



Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

1475

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Glad Tidings

OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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A monthly magazine published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world. Its objectives are – to encourage study of the Bible as God's inspired message to men; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God's world-wide Kingdom.

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The Lamb of God

It was John the Baptist who first made the connection. He had become a well-known figure in First Century Israel; a priest by birth who had become a reformer instead.

Positioning himself by the River Jordan, instead of in the Temple at Jerusalem, he had summoned the nation to renew their vows and to enter into a new spiritual experience. They were to repent of their sins and be baptised in the Jordan.

Coming Deliverer

But, on his own admission, John was not the centre of the reformation he was beginning. He explained that there was someone else coming to refine and purify the nation and it was evident that he held that person in very high esteem, even though he didn't know, at the time, who that person would be. This is what he said about the expected Deliverer:

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his threshing floor, and gather his wheat into the barn; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11,12).

He was expecting a mighty One who would devour and destroy all opposition, whose burning zeal would purify

those who accepted and followed him. John had not conjured that vision up himself; it was the prophet Malachi who had predicted such an outcome, and who had also said that the Messiah would be preceded by a messenger who would prepare his way, and make the people ready for the coming change (see Malachi chapters 3 and 4).

Surprise Arrival

It seems that John was somewhat taken aback one day when Jesus of Nazareth came to him at the River Jordan and asked to be baptized. They had known one another a little, because they were distantly related, and John knew enough to know that

Jesus was a good-living man. So much so, that he said that if anyone was to be baptised, Jesus should baptize him, not vice versa. But Jesus quietly insisted:

"Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness" . Then he allowed him" (Matthew 3:15).

Notice that Jesus said "for us", not "for me". His life was an example of how we too should live, so his baptism was a way of demonstrating that we too need to be baptized if we are to be right with God. So John baptised the Son of God and something remarkable happened:

"Behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him" (3:16).



It was an eye-opener for John as well, as he later explained (John 1:29-34). All of a sudden he knew that the Saviour he had been heralding was Jesus of Nazareth, and he couldn't get over the fact that he hadn't realised that before, for he repeats the words "*I did not know him*" (John 1:31,33). Of all people, he seems to say, you would have thought that I would have realised that Jesus was the One whom God had sent to rescue His people from their bondage to sin and death.

The Lamb of God

John had disciples of his own: people who were following his teaching and learning about life as he saw it. What was he now going to say to them about the Deliverer – the person he had been promising. John was a prophet of God, so the things that he said as a prophet could go far beyond his own immediate understanding. And this is what he said to them:

"John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as he walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:35,36).

It was a remarkable thing to say, especially at that time in the ministry of Jesus, which was only just beginning. Years later, Jesus explained to his disciples that he must suffer and die at Jerusalem, offering his life as a sacrifice which would take away the sins of all those who believed in him. But, even then, the close followers of Jesus found it difficult to accept that he was really being asked to die as a sacrifice for sin (see Matthew 16:21-23). So, for John to have said what he did was remarkable.

God-Provided

Generations before, the patriarch Abraham had once been asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and had shown that he was willing to do it, if that was what God commanded. It turns out that he believed God would have then brought Isaac back to life again (see Hebrews 11:17-19). But, having proved that he would have done it, God spared Abraham and Isaac the trauma and allowed the faithful man to offer a ram as a sacrifice instead – one that He had provided, just as Abraham anticipated (Genesis 22:7-14).

Abraham had expected a lamb; at the time God provided a ram, caught by its horns in the thicket. Now, some 2000 years later, John the Baptist foresaw that God was providing the long-awaited lamb:

"John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29).

It took John the Baptist a while to realise who Jesus was and what he had come to do. It will be the same with us. But when we realise that Jesus came to die for the sins of the world, and that through his death our sins can be forgiven, we shall have begun to share John's insight and will have started to learn about the Saviour who can purge and purify us, and make us right with God. Such an insight is really important if we are to fully appreciate all that God and the Lord Jesus have done, and still can do, for us.



Editor

Love for the Unloveable

It is sometimes said that God 'loves the sinner but hates the sin'. But when you think about it there is something illogical about that statement. How can you distinguish between the sinner and the sin? A man's actions are a product of what he is. If his actions are unlovable then so too will be his character, just as Jesus once said that a bad fruit tree cannot produce good fruit (Matthew 7:18). How then can we abstract 'sin' from the character of the sinner, and assume that God loves one and hates the other?

