

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 24 April 2023.

Greetings.

First, a history lesson ... and an encouragement to persevere in prayer.

Today marks the anniversary of the baptism in Milan of Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430), on 24 April 387. The baptism of thirty-two-year-old Augustine was observed by his godly mother, Monica.

Augustine had been brought up in Carthage in North Africa (present-day Algeria) but, as a godless and heretical young man, he had been allured by the attractions of Rome. His Christian mother Monica, who longed passionately for Augustine's conversion, did all she could to persuade Augustine not to go, following him even to the harbour from where he planned to sail.

But Augustine deceived her and set sail at night for Rome. From Rome, he moved to Milan, where (largely as a result of the preaching of Bishop Ambrose) he was converted.

In his 'Confessions', written sometime after, Augustine records the events of the night of his departure for Rome:

'That night I slipped away secretly, but she (his mother) remained to pray and weep. And what was it, O Lord, that she was asking of you with so many tears, but that you would not allow me to sail? But you, in the depths of your counsels and hearing the real point of her desire, did not grant what she then asked, that you might make me what she had always been asking.'
(*'The Confessions of St. Augustine'*, Book 5, Chapter 8, Paragraph 15.)

Second, I set out below this week's 'Monday Musings' document.

Here are five brief 'tasters':

- (i) There was not one act for self in all Christ's life; He was always at the service of everyone.
- (ii) On that day when they're celebrating their victory over that villain who set up his image in the Temple and claimed to be a god, Jesus stands in the Temple and claims to be God.
- (iii) We rejoice to know that *'the last enemy'* will not have *the last word*.
- (iv) Paul did not say, 'none of these things *hurt* me'; he said, 'none of these things *move* me'.
- (v) There are three recorded occasions when Peter uses the word '*never*' when addressing the Lord.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

(i) Scripture.

They sat down and kept watch over Him there. And over His head they put the charge against Him, which read, 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews'.

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and one on the left.

And those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross'.

So also, the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him, saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, "I am the Son of God"'.
And the robbers who were crucified with Him also reviled Him in the same way.

Matthew 27. 36-44 (*English Standard Version*)

(ii) Food for thought.

'In the morning will I direct my prayer unto Thee, and will look up' (Psa. 5. 3).

'To be miserable, look within.

'To be distracted, look around.

'To be happy, look up'.

(D. L. Moody, 'Notes from my Bible', page 65.)

'Though He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered' (Heb. 5. 8-9).

'He learned obedience, not in the sense that He moved from disobedience to obedience, but that He moved from untested or untried obedience to fully tested, fully tried obedience. He was being tested at every point and proving Himself obedient at every point'.

(John Piper, 'Why Did Jesus Need to "Learn Obedience"?')

'The Son of man came not to be served but to serve' (Mark 10. 45).

'There was not one act for self in all Christ's life; He was always at the service of everyone. It is difficult for us to believe in the love of Christ, we are so selfish.

'Love likes to serve, selfishness to be served. Christ was love; He delighted to serve; He took upon Him the form of a servant'.

(J. N. Darby, 'Fragment', Food for the Flock, Volume 5, page 36.)

The Feast of Dedication.

'At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem ... and Jesus was walking in the temple ... the Jews gathered around Him and said to Him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly".

Jesus answered them, "... I and the Father are one". The Jews picked up stones again to stone him ... "we are going to stone you for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God"' (John 10. 22-33).

'The Feast of Dedication was not authorized by the Hebrew Scriptures; it was a relatively recent institution. In 167 BC, the Syrian Antiochus Epiphanes ["God manifest"] overran Jerusalem and polluted the temple, setting up a pagan altar to displace the altar of Israel's God ... many Jews revolted and developed the fine art of guerrilla warfare. Eventually they grew strong enough to overthrow the oppressor and, under the leadership of Judas Maccabaeus, they recaptured the temple and reconsecrated it to God ... The people celebrated the rededication of the temple for eight days, and it was decreed that a similar eight-day Feast of Dedication ("Hanukkah") should be held every year'.

(D. A. Carson, 'The Gospel According To John', page 391.)

'John brings out the utmost in irony. On that day when they're celebrating their victory over that villain who set up his image in the Temple and claimed to be a god, Jesus stands in the Temple and claims to be God!'.

(Tom Hobson, 'Jesus' Shocking Words at Hanukkah'; accessed at ...

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tomhobson/2017/12/jesus-shocking-words-hanukkah/#q7v6uqJcUQKgtwck.99.>)

Seven cases of fear in the Gospel according to Mark.

