' he has believed, but whom. In the original text there does not even appear a preposition. Paul has not believed 'in' or 'on' Christ; rather he has believed Christ and the eye of his faith rested on the glorious Christ whom he trusted implicitly.

The reality is that we cannot take the person of Christ out of Christianity because to do so renders Christianity meaningless. Because it is not, like so many other belief systems, a mere body of doctrine about God, human duty and morality. Rather it is faith vested in the living reality of our personal knowledge of a personal Saviour; faith that rests on our understanding that Jesus was indeed the living embodiment of God himself; faith that grows stronger as we draw ourselves closer to him and allow our lives to be enveloped by his divine nature.

Such faith in Christ empowered Paul to approach his impending death with absolute certainty about his ultimate destination. His Lord would deliver him from every evil and bring him safely to his heavenly kingdom. **"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me but also to all that have loved his appearing."** In the words of the hymnwriter:

**'Lord, give me such a faith as this'**

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# *The historical and cultural background to the New Testament (7)*

Ian S Davidson, Motherwell

## **ROMAN ACHIEVEMENTS**

Someone once said of the Greeks: "In the end the Greeks are remembered as poets and philosophers: it is an achievement of the mind that constitutes their major claim on our attention." Someone once said of the Romans: "Only in two practical fields were the Romans to be great innovators – law and engineering."

However, what the Romans achieved overall undoubtedly assisted the spread of God's kingdom on earth. Their achievements with other factors are listed by W. Carl Ketcherside in his book *The Kingdom of the Messiah* to prove the point:

- 1) A universal empire which would grant protection and travelling rights to its citizenry, so that they might freely bear a message to every part of the earth.
- 2) A common tongue used especially by men in the commercial realm or the world of trade, so that writings in such a language would be generally understandable.
- 3) Good roads which speed the courier on his way and make it possible to hasten any news of importance.
- 4) Freedom of trade between nations, assuring that ships would regularly sail the seas and passenger vessels be available to the traveller.
- 5) An era of peace, and international tranquillity, that the message not go unheeded amidst the turmoil and strife of war, with its dangers and distractions.
- 6) A general air of expectancy which would enhance the eagerness for the reception of the message and guarantee that it would be readily considered.
- 7) A state of discontent with previous forms of religion, and a weariness with reference to the old worship, its rituals, and its sacrifices.
- 8) A yearning for fellowship and brotherhood which would create a favourable attitude toward any organisation based upon these factors, rather than one of hostility toward that which is new.
- 9) A people who had been taught the elements of the new relationship, dispersed among the nations of the earth, regularly carrying on a worship akin to the one to be introduced, to act as a leavening influence".

The apostle, Paul, wrote: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law." (Galatians 4:4) Mark records the words of Jesus at the commencement of His ministry: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel." (1:15) So we see that when Jesus entered the world He entered it at the right time. It was not something fortuitous. It was planned, yea, even before the foundation of the world. Jesus did not come when the Babylonians ruled the world or when the Persians were masters of the earth. He did not come in the days of the British Empire or when the world was subject to the Pax Americana. No, He came when Rome held sway over mankind.

### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ON THE ACHIEVEMENTS**

I wish to add a number of comments to the things listed by our late brother Ketcherside. Paul, as a Roman citizen, travelled afar throughout the Eastern Empire. He did not require a passport to enter, for example, Macedonia or Achaia. He simply walked into these provinces because they were under Roman jurisdiction. This ease of travel enabled him to visit many places to proclaim the gospel. His journeys took him to the great cities of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus and Athens and many other towns and cities too numerous to mention. He followed most of the time the Roman roads, which were all a great feat of engineering. The first major road and the most famous was the *Via Appia*, which was begun in 312 BC. It stretched south from Rome to Capua and took over 100 years to build. 900 years after its completion, the historian Procopius called it one of the great sights of the world. The *Via Appia* was the first link in a network that eventually stretched over 50,000 miles and reached every corner of the Empire. The remains

of these routes formed the basis of Europe's modern roads and railway lines.

Trade was a major factor in the spread of the good news of Jesus and His love. Believing traders came into regular contact with pagan traders and thus had the opportunity to speak a word for the Lord. There were markets for grain, oil, fish, wine, fruit, metal goods (precious and non-precious), salt, cattle, wool, linen, horses, wood, glass, slaves, etc. Most of these traders probably spoke the common tongue of the day, which, of course, was Greek. Many were highly educated and multi-lingual. Shipping was of vital importance to the peoples of the Mediterranean. Marine archaeologists today are making tremendous discoveries in the depths of the Mediterranean Sea and are bringing to light a measure of the quantity and quality of goods traded around the islands and coastline of the Great Sea over hundreds of years.

The age prior to the birth of Jesus was an age of peace. Augustus was the man who helped bring this about. The Prince of Peace came to a world under the influence of the peace of a Prince (Augustus). But whose peace would last? Whose kingdom would stand forever? Two thousand years later we know the answers to these questions. The Roman Empire is long gone, but the kingdom of God is still here and will never be destroyed. (Read the wonderful comparison of the two kingdoms in the book of Revelation.)