Profound Truth

Nevertheless there is something profoundly true in this statement. There is indeed a sense in which God can love a man apart from that man's sin. He can love a man or woman not for the sake of what he or she is now, but for the sake of what they have the potential to become.

He can look into the heart and see not only what is, but what might yet be, and what might yet be is a reflection of His own character.

Parents continue to love their children even at times when their children try their patience. They know that such disobedience need not be a permanent state; one day they will grow into mature young people who will return the love that was shown them when they were younger. Even in the most wilful and obstinate child there is a potential for something better. And it is through love alone that that potential can be brought out and nourished.

Best-Known Verse

The Gospel of John says, in one of the

best known verses in the Bible, that *"God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

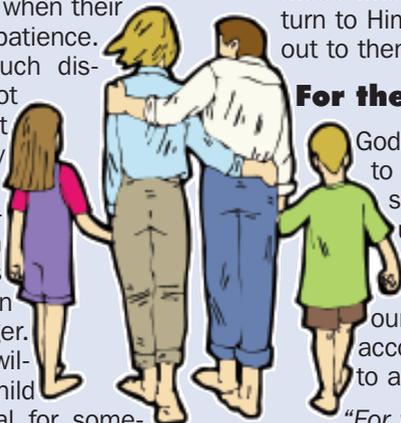
Yet what is loveable about "the world" with all its immorality, violence and injustice? Why should God want to provide eternal life to its inhabitants?

At first glance there is very little that is loveable; but God knows that among the teeming millions on the surface of this planet, most of whom give no thought for their Maker, there are those who will reach out to Him, and turn to Him in faith, if He first reaches out to them.

For the ungodly

God gave His only begotten Son to provide the means of our salvation. He did not wait until humanity was obedient before He offered that salvation. All that is needful for our salvation has already been accomplished, if we are willing to accept it:

"For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ



died for us” (Romans 5:6-8).

Note carefully what we are being told here. “While we were still sinners” – that is, while we were in a state of rebellion against God – Christ laid down his life, so that we might be transformed into God’s friends. That is a measure of His love. Our sin might grieve Him, yet He does not reject us, although He would be acting justly if He did.

Becoming Worshippers

God expects us to show the same characteristics towards those around us as He has shown toward us. It could be said that people become what they worship, in the same way that children take after their parents.

- ❖ If they look up to a God whom they conceive as hard and unbending, then something of that will be reflected in their dealings with others.
- ❖ If they look up to a heavenly Father whom they know to be compassionate and kind, then they will deal with others in the same way.

The morality which Jesus taught his followers and which he himself practiced is a reflection of the character of God, who bestows the blessings of nature on the deserving and undeserving alike. This is what Jesus said:

“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 sons of



your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:43-45).

It is difficult to love those who try to do us harm. But love, in the sense that Jesus uses the word, is not the same thing as affection. It means doing all that we can to bring out the best in others, even if they are hostile toward us, or even if they exploit us. Just as God looks for the best in us, He expects us to deal sympathetically with others. Just as He sees in every sinner a potential saint, so He expects us to see in every enemy a potential friend.

Like children who are reared by wise and long-suffering parents, our awareness of how much God loves us is the incentive which draws from us a response of gratitude and love. If we fully appreciate what He has done for us and have absorbed the implications of His Son’s gospel then our attitude toward others should reflect the same generosity, magnanimity and kindness as He has shown toward us when He gave His Son to provide us with the means of salvation.

Paul Wasson

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The Moral Standards of Jesus

In this two-part article **Dudley Fifield** reviews some of the things Jesus said about the way we should live if we are to please God by following the example set by the Lord Jesus. At a time when people think that “anything goes” it is important to realise that God has set standards of behaviour by which we should be living.

What Really Matters?

The gospel of Mark (chapter 7, verses 1 to 13) includes an account of a heated debate between Jesus and some of the religious leaders of his day. If you read it, you will see that it gives a clear example of the emphasis the Lord Jesus puts upon the things that really matter.

The Pharisees and the Scribes took exception to the fact that the disciples of Jesus ate bread without washing their hands. For them, this was not a matter of hygiene but of ceremonial uncleanness. They were concerned lest inadvertently they had touched something that was regarded as unclean, so they had a special way of washing their hands.

They placed emphasis upon the externals of their religion, yet, as Jesus pointed out, they had found ways of avoiding the teaching of God’s Law to their own advantage. For example, they allowed men to evade their responsibilities to their parents by saying they had dedicated everything to God, although they still had access to all their money for themselves, and the Lord Jesus was constantly demonstrating the double standards by which they

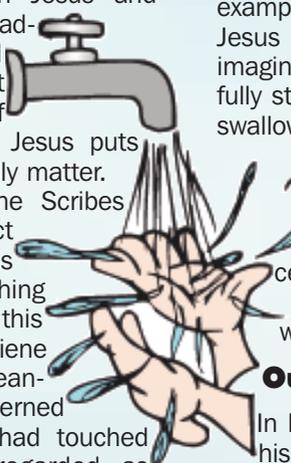
lived.

He said on one occasion that they strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel (Matthew 23:24). This is a good example of the humour that the Lord Jesus used on occasions. Can we imagine the fastidious Pharisee carefully straining his bowl of soup lest he swallow a gnat, oblivious of the fact that lurking under the surface was a camel which he proceeded to swallow! In other words, they were so concerned with the minutiae of the law that they disregarded the weightier matters.

Outside or Inside?

In Mark chapter 7, Jesus develops his teaching (verses 14 to 23). He explained that it was not the external things that defiled a man. It was not what he touched or ate for “whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him” (Mark 7:18). Rather, it was those things that sprang from within the human heart that caused defilement.

“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things



come from within and defile a man” (v.21-23).

Stated negatively, these are the things we ought not to do. We have there the basis of Christian morality and we might say that it is largely the same as that contained in the Law of Moses and condensed into what we know as the ‘ten commandments’. We will find, however, that the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is even more challenging than this. We want to look at part of what is commonly known as the ‘sermon on the mount’ (Matthew 5: 27-42), where Jesus says some really challenging things.

The Law of the Heart

Could anything be more challenging than this?

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (5:27,28).

Jesus says that the man who nurtures lust in his heart has already committed adultery. It is only lack of opportunity and fear of the consequences that has prevented him from becoming an adulterer in fact as well as in thought.

The Lord Jesus was a realist and would have known that such a man would not have damaged others in the way that actual adultery would have done. But in his heart he would have defiled himself, having seriously affected his own relationship with God. This is not only true of adultery but of all the evil that we can store up in our hearts. Long before, the writer of the Book of Proverbs summed that up by saying:

“as (a man) thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

How then do we escape from *“the sin which so easily ensnares us,” (Hebrews 12:1).* Jesus gave this remedy:

Cut it Off!

“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you ... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you” (Matthew 5:29,30).

What did Jesus mean with this talk of amputated limbs and plucked out eyes? He did not mean that we should physically abuse ourselves in this way, but that what we see and what we do is often the cause of what we are, in our hearts. Thus if what we delight to look at and the things we rejoice to do cause us to treasure evil thoughts in our hearts then figuratively we must pluck out our eye – and cut off our arm. We must ensure that we do not put ourselves in situations of temptation.

The teaching of the Lord Jesus, contained in verses 29 and 30, is not practised literally: it would not be thought appropriate for the society in which we live for eyes to be gouged out and limbs to be chopped off. Nevertheless, cutting off the source of temptation – what we see and what we do – remains the standard that the Lord Jesus expects of those who claim to follow him and we cannot presume to change his words or to reduce their force.

We will look at more of this teaching in the concluding part of this article.

Dudley Fifield



Jesus in Gethsemane

*There is widespread confusion and misunderstanding about the relationship between the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Popular theology proposes that they are co-equal and co-eternal parts of the same godhead. In this article **Steve Weston** explains that the Bible says something quite different to that and, in so doing, gives far greater weight to the achievements of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christadelphians have no desire to be different for the sake of being different. They believe what the Bible teaches, and an honest and careful reading of the Bible impels us towards the simple but profound truth that Jesus Christ was – and still is – the only begotten Son of God. In words that have become memorialized in John Stainer’s oratorio “*The Crucifixion*” :

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

These words confirm that the basis for the gift to men and women of everlasting life is to be found solely in the love of God and in the gift of God – His “*only begotten son*”, the Lord Jesus Christ. But have you ever asked this question:

“Did Jesus contribute anything himself towards the process whereby humanity could be saved from the consequences of their own sinfulness?”