Alexander Campbell in his famous debate with Robert Owen spoke of the expectancy in the world at the time of Jesus' birth. The Jews expected then the coming of the Messiah, who would free them from the Roman yoke and usher in a golden age in which Judaism would triumph. But the Gentile world was also in expectation. Campbell quoted the Roman poet Virgil, who died about twenty years before Jesus was born:

"The last age, decreed by Fate, has come;  
And a new frame of all things does begin,  
A holy progeny from heaven descends.  
Auspicious be his birth! which puts an end  
To the iron age! And from which shall rise  
A golden age far glorious through the earth...  
By thee what footsteps of our sins remain,  
Are blotted out, and the whole world set free  
From her perpetual bondage and her fear...  
Yet some remains shall still be left  
Of ancient fraud, and wars shall still go on."

"It would seem that the entire world was a readied stage for presentation of the mightiest drama of the ages." (W. Carl Ketcherside) Popular religion had lost its hold. Philosophy had killed Roman mythology. Faith in the gods had failed. People had fallen into a spirit of apathy, languor and weariness. "Bury the old and bring on the new!" was the cry. Someone said: "The fulness of the time had arrived; it was now time for the fulness of God to arrive!"

Throughout the Empire, the Jews with their synagogues and sabbath assemblies helped bring in the new. Paul frequently took advantage of his Jewish background to preach Jesus to his fellow Jews. The custom in the synagogue was for visitors to speak and Paul was a visitor in many synagogues, as Luke reveals in the book of Acts. Undoubtedly, the Lord's church owes a great debt to the synagogue.



In conclusion, I wish to point out to our many readers abroad, especially in Africa, that I write from a country, (Scotland), that was partially conquered by the Romans. Consequently, I have undertaken many field visits in Britain to see their handiwork at first hand. They even built two walls in northern Britain – the so-called Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall. I have visited both frequently and learnt much from my studies. Ed Archer, a Roman expert, was, for me, a tremendous teacher, whose lectures and tours I still remember fondly twenty years later. The Romans left their mark in Britain, as they did everywhere they conquered. For example, the thing that strikes one about their roads is how straight they were. Many of these roads are still in use today, although, of course, resurfaced. The Romans did not have sufficient manpower to conquer the whole of Scotland or Caledonia. History reveals that the Romans always found the Scots a troublesome lot. Many people think we still are!

# MINISTRY

**1. The New Testament does not support the widely practised distinction between 'clergy' and laity'. In fact, the very concept is foreign to New Testament teaching.**

The word 'clergy' is derived from '*kleros*', which literally means 'God's lot, or portion' and is properly applied to the entire Church, the people of God – belonging to God. It does not indicate a separate group or class within the Church.

**2. Ephesians 4:11-16** reveals that God gave certain special servants, apostles and prophets, etc., in order to equip and prepare the members of the Body for the service which builds up the Body, And the scriptural figure of the Church as a Body implies that every member has a function, and when members fail to fulfil their role, the growth of the Body is impeded.

**3. We sometimes speak of this form of service as 'mutual ministry',** the word 'mutual' meaning 'belonging to one another'.

**4. The New Testament principle is seen in the following passages.**

1. 'Admonish one another' Rom.15: 14.
2. 'Serve one another' Gal.5: 13.
3. 'Forbearing one another' Eph. 4:2.
4. 'Forgiving one another' Eph. 4:32
5. 'Comfort one another' 1<sup>st</sup> Thess 4:18.
6. 'Edify one another' 1st Thess.5:11
7. 'Exhort one another' Heb.3:13.
8. 'Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another' Jas.5: 16.
9. 'Teaching and admonishing one another' Col.3: 16.
10. 'Love one another' 1st Peter 1:22.

**5. It becomes evident from these verses that 'ministry' is a word that covers a very wide range of Christian service, and it would be a mistake to restrict it to one form of activity.** Indeed, it would even be wrong to do so, or to suggest that one form of 'ministry' is more important than another.

**6. The purpose of 'ministry' is shown to be that of building up the body of Christ,** and anything that may be legitimately - i.e. scripturally - done with this goal in mind, is pleasing to the Lord. (The word '*oikodomeo*' which is rendered 'building up', literally means 'to build a house').

**7. The subject has been summed up well as follows: -**

The PLACE of ministry is SUBSERVIENT.  
The MOTIVE for ministry is NEED.  
The CONDITION of ministry is ABILITY.  
The IDEAL of ministry is CO-OPERATION".

## CONCLUSION.

**1. Ministry is essential to true discipleship** and it follows that;-

- a) every member of the congregation is 'a minister' and
- b) No member is 'The Minister' of the congregation.

**2. The scriptural teaching on 'ministry' reveals that its aims are:**

- a) The spiritual growth of each believer.
- b) The numerical growth of the people of God.

**3. God's plan is for a Church of ministering members.**

- a) Every member has at least one talent.
- b) Every talent should be employed.

**4. The Church is an evangelising Body.**

- a) Every member should carry the Gospel to others.
- b) Special 'Missions' or 'Campaigns' may supplement this ministry, but never be a substitute for it.

**5. There are two extremes which should be avoided in public preaching and teaching,**

- a) 'One-man ministry' - when a 'Minister', or 'Pastor' does all the preaching and teaching.
- b) 'All-man ministry' - when every man is allowed to preach or teach, without regard to his ability or suitability.

**6. When the work is done 'according to ability', God is 'in all things glorified through Jesus Christ', 1st Peter 4:11.**

# My Child....

You may not know me, but I know everything about you. . .Psalm 139: 1  
I know when you sit down and when you rise up... Psalm 139:2  
I am familiar with all your ways. . .Psalm 139:3  
Even the very hairs on your head are numbered. . .Matthew 10:29-31  
For you were made in my image. . .Genesis 1:27

In me you live and move and have your being... Acts 17:28  
For you are my offspring. . . Acts 17:28  
I knew you even before you were conceived. . . Jeremiah 1:4-5  
I chose you when I planned creation . . . Ephesians 1:11-12  
You were not a mistake, for all your days are written in my book. . .Psalm 139: 15-16  
I determined the exact time of your birth and where you would live. . . Acts 17:26  
You are fearfully and wonderfully made. . .Psalm 139: 14  
I knit you together in your mother's womb. . .Psalm 139: 13  
And brought you forth on the day you were born. . .Psalm 71:6

I have been misrepresented by those who don't know me. . . John 8:41-44  
I am not distant and angry, but am the complete expression of love... 1 John 4:16  
And it is my desire to lavish my love on you. . . 1 John 3: 1  
Simply because you are my child and I am your father. . . 1 John 3: 1  
I offer you more than your earthly father ever could. . .Matthew 7: 11  
For I am the perfect father. . .Matthew 5:48  
Every good gift that you receive comes from my hand . . . James 1:17  
For I am your provider and I meet all your needs. . .Matthew 6:31 -33

My plan for your future has always been filled with hope. . . Jeremiah 29: 11  
Because I love you with an everlasting love.. Jeremiah 31:3  
My thoughts toward you are countless as the sand on the seashore... Psalm 139:17-18  
And I rejoice over you with singing. . .Zephaniah 3:17  
I will never stop doing good to you... Jeremiah 32:40  
For you are my treasured possession. . .Exodus 19:5  
I desire to establish you with all my heart and all my soul. . .Jeremiah 32:41  
And I want to show you great and marvellous things. . . Jeremiah 33:3

If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me. . . Deuteronomy 4:29  
Delight in me and I will give you the desires of your heart. . .Psalm 37:4  
For it is I who gave you those desires. . . Philippians 2:13  
I am able to do more for you than you could possibly imagine. . .Ephesians 3:20  
For I am your greatest encourager. . .2 Thessaionians 2: 16-17  
I am also the Father who comforts you in all your troubles. . .2 Corinthians 1:3-4  
When you are brokenhearted, I am close to you. . .Psalm 34: 18  
As a shepherd carries a lamb, I have carried you close to my heart. . . Isaiah 40: 11  
One day I will wipe away every tear from your eyes. . .Revelation 21:3-4  
And I'll take away all the pain you have suffered on this earth. . . Revelation 21:3-4

I am your Father, and I love you even as I love my son, Jesus. . . John 17:23  
For in Jesus, my love for you is revealed. . . John 17:26  
He is the exact representation of my being. . .Hebrews 1:3  
He came to demonstrate that I am for you. not against you. . .Romans 8:31  
And to tell you that I am not counting your sins... 2 Corinthians 5:18-19  
Jesus died so that you and I could be reconciled. . . 2 Corinthians 5:18-19  
His death was the ultimate expression of my love for you. . . 1 John 4: 10  
I gave up everything I loved that I might gain your love... Romans 8:31-32  
If you receive the gift of my son Jesus, you receive me. . . 1 John 2:23  
And nothing will ever separate you from my love again. . .Romans 8:38-39

Come home and I'll throw the biggest party heaven has ever seen. . .Luke 15.7  
I have always been Father, and will always be Father. . .Ephesians 3: 14- 15  
My question is ... Will you be my child? . . John 1:12-13  
I am waiting for you. . . Luke 15: 11-32

Love from Your Dad, Almighty God

# WONDERFUL WOMAN

## Women of the Bible 6

Ann Boland, Germany

### POTIPHARS WIFE

There are not many women in the story of Joseph, until he is sold as a slave to Potiphar (**Gen 39**). We know the story of how Potiphar's wife wanted Joseph, and how he was thrown into prison through her lies. A story we could hear all over the world today – one of envy, want and deceit. It may not seem likely in this day and age that honesty and holding to the Lord will bring us anything, but that is what Joseph did, and God did not forget him, although it probably seemed to Joseph that God was far too busy to take any notice of him. Again, a very familiar story for today. Patience and perseverance bring rewards, as we have seen previously in this series.