To answer it, consider the events that took place in the Garden of Gethsemane – events which led to the arrest, trial, condemnation and execution of Jesus at the hands of a jealous and worried Jewish religious hierarchy and a compliant Roman Governor.

It was late at night, and Jesus had just shared with his disciples a simple

Christian meal in the Upper Room, which Christadelphians now refer to as the “*Breaking of Bread*”. Judas Iscariot had left the group to rendezvous with the Jewish authorities and finalise arrangements for arresting Jesus.

Jesus at Prayer

We will follow the record of these events in Matthew’s account:

“Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, ‘Sit here while I go and pray over there’” (26:36).

Prayer had always been an important part of Jesus’ life, including when he was dealing with difficult situations. When you think about it, that would have been a rather strange practice if he was really God; but it was entirely understandable for the Son of God – a son should talk to his Father frequently.

On this occasion, Jesus was praying about the immediate prospect of the pain and the degradation of the cross. We can understand that, for we would do the same thing ourselves. Yet if Jesus was an incarnation of the Creator Himself, as some people say, he must have been above and beyond the frailties of human nature. But, as a human being, made of flesh and

“Did Jesus contribute anything himself towards the process whereby humanity could be saved from the consequences of their own sinfulness?”

blood, with the same feelings and sensitivities as us, the cross would be something Jesus would have preferred to avoid if at all possible. So he prayed.

“He went a little farther and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, “O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (26:39).

“Not my will”

The very fact that Jesus can talk in terms of having a will of his own which is potentially different to that of his Father is the clearest of pointers to the fact that we are in the company of a man who was wrestling with his destiny, not from a position of unassailable strength but of readily recognizable weakness. Left to himself, Jesus would not have chosen the way of the cross: His will was otherwise.

If you have ever read about crucifixion, or seen it portrayed, you will fully appreciate his dilemma. It was the most barbaric method of judicial execution imaginable, and it was meant to be. For by these horrible public deaths, the occupying Roman administration deterred any rebellion against its authority. ‘Rebel and die’ was the message they sent out by public execution in this cruel way.

Jesus knew, however, that it was the will of his Father that he should surrender his life. In so doing he was to achieve victory over the power of sin, a power that resides in human nature. So, what we are witnessing in the Garden of Gethsemane is a genuine con-

flict of interest.

✚ On the one hand – Jesus would have preferred to avoid the painful, shameful horror of crucifixion.

✚ On the other hand – he was devoted to accomplishing the will of his Father and had learned that this sacrifice was necessary for the salvation of the world.

No wonder Jesus says to the disciples, who were struggling unsuccessfully to stay awake during this crisis moment for the whole world:

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (26:41).

These are words straight from the heart of a man who was living out the same dilemma as we experience most if not every day of our lives – good intentions thwarted by human feebleness. The difference is that here the Lord Jesus, through his total commitment to the will of his Father, was able

to make those good intentions prevail over the weakness of human nature. Note the words that are used to describe the second prayer uttered by Jesus at this time:

“He went away again a second time and prayed, saying, ‘O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me unless I drink it, your will be done’” (26:42).

“Your will be done”

This second prayer is that of a man who has made a decision: one which is rooted in his love of, and respect for, his heavenly Father. He is ready and willing to set aside his own pain-avoiding preferences, and submit to that of a higher authority. *“Your will be done”*



sounds like a positive affirmation by Jesus of his decision to forgo his own inclinations and make himself one hundred percent obedient to the will of his Father.

Once again, these words are only meaningful if they are describing the process of genuine choice. It would not be a genuine choice if God and Jesus were one and the same. The fact that one is agreeing to obey the other shows that the Father is greater than the Son, and is thus able to command him to obey. And the obedience of the Son shows a marvellously loving attitude of free response and perfect obedience.

Helped by God

It is interesting to ask what if anything happened between the first and second prayers of Jesus, to explain the difference that is now apparent. The parallel record in Luke's gospel may provide the answer. Only the wording of one prayer is mentioned here, but it is immediately followed by a detail unique to Luke:

"He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is your will, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but yours, be done.' Then an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him" (22:41-43).

So, Jesus began by wrestling vigorously with the dilemma proposed by the conflict between the willingness of his spirit (to do the will of God) and the weakness of his flesh (his own human preferences). He ended by resolving to do the will of his Father, in which resolve he was helped by the Father. Those of us who are parents will immediately recognize the accuracy of what is being described here. You want your

grown-up child to take a course of action which you know is right, and you help all you can, but ultimately the decision is theirs not yours. You have to know and respect that. And it was so with Jesus.