### WOMEN IN MOSES' LIFE

We now come to a wonderful story of love, namely that of Moses' mother, Jochebed, who loved him so much that she could not kill him, as commanded by the Egyptians, but hid him for three months, and then placed him in a basket on the Nile River (**Exodus 2**). This story strongly reminds me of that of Our Lord Jesus – total love and sacrifice. Moses was given back to his mother, by Pharaoh's daughter, to nurse, so her love was rewarded. Moses' sister, Miriam, was the means of bringing this about, and we hear of her later in Exodus.

Moses met his wife, Zipporah, in much the same circumstances as Rebekah and Rachel were chosen for their husbands – again at a water well, where Moses helped to water the flock. There is not much information about Zipporah, but a very curious incident in **Exodus 4**. God was about to kill Moses, but Zipporah circumcised her son, which saved Moses. This incident is not explained, but it could be the forerunner of the Laws that were given to Moses: circumcision being a sign that a man was a Jew. She remained with Moses through the exodus from Egypt, and was then sent to her father (**Exodus 18:2**). We are not told any more of her, and must assume that she died sometime when the Israelites were wandering in the desert.

### MIRIAM

The next woman we read about is Miriam, Moses' sister. She had saved him when he was a baby, and played a very interesting, if not very good role in his life. We are told she was a prophetess (**Exodus 16:20**), but this is not explained fully. In this chapter, she leads the women in song to praise God for delivering them from the Egyptians by letting the Israelites pass through the sea, and closing the waters on the Egyptians. This, however, was soon to end in that age-old emotion, jealousy. We read in **Numbers 12** that Miriam and Aaron, their brother, became jealous of God speaking through Moses. God had used the two of them to speak to the people, but Moses was their leader, and he had received the Ten Commandments. Verse 3 tells

us a lot about the situation: *Moses was more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth*. That was probably why God had chosen him, but Miriam and Aaron did not see things in that light. Her punishment was to be a leper, and kept outside the camp for seven days until she was healed. Her death is recorded in **Numbers 20:1**.

## RAHAB

The last woman we will look at in this edition is Rahab, a prostitute, and we read her story in the book of **Joshua**. He had succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites when Moses died (Aaron was also dead by this time), and the Israelites had come to the borders of the Promised Land. Joshua sent men into the land to gather information, and Rahab saves two of these spies by hiding them on the roof of her house in Jericho. Its inhabitants had heard of the children of Israel (**Joshua 2:8 – 13**), and Rahab begs for the lives of her family in exchange for those of the two spies. Having agreed, the spies were let down the wall at night, and reported back to Joshua after arranging a sign of recognition with Rahab. We know that Rahab and her family were saved, and that she became a part of the Israelites. (**Joshua 6:25**) This must be one of the most powerful stories of trust that is told in the Bible. Here we have a Gentile woman of bad repute who is saved by her belief. (**Hebrews 11:31 and James 2:25**) Surely there is hope for the greatest sinner if they only believe and obey.

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## ONE MOTHER'S FAITH & FORGIVENESS

Many readers will be aware through television and the press of the circumstances of the murder, during the summer, of the black teenager Anthony Walker in a district of Liverpool. During the trial and the sentencing of the two young men who killed Anthony the judge described the killing as one motivated by racial hatred.

It would surely be the hardest of hearts that was not moved by watching Anthony's mother, Gee Walker, during her various interviews after the trial which were widely reported. The horrific circumstances of her son's death, he was a popular, church-going, basketball enthusiast with strong Christian beliefs, would have justified the harshest response from his mother and family.

Yet despite her grief at the loss of her son and soul-mate this Christian mother spoke only of her forgiveness towards her son's killers; she even found time with compassion to express her concern at the effect the actions of her son's killers and their life sentences would have on their families. Of her faith, she said, We don't just preach it, we practice it. We have to forgive them. Every word that she uttered was spoken with dignity, compassion and without bitterness even though her pain and grief were evident.

As Gee Walker spoke, I realised a little bit of what it is to show Jesus in our lives. Her words and actions were more powerful than a thousand sermons and showed the glory of a faith in Christ in the face of the most appalling circumstances.

Editor





QUESTION – What did Jesus mean when he said, “Before Abraham was, I am.”  
(John 8:58)



This sentence of only five words – (in both English and New Testament Greek) – invites our attention to one of the profoundest and most important subjects in the scriptures; the nature of the Lord Jesus. I think this fact becomes even clearer when we understand that the word ‘was’ is the word *‘genestai’*, which literally means ‘was born’; thus, *‘before Abraham was born, I am’*.