Conclusion

The question was posed earlier whether Jesus had himself contributed anything independently to the salvation of the world. Or had his death been inevitable, because of who he was and where he came from?

Our brief sojourn with the Lord during his time in the Garden of Gethsemane has surely brought us to the inescapable conclusion that Jesus did indeed make the supreme sacrifice to suppress his own will in favour of total commitment to the outworking of his Father's will, even though that decision took him down the agonising road of the cross. The choice to obey was not made by someone popularly referred to as 'God the Son', but by the Son of God, a man of flesh and blood, who could have run away from his calling but didn't.

We rightly thank God for His love in providing the way of salvation for us. It is equally right that we thank Jesus Christ for his loving submission to his Father and for his freely-given participation in overcoming the power of sin in human flesh, thereby achieving a victory for himself and for us. The Apostle Paul describes so clearly the partnership which has brought salvation within our reach:

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57)

Steve Weston

Reading the Small Print



If ever we are offered a contract it's always wise to read the small print, and isn't there a lot of it sometimes! It can be so disappointing and frustrating, when something goes wrong, to discover vital words in the small print which tell us that what has happened is not covered and that we have to pay – not someone else!

Jesus and the Small Print

The Lord Jesus once made reference to the small print of the Old Testament. He was speaking about himself and the work he had come to do, as the Son of God. This is what he said:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17,18).

The “jots” and “titles” to which Jesus referred were the smallest markings in the Hebrew language: they helped people know how to pronounce the words and were the Bible version of small print! So he was making a monumental claim: that even the smallest part of the Old Testament law was to find its full meaning – or fulfilment – in him. That really is throwing down a challenge to us, isn't it! Jesus seems to be saying this:

“Go search the Old Testament and see if you can find me there and check off my life experiences, and what I teach

and do, are in harmony with it – even in its smallest details.”

That is a very difficult thing to do, of course, if we don't know much about either the life of Jesus or the Old Testament. But it is not impossible; for the Bible is there for us to read and study and we can find out all about the life of Jesus from the four gospel records. Using what knowledge we have, we can start to search and see. We need some patience and need to take some time about this examination, but reading the small print always pays dividends in the long run.

Wish Fulfilment?

There is something that may cross your mind at the start, and it is as well to acknowledge it at the outset. Jesus knew the Old Testament very well indeed, often better than the learned scholars who came to debate with him. So might he have done and said things that deliberately fulfilled the ancient prophecies? To set your mind at rest about that, we will choose examples where we know he had very little control over events, where maybe people who were his enemies were doing their best to catch him out or even “do away” with him.

Let's start in the gospel records before Jesus was actually born, and we'll begin with the first gospel account, the one that was written by Matthew. I hope incidentally that you will get your Bible out and read the passages that are referred to.



Heb yod (smallest letter in Hebrew) is the jot; the tiny pen-stroke (circled on the right) is a tittle

Family Tree

When opening the Bible at the first chapter of Matthew we find – a list of names! Lots of people like to know more about their family – or so it would seem from the number of people I know who are researching their family backgrounds and compiling a family tree. We can get a sense of authenticity and identity when we know who was in our family, where they lived and what their background was. Sometimes we might even find an interesting story, even a skeleton or two in the cupboard; there's nothing like a bit of scandal for some people!

Jesus' family tree is full of interest of that sort. Firstly, it shows us his evident humanity. Although it mainly traces the male line, the list does include mention of three important females, each with a story to tell. The really important thing is that we have Old Testament points of reference where we can now check the family background of our Lord, right back to Abraham who enters the Bible record in Genesis chapter 11. This brings us to one of those all important details. The genealogy is summarised in verse one:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1).

Do you notice that the names are not in chronological order? David comes first (he lived about 1000 BC); Abraham is second (he lived about 2000 BC). So this detail – the very first verse in the New Testament – is not there to give us chronological information. It is meant to draw our attention to the importance of these two people in the life of Jesus. David was a really important king in Israel's history. As a man who believed in God, he was promised a kingly line of descendants

who would always be available to rule over God's people in every generation (2 Samuel chapter 7).