You will have noticed, I am sure, that as it stands, the sentence does not make very grammatical English, but its significance becomes clearer when we recognize that this is a statement that must be considered, not grammatically, but theologically.

### Jesus confronts the Jews

John chapter 8 records a confrontation between Jesus and the Jews and the main question at issue concerned His identity. His Jewish questioners were quite certain and proud of their own origin. They were the children of *‘Father Abraham’*, who was mentioned no fewer than 10 times in the discussion. But Jesus pointed out that, even if that were true, they certainly did not demonstrate the faith of Abraham, because, He said, *“Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day, and saw it and was glad.”* v.56 (See also Gal. 3:8)

We hear the mockery and ridicule in their voices when they responded, *“You are not yet 50 years old, and have you seen Abraham?”* Of course, if they had been listening to what He was saying they would have noticed that He was not claiming to have *‘seen Abraham’*. He was saying that Abraham had been privileged and glad to have been allowed to ‘see’ the coming of the One through whom all nations would be blessed.

The Lord did not respond to their question. Instead He made the statement in verse 58 which instantly turned their ridicule into blazing anger. *“Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am”*.

Notice carefully what He said. He did not say, *“Before Abraham was born, I was born”*, or, *“Before Abraham existed, I existed”*. His assertion was, *“Before Abraham was born, I AM”*, and regardless of how strange this may fall on *our* ears, His meaning was clearly understood by those who heard His words that day. They immediately took up stones to stone Him to death, because they saw this statement as blasphemous and therefore deserving of the penalty for blasphemy imposed by the Mosaic Law. They realized – quite correctly - that Jesus was claiming to be greater than their Father Abraham, because He shared the nature of deity.

### What Jesus meant by ‘I am’

The two words which aroused their anger and indignation are the last two words in His statement; *‘I Am’*, words which, in the Greek text read, *‘Ego eimi’*, and they were enraged because they knew perfectly well what those words meant when used in this context.

To understand why they were angry it is necessary to go back to Exodus 3, which records God’s words to Moses at the burning bush. You will remember that God called



Moses, in order to send him back to Egypt with a message for Pharaoh. However, having been brought up as an Egyptian prince in the heart of Egyptian life and culture, Moses knew that every deity in Egypt had a personal name, (and it has been calculated that there were some 20,000 personal and national deities in the land). It would not be enough, therefore merely to tell either his fellow-Hebrews or Pharaoh that – *'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'* was demanding the release of His people. The people had been in Egypt too long to know the God of their forefathers, and Pharaoh himself would certainly demand to know the name of this 'god', but, at this point, Moses did not know how to respond.

In fact, in chapter 5 we see that Moses had accurately predicted Pharaoh's reaction.

God's answer to Moses is found in Exodus 3:58. He said, *"I Am who I Am". Tell the people of Israel, I Am has sent me"*.

Now the words, *'I Am'* form part of the verb *'to be'*, and when I went to school I was taught that this verb embraced such expressions as *'I am, he is, you are, they are'*, all of which are in the present tense.

The Hebrew verb *'to be'* is *'hayah'*, and in Ex. 3:14, the first person, singular number, present tense of the verb *'to be'*, is *'ehveh'*. *"I Am who I Am"*. It is as though God was saying to Moses: *"You ask Me for a name, but My nature cannot be expressed in words, nor can it be grasped or understood by man's mind, I exist essentially – eternally. I am reality. I exist and no-one and nothing else exists. If, with the limitations of human language I am to give you a name which expresses My nature, call Me "I Am"*.

### **The reality of Jesus' claim**

A little later, at chapter 3:15, God modified the verb *'ehveh'* when he told Moses *"Go to the people and tell them that 'YHVH', the God of your fathers has sent me to you. This is My Name for ever"*. The *'ehveh'* = *'I AM'* had become *'YHVH'* = *'I shall Become'*.

This is the first Person, singular number, future *tense* of the verb *'to be'*. And the significance of this name *'YHVH'* or *'Yahveh'* is that it identifies God as *'The Becoming One'*. It is His redemptive Name. He is the God Who *'becomes'* whatever His people need. Becoming Man. Becoming the Redeemer.

When, in the period between the Testaments, the Hebrew scriptures were translated for the use of Jews who used the Greek language, which had become the common language throughout the Roman Empire, the Hebrew word *'ehveh'* = *'I Am'* was rendered in the Greek by *'ego eimi'* = *'I Am'*, so that in the days of Jesus every devout Jew understood and accepted it as the name for God. Indeed, this was emphasized by the fact that, in those days, since very few Jews could read Hebrew anyway, the 'authorized version' of their scriptures was the Greek version.

Therefore, when Jesus said, *"Before Abraham was born, I AM"*, He was claiming to be deity. And the Jews knew it! You can also understand how angry and shocked they were when He told them, *"Unless you believe that I Am, ('ego eimi') you shall die in your sins"*. *John 8:24*.