Promised Seed

This family tree then shows us that Jesus Christ (which means *‘the anointed one’*) was and is a king who will one day rule over the people of Israel (a theme we will develop later). More than that, the promises God gave actually start with Abraham (Genesis chapter 12), which is why he features so prominently. Genesis tells us that Abraham was promised a “seed” – a descendant who would one day possess the land of Israel, through whom “blessing” or happiness would come to all nations and that Abraham would be alive to see it all come to fruition. Wow! That is very far reaching stuff.

But notice the detail. That word “seed”, means *“descendant”*; it is singular, whereas Abraham was indeed the father of nations – Jews and Arabs. Now Matthew shows that the true meaning – the fulfilment of that promise – pointed to just one person – one special descendant, Jesus Christ.

So this family tree is telling us that through Jesus Christ there is a great master plan for the world which involves him reigning as king over Israel, bringing peace and happiness to the world and bringing back to life people who have long since passed off the scene. I am quite sure that you will take a little while to get used to such amazing ideas. But they are all implied by simply looking at the detail of what the Old Testament says about Jesus – and we have looked no further than Jesus' family tree. There's a lot more to come!

David Nightingale

Paul at Philippi

*On their second missionary journey, Paul and his companions have reached Philippi, a Roman Colony in Asia Minor and, as **John Hellawell** now explains, they are intent upon preaching the gospel of salvation in this city too. They could not keep the good news of salvation to themselves!*

No Synagogue

At Philippi, Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, went on the Sabbath to locate a place of prayer which they anticipated would be near the river. Given the importance of Philippi it is interesting to note that there does not appear to have been a Jewish synagogue there. Since it required at least ten adult male Jews to form a synagogue, we may assume that there were fewer than ten living in Philippi.

It seems likely that the explanation is to be found later, in Acts chapter 18. There we read:

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them” (Acts 18:1-2).

The Roman historian Suetonius explains that the Jews in Rome “were constantly rioting at the instigation of Chrestus”. It seems possible that Suetonius mistook the real cause of the riots – Christus – and assumed that the ringleader had the quite common name Chrestus. The two words would

sound very similar. If this is correct, we can assume that when the Christian faith had been brought to Rome by those who had returned after Pentecost (Acts 2) the response of the orthodox Jews, who resisted the preaching and found themselves unable to refute the evidence presented, was to cause riots. Paul had experienced this reaction in almost every city where he preached.

The number of Jews in Rome was likely to be quite large so the opposition would be formidable. It must have reached the stage where the peace of Rome had been disturbed to such an extent that the Emperor Claudius lost patience and solved

the problem by expelling this notoriously troublesome minority in about 49/50 A.D., which is about the time of this Second Missionary Journey.

Philippi was a Roman colony and was regarded as part of Rome overseas. As the Roman citizens in a colony tended to be more patriotic and zealous of their status than those in Rome, it seems highly probable that the edict of Claudius was implemented in Philippi more rigorously than it was in Rome itself.



Ruins of the marketplace in ancient Philippi

Lydia is Baptized

At the place of prayer they found only women present. Paul and his companions sat down and spoke to them. It is not certain that these were Jewish women. More probably they were “God-fearers”, that is, Gentiles who were attracted to the Jewish faith but who were not true proselytes. It seems that the beliefs of Judaism were attractive to many Gentiles who were dissatisfied with the polytheistic Roman religions. Many women became proselytes but the requirement of circumcision was repugnant to the men.

It is evident that one of the women, Lydia, was indeed a God-fearer (Acts 16:14). She came from Thyatira in Asia Minor, where a church was established later (Revelation 2:18), and was a “seller of purple”, an expensive cloth worn only by the wealthy. Since Thyatira is a city in Lydia, it is possible that she was known as ‘the Lydian woman’ and ‘Lydia’ was not her real name. Although she was already a worshipper of God, Lydia listened to Paul and “the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken” by him.

Heart and Mind

The “heart” here is really “the mind”: the ancients believed that the heart was the seat of understanding while we believe that the brain is where our mind is located. Luke is telling us that she not only listened; she understood the significance of what she heard. This explains why some people respond to the call of the Gospel and others do not. There are many examples in the Bible of people who listened

to preaching but never responded.

The Lord Jesus had said earlier:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The effect of the Lord’s opening of her heart was inevitable: “she and her household were baptized”. One may imagine that she persuaded the other members of her family and her servants and slaves of the reality of her newfound faith in Christ. Lydia’s conversion followed the pattern which is evident throughout Acts. First the Gospel message must be understood and its significance appreciated. Then

it is necessary to undergo the rite of baptism as an evident token of our awareness of the need to symbolically end the old life by being “buried” in the baptismal water in order to emerge into the new life in Christ (see Romans 6:4).

Lydia wanted to assist Paul and his companions in their work so she begged them to stay at her house:

“If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.”

They accepted the invitation, for it would probably mean not only greater comfort but also more time for preaching since her household would attend to their physical needs.

Arrested and Imprisoned

During their stay, Paul and Silas were followed day after day by a slave girl who was “possessed with a spirit of divination” and brought her owners considerable wealth by her fortune-telling. Romans were extremely superstitious and they would consult such a person before making important decisions, for example, undertaking a



lengthy journey or embarking on a business venture. The skill of the fortune-teller was to ensure that the answer was sufficiently imprecise as to be true whatever happened. This slave girl probably had mental illness which gave her an intuitive instinct for reading the body-language of her clients and her questioning may have enabled her to make statements about them which would give the impression of supernatural powers.

As she followed Paul and Silas she declared something which was absolutely correct:

“These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

Eventually Paul became very annoyed with this slave-girl’s proclamations. One might have thought that her independent support would have been welcomed, especially if she had a reputation for supernatural perceptive powers. We are not given any explanation for Paul’s resentment but it is possible that he was concerned

lest his audience was converted by her influence and not by the conviction which comes from an understanding of the Gospel. It may even be the case that Paul recognised that, in spite of her mental state, she understood the Gospel but, as a valuable slave, her masters would not allow her to join the Faith. Paul might have anticipated that once cured she would be worthless and perhaps could be bought cheaply and even freed. No doubt Lydia would have been willing to do this and she could then join the other converts.

Whatever the real reason, Paul used his Holy Spirit powers to cure her condition and she lost the ability to tell fortunes. Her consortium of owners soon realised that she was now virtually worthless and their lucrative business was over. They did what many thwarted businessmen do when things go wrong – they blamed others and got them into trouble! Paul and Silas were dragged off to prison but, under the hand of God, that turned out to be a remarkably good thing. Something marvellous was about to happen.



Tribulation Works Patience

**Thank God for tribulations
Which often come our way,
They help us to be patient:
And teach us how to pray.**

**They help us count our blessings,
If we’ve a Christ-like mind,
And realise the Father
Is always good and kind.**

**Our character is moulded,
Removed each wayward bit:
So bear up in your troubles,
And unto God submit.**

Gwen Marley

The Fortune-Teller's Story

My owners regarded me as a money making machine. They had bought me at a slave market in Philippi as a young girl.

Dealing with the hardships and restrictions of slavery had been difficult, but I also grieved for my family. During my teenage years, my owners seemed to believe that I could predict the future and influence people. I just thought I was talking from gossip heard in the market or perhaps I was mentally ill. The truth about my condition no longer matters, because a Jew preaching about someone called Jesus took the skill from me.

My masters had begun making me tell fortunes in the Philippi market place. I was the local celebrity like the woman known as the oracle of Delphi. They charged high fees for my comments and over a period of years became very rich. If I failed to make pleasing prophecies for customers, they beat me. By the time Paul the Jew arrived in Philippi, I was weary of my life and very unhappy.

Hearing about Jesus

Paul and his friend Silas also seemed to predict the future. However, they were talking about prophets from the Jewish religion and in particular someone called Jesus who, Paul said, was the Son of God. Paul claimed that Jesus had died because of the things

we do wrong, that he had come back to life again and was now in heaven until that time when the Kingdom of God should come. Paul said that when that happens we can live as good people, for ever.

Few people listened at first, but gradually more people began to believe Paul's message. Then, something odd happened to me. Every time



I was in the same part of the market as Paul, I found myself shouting out, "These are the servants of God who will tell you how to be saved". In spite of several beatings, because my masters hated the idea of this religion, I just could not stop shouting. It was

weird!

Paul and his friend were clearly messengers from God. They were polite and kind to people and they were not making money from their message, as my owners worked so hard to do. I saw them heal people of injuries and diseases. I was beaten repeatedly for shouting after Paul and his friends, but it was no good, I could not stop.

Then it Happened!