It would be difficult to find a clearer or more emphatic warning against unbelief than this, in the entire New Testament!

**Frank Worgan.**



What do you think?

## DOES GOD INVOKE DIRECT ACTION?

Religious broadcaster and erstwhile 'tele-evangelist' Pat Robertson has caused quite a stir recently by warning the residents of a small town called Dover in Pennsylvania, USA that they are facing a God-sent disaster. Apparently on Thursday 10th November, all eight members of the Dover school board who were up for re-election were defeated because they wanted to introduce the teaching of "intelligent design" – the belief that the universe is so complex that it must have been created by a higher power – as an alternative to the theory of evolution. (See editorial on Intelligent Design in August issue of SS)



Mr Robertson has warned the residents that they "voted God out of your city" by ousting school board members who favoured teaching intelligent design. Robertson is quoted as saying, "I'd like to say to the good citizens of Dover. If there is a disaster in your area, don't turn to God. You just rejected him from your city." Later Robertson issued a statement saying that he was trying to point out that, "our spiritual actions have consequences". He continues, "God is tolerant and loving, but we can't keep sticking our finger in his eye forever. If they have future problems in Dover, I recommend they call on Charles Darwin. Maybe he can help."

In previous statements, Mr Robertson has claimed that Hurricane Katrina which devastated New Orleans was God's expression of anger at the choice of a celebrity called Ellen Degeneres, a lesbian and a native of New Orleans to host the Emmy television awards ceremony. "By choosing an avowed lesbian for this national event, these Hollywood elites have clearly invited God's wrath," Robertson said. "Is it any surprise that the Almighty chose to strike at Miss Degeneres' hometown?" He also linked the September 11th 2001 terrorist attack on New York to Miss Degeneres previous hosting of the Emmy awards, which took place shortly after the attack.

### What do you think?

- > Are such statements as those attributable to Pat Robertson justifiable from Scripture?
- > Is this kind of rhetoric beneficial or unhelpful in trying to promote the Gospel?
- > Do you accept or reject the idea that in the present age God engages in such direct action as sending disasters/hurricanes/terrorist attacks in retaliation against man's actions?
- > If he did, how would you explain God's action to the innocent victims of such disasters?
- > There are Old Testament accounts of God's direct action. Has God's approach changed in the new dispensation?
- > Pat Robertson implies that people who have previously rejected God can't legitimately turn to him in times of distress. Do you agree? Or is this the very time when people may well 'find' God?

If you have any thoughts or comments on any of the above questions, or any others that are linked to the subject, then please submit them for publication to the editor, postal and email addresses on back page.

# Aspects of Living

## Beauty

**(The fourth in a series of previously unpublished essays on Aspects of Living from the writings of Alf Marsden, deceased)**

In a passage of Scripture contained in Isaiah 53:2 we read, **“And when we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him.”** This is referring to the Messiah, born Jesus of Nazareth. Sometimes we Christians will sing, ‘Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me’. This at first sight seems to be a paradox, but obviously two different facets of the same person are being referred to...

It follows then that beauty is a combination of qualities and these qualities are normally appreciated through the senses. There is a popular saying that states ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ and in many ways this is true. The parents of a newly born baby may see a child of exquisite beauty; a friend may see the same child as a normal, unexceptional baby so far as looks are concerned. We understand that the same thoughts exist in our appreciation of such things as a landscape, music, poetry and the arts in general. What we are really thinking about then is the appreciation of beauty through the physical senses and the impact on us through the soul and spirit.

The apostle Paul, quoting a passage from Isaiah 52:7 remarks, **“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring tidings of good things.”** (Romans 10:15) Now not many of us are connoisseurs of beautiful feet and I suppose many a chiropodist would be hard put to in trying to describe them. But quite clearly the writer has here something profounder to say. It is the beauty of the message carried by those who had been sent to proclaim it that is the object of beauty. Walking from place to place carrying the message of redeeming love until the beauty of that message seemed to transform the very body of the messenger. The literal feet might well have become sore, blistered and unlovely in the cause of helping many to appreciate the beauty of the message and more especially the beauty of the one who had made the message possible.

David, one time king of Israel said, **“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”** (Psalm 29:2) But where has the ‘beauty of holiness gone in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century? (These writings date back to the mid 1990’s – Ed) The deep and ugly scars of violence, sexual

immorality, drugs and infidelity have disfigured society. The almost unseemly scramble for money and material goods has turned personal and social values upside down. We can look into our gardens and marvel at the beauty and symmetry of the plants and flowers, but then we go outside to get a breath of God's pure air and we find it polluted by carbon-monoxide fumes and other effects of mankind's 'progress'. The most galling thing though is when we grumble at God's seeming ineffectiveness in dealing with ills which we ourselves have created. Oh for a re-emergence of the beauty of God's holiness and that the real and abiding spirit of Christ might be rekindled in the hearts and minds of those who bear his name. As William Cowper wrote:

Where is the blessedness I knew  
When first I saw the Lord?  
Where is the soul-refreshing view  
Of Jesus and His word?

I sometimes wonder if, like the Jews of old, we tend to gaze at the edifice instead of what the edifice portrays. In the mind's eye I can see them at sunset gazing upon the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, that gate that was covered with the finest Corinthian brass which, when caught by the rays of the setting sun no doubt glowed with the effulgence of golden fire. Would that the beauty of the Lord in whose name the Temple had been built could have fired their love for Him.

Sometimes we are content to bathe in the reflected glory of the One who brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, and we do not see the real beauty as, blood streaming down his holy face and staggering under the weight of the Cross and all that it represented, He endured the final degradation on our behalf. In Him, in the person of Jesus our Saviour, was and remains the real majesty and beauty. And when we look beyond the physical limitations that for a time he was willing to take, and we look past the marred visage of our Lord as he bore our sin, we then truly can see the beauty of Heaven, the luxuriant Plains of God, the illimitable tracts of Holiness, the beauty and peace of a sinless and sanctified environment. Then we understand that gross earthly gain and ambition are not to be compared with the soul-elevating beauty of the spiritual heritage that the Christian has been given.

All things that are beautiful have high elements of moral and spiritual values in them. Nature always enhances its own natural beauty. By judicious pruning of roses and other plants, the skilled gardener can produce greater blooms of greater beauty. And so too, by the judicious pruning of our lives by the Holy Spirit we can live lives of greater beauty, even as our Lord himself is Beautiful. The philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that: 'Beauty is the pilot of the young soul'. The aspiration for the 'beauty of holiness' can be the pilot for any soul and any age as we strive to ensure that the beauty of Jesus is seen through our lives. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

# Understanding the Life of Jesus - An Introduction

I have formed the opinion during my study of the New Testament that there was nothing in the life of Jesus, or in the unfolding revelation of the purpose and nature of Jesus, that was random, casual or lacking in purpose. I was inclined to add that there was nothing opportunistic either about the actions of Jesus, but maybe it could be argued that on the occasions that Jesus reacted to requests or pleas that were made to him at various times (such as at the Wedding Feast, the woman with the issue of blood) Jesus did indeed take advantage of the opportunity to reveal something of his nature and purpose.



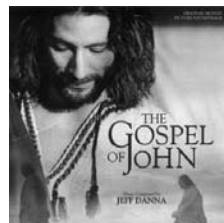
What I am convinced about is that there was always purpose behind the actions and words of Jesus; that the action or word was suited to a time, a place or an audience and was deliberately designed (and that word is chosen carefully) to ensure that some kind of statement or evidence was presented to those present and to those who would hear of Jesus and his works. On some occasions Jesus performed deeds and made statements very publicly whilst at other times they were done or said in private; sometimes it was evident that he wanted news of his actions to travel and at other times he counselled the witnesses to say nothing; there were times when he was apparently deliberately provocative or confrontational though on other occasions he was conciliatory and compassionate; often, especially those events recorded by John, the Jews were obviously the target audience; whilst other events were designed for his disciples or for the population at large.



I don't know that I can be definitive as to whether Jesus was ever surprised or overtaken by an unexpected turn of events; my guess though is that even on those occasions when he had to quickly move out of an area to avoid those who would seek to arrest him he would have anticipated the reaction of the authorities or the people at large to the events that he had been involved with and planned to make his exit for "his time had not yet fully come". As we know from the end of John's record, there are many events in the life of Jesus that are not recorded but we have nevertheless enough to see the unfolding revelation of Jesus' purpose.

It is fascinating to try to get 'behind the scenes' of the events in the public ministry of Jesus. What was he revealing about his nature and purpose? What was he saying about his relationship with the Father? Who was he trying to influence or teach? How was he preparing the Jews, his disciples and the people at large for the final climactic events of his life? How was he laying the groundwork for the future Church? Why did he choose a certain time, place or audience?

If the basic proposition - that Jesus was not random or ad-hoc or speculative in his actions and revelation - then some or all of the above questions should be answerable through study and interpretation. I am therefore inviting a number of people to conduct an analysis of certain events and/or statements from the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospel of John (using John's Gospel to give some focus and continuity) and look more closely at his purposes in those events and interpret them in the context of their contemporary setting and eternal importance. Whether it's the cleansing of the Temple, the events surrounding the raising of Lazarus, Jesus discourse on the bread of life, his confrontations with the Jews there is much to be learned and gained about Jesus revelation. If any reader has anything that they would like to contribute to this series then either contact the editor for further information (see back page) or submit your contribution for publication.



## **News and Information**

### ***Ghana Appeal***

Contributions to the Fund are distributed with care and priorities are considered carefully. Evangelism continues and many are responding to teaching of the Gospel. Not only is the size of individual churches increasing, but new congregations continue to be established. As these are often widespread and remote from the evangelising church, there is considerable travelling involved to enable the teaching to continue. One brother is continually visiting four widespread infant churches over difficult terrain. This is expensive and he needs help with travelling costs.