One day, when I had talked of nothing but Paul in the market, and certainly made no prophecies pleasing to customers, as the stall was being packed, Paul turned round, clearly upset and commanded the spirit (whatever that was) to leave me. From that moment,

I never foretold anything. My masters did not believe I had lost my powers at first, but soon realised that I was now financially useless to them. They threw me out and then went after Paul, had him beaten up and imprisoned.

During the night following Paul's imprisonment, an earthquake struck. We were all frightened badly by the shaking of buildings and movements in the earth. Being saved suddenly seemed a wonderful idea and next morning I tried to find out where Paul and his friend were. The market was rife with rumour that during the earthquake Paul and his friend Silas had prevented a mass breakout from the prison, talked to the guards and then demanded that the local authorities come to see them because Paul was a Roman citizen and had been beaten and imprisoned without trial.

Paul's visit to Philippi changed my life. I found a new position helping to form a group of Christian believers in the town. (Paul later wrote us some wonderful letters teaching us more about God and Jesus and how best to live our lives.) I was well-treated for the first time ever, but even though life is still hard, I can look forward to a wonderful time. I still see into the future, but it's a vision I have learned from knowing about the ways of God, a vision you too can share if you read the Bible. I can tell you that one day Jesus will come back to the earth, cruelty and hardship will vanish. He will be the King in Jerusalem, ruling the whole world, giving life to all of us who have tried to follow his ways.

Cynthia Miles

Why was Jesus Killed?

It seems very strange that the Jews refused to accept Jesus as their God-given Saviour and, instead, conspired to find him guilty of blasphemy and treason, so they could deliver him to the Roman authorities as a convicted criminal who could then be executed. If we can understand that he is the Saviour whom God had sent, we might well ask *'Why did they not recognise him?'* The Bible tells us why they handed Jesus over to be killed. The basic reason is clear. The Jewish leaders feared that Jesus would upset the comfortable lives they had.

Pilate, the Roman governor in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus understood this. The Bible says *"For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy."* (Mark 15:10)

The Jewish leaders were fearful that if the common people believed on Jesus: *"The Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation"* (John 11:48). So, despite the fact that at least one of the Jewish leaders said to Jesus: *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."* (John 3:2), most of the Jewish leaders contrived to have Jesus murdered because they saw him as a threat to their comfortable lives.

Now here's the challenge for us. Do we avoid commitment to Jesus because obedience to his teaching would place obligations upon us that we do not want to accept? Surely not!

Peter Forbes

The Very First Lesson

The outstanding lesson of the Old Testament is Obedience.

“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22).

One familiar story after another repeats this theme. The first sin was disobedience, when Adam and Eve broke the simple law appointed them, and ate of the forbidden fruit. It is possible to infer that this was also the fundamental reason for the acceptance of Abel and the rejection of Cain.

God’s greatest promise to Abraham was given *“because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son...”* (Genesis 22:16). It was given because of Abraham’s faithful obedience.

The Passover

The Israelites in Egypt were to be protected from the last and worst plague – the slaying of the firstborn – by the blood of the Passover Lamb which was to be daubed on door posts and the lintel of the doorframe. Suppose some Israelite had reasoned like this: *“I don’t see any point in this daubing of the blood on the house entrance. Of course, we’ll kill and eat the lamb, according to instructions, just like all the others are doing. But surely the rest is hardly necessary. So messy! Besides, how the Egyptians will laugh when they see what we’re up to!”*

At the time such a sceptic would doubtless have sounded very superior and very convincing. Yet in the morning that house, like all the Egyptian homes, would have been the scene of bitter lamentation. When God tells us

to do something, we had better take notice, or else.

Not so Well Known

The less familiar story of Nadab and Abihu contains the same powerful message. These two sons of the high priest Aaron had burned *“strange fire”* before the Lord, such as He had not commanded. The context suggests that, in all probability, they went to their duties in the sanctuary drunk. So a fire went forth and consumed them. Their priestly garments, *‘for glory and for beauty’*, became their shrouds, and the Word of God underlined the lesson: *“By those who come near me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified”* (Leviticus 10:3).

And so it goes on. Moses, Achan, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Naaman, Gehazi, and a long, long line of kings and prophets all proclaim, either by their obedience or by their wilfulness and its consequences, who it is whom God delights to honour – those who are obedient.

Ezekiel the prophet wraps it all up in a grim and trenchant summary:

“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son” (Ezekiel 18:20).

The Lord Jesus presents the same truth more positively:

“You are my friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:14).

Harry Whittaker

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