Some, coming out of idolatry, have to accept changes to their lifestyle, such as realising that a Christian man can have no more than one wife.

There are numerous reports of snake-bites among brethren who survive by growing food on a patch of ground. Provision of suitable protection, such as Wellington boots, is difficult for them and it would be good to show our concern by providing these.

We thank brethren who have contributed to this Fund and plead that it continues. So much has been achieved – and the potential is so great.

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**

## **Tsunami Relief Work in India**

### **Bro Allan Ashurst, Stretford,**

I feel the brotherhood needs to know the current situation and the work being done by these brethren. People to the north in West Godavari Andhra Pradesh were not as badly affected as in Tamil Nadu and so have tended to be overlooked by NGO's which means many face severe hardships and even starvation. I have visited these areas in February and can recommend the work being done by these brethren wholeheartedly. Please send gifts for this work to:

John S Purcell  
3, Dale Avenue  
Bramhall, Stockport,  
Cheshire SK7 2JP

With a covering letter saying it is for Tsunami relief work and making cheques payable to **Church of Christ (Stretford)**.

**Brethren this work is ongoing - Ed**

## **Longshoot. Wigan Fellowship Weekend 2006**

Since 1992, the Longshoot, Wigan congregation has held a Fellowship Weekend on alternate years. In the normal course of events the next one was due in 2006. It is with some regret that we have decided not to hold the weekend in 2006. We have enjoyed some fabulous times since 1992 in fellowship with many brethren

and friends from around the country. However we have concluded that our natural catchment area for support is declining, some of our regular visitors over the years are less able to travel and some congregations are more reliant on fewer people, making it less likely that they will feel comfortable being away from their home congregation.

We have gained such upliftment and sheer enjoyment from the weekends that we didn't want ever to leave one feeling in any way disappointed so we have decided to 'go out at the top'. In doing so we thank all those who have supported us over the years, those speakers who have brought excellent lessons and those who just by their presence have inspired us.

We will be hosting another group of young people from Lipscomb University, USA in March 2006 to work with our young people. We are also actively considering other avenues for providing opportunities for fellowship with the brethren.

**Andrew Marsden, Secretary**

## **Pakistan Earthquake - Update**

**The following email was received from Pakistan and passed on by Allan Ashurst, Stretford:**

Brethren, this email is just to let you know that our country has been hit by the worst earthquake in our history and the area hit is the hilly area and the cold weather is already started and

very soon the temperature will get to zero. The people in that area are coming down from the mountains and want to move to cities where they can be provided with shelter with a roof over their heads and be safe from the cold. These people are penniless as they have lost everything. Besides the help we have already rendered in the form of clothes, match boxes, edibles, candles, blankets and utensils they need cash very urgently to pay the fare to move to a proper place where they can be provided shelter. Please send your contributions to my account in Citibank, by cable transfer to help those people to take care of the fare. The particulars of my account are:

Asghar Ali  
59-Abu Bakar Block  
New Garden Town,  
Lahore-54600  
Pakistan.  
Account No: 9010359-594  
Citibank, Lahore, Pakistan.

Looking forward to your prompt response as the need is urgent. If you cannot help financially the following is a list of needs:

1. Tents;
2. Blankets;
3. Warm clothes;
4. Flash lights;
5. Medicines;
6. Plastic sheets;
7. helicopters(!),
8. Relief for pregnant women and newborns, nutritious dry food for mothers, powder milk, pampers, warm clothes, feeding bottles, baby blankets.

Allan Ashurst adds: "Asghar Ali is an evangelist with a church of Christ in Lahore. He is a brother of high repute. I asked him if he would let us know the earthquake situation so that I could inform the brotherhood. Anyone wishing to help, please go direct to Brother Asghar.  
(email address: dasghar@wol.net.pk)



## Obituary Bro David Chalmers

David Chalmers fell asleep in Jesus on October 21st. Baptised in 1935 he was one of the first members of the Dalmellington congregation in Ayrshire. He was well known as a speaker by the brethren in the Slamannan District congregations and respected for his unswerving faithfulness to the scriptures. He was a dependable worker who could be relied upon to serve the Lord.

David was 89 when he died and had spent the last year or two in Airlie House Nursing Home, in Ayr, where he was well cared for. He leaves a son and two daughters who had supported him since the death of his wife, Nan. Although he was a little isolated he was regularly visited by the remaining local brethren and by others from farther afield. The brethren who knew him and had learned to love and respect him will miss his faithful service.

The writer led the funeral service and also at the graveside.

**John Kneller**

## 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](http://www.christianworkshop.net)

Alternatively you can email for information to:  
[paulhalliday@yahoo.com](mailto:paulhalliday@yahoo.com)  
[stephen.woodcock@tesco.net](mailto: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)**

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