(i) The men of Gerasa/Gadara: 'they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid' (Mark 5. 15).

(ii) Jairus: 'overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, Do not be afraid, only believe' (Mark 5. 36).

(iii) The disciples, when they saw Jesus walking on the sea: 'immediately He spoke to them and said, Be of good courage; it is I, be not afraid' (Mark 6. 50).

(iv) The disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration: Peter 'did not know what to say, for they were sore afraid' (Mark 9. 6).

(v) The disciples, when Jesus spoke to them of His forthcoming death and resurrection: 'they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask Him' (Mark 9. 32).

(vi) The disciples, when Jesus strode purposefully ahead of them on the way up to Jerusalem: 'Jesus went before them ... and as they followed, they were afraid' (Mark 10. 32).

(vii) The women who fled out of the empty tomb after encountering an angel there, following Jesus' resurrection: 'they went out and fled from the tomb ... and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (Mark 16. 8).

'The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death ... there shall be no more death ... and He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new' (1 Cor. 15. 26; Rev. 21. 4-5).

We rejoice to know that 'the last enemy' will not have the last word.

'Pray one for another' (James 5. 16).

'How many times have you heard someone say, "All I can do is pray"?'

"All I can do is pray"! You might as well say to a starving man, "All I can do is offer you food", or to a sick person, "All I can do is give you medicine that will make you well", or to a poor child, "All I can do is buy the toy you most want for your birthday".

'Praying unlocks the doors of Heaven and releases the power of God'.

(Billy Graham, '*Hope for Each Day*', page 236.)

Five 'eternal' things in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

- (i) 'Eternal salvation' (Heb. 5. 9).
- (ii) 'Eternal judgment' (Heb. 6. 2).
- (iii) 'Eternal redemption' (Heb. 9. 12).
- (iv) The 'eternal Spirit' (Heb. 9. 14).
- (v) 'Eternal inheritance' (Heb. 9. 15).

Faith and works: Paul and James.

'For Paul, "faith" is active and works by love (Gal. 5. 6), while "works" are legalistic efforts to establish our own righteousness (Rom. 10. 3).

'In James, by contrast, "faith" is merely intellectual assent to theological propositions, which even demons might give (James 2. 19), while "works" are the practical expression of religious conviction (James 2. 18)'.

(J. M. Furness, '*Vital Words of the Bible*', page 40.)

'Bonds and afflictions ... none of these things move me' (Acts 20. 23-24); 'Be ... unmovable' (1 Cor. 15. 58).

'Paul did not say, "none of these things hurt me"; he said, "none of these things move me"'.

(Leonard Ravenhill, '*Christ Magnified in My Body - Part 1*', Sermon 110284.)

Two things which Paul said surpass human comprehension:

- (i) 'The love of Christ, which passes knowledge' (Eph. 3. 19) .
- (ii) 'The peace of God, which passes all understanding,' (Phil. 4. 7).

The literal fulfilment of biblical prophecy.

'The promises of the first coming of Christ were fulfilled literally. The promises of the second coming often stand in the same sentence with those. Who therefore can justify these being taken merely "spiritually"? (e.g., Luke 1. 31-33).

'Christ came literally out of Bethlehem (Mic. 5. 2), rode literally on an ass into Jerusalem (Zech. 9. 9), was literally betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zech. 11. 12), and His hands and feet were literally pierced on the cross (Psa. 22. 16). Literally His bones were not broken (Psa. 34. 20), literally His side was pierced by a lance (Zech. 12. 10). He died and was buried literally (Isa. 53. 8, 9, 12), and literally rose again on the third day (Psa. 16. 10).

'What absurdity and contrariness, therefore, it would now be to evaporate into mere metaphors the predictions of His coming in glory. "Has then Jesus only metaphorically died on the cross? Has He drunk only spiritual vinegar (Psa. 69. 21), and were lots thrown only for His spiritual garments? (Psa. 22. 18). Has God only figuratively scattered His people among all the nations? (Deut. 4. 27), and are they at this moment only metaphorically 'without king, without prince, without sacrifice, without altar, without ephod, and without sanctuary'? (Hos. 3. 4). No, all came to pass literally and actually" (F. Bettex).

'How therefore would it be right, when God in the prophets repeatedly asserts that He will gather afresh the people of Israel out of all the peoples of the world and bring them again into the land of their fathers, to suppose that all this is merely figurative turns of speech? Who gave us the right to make out of the Jews the Christians, out of Jerusalem the church, out of Canaan heaven?'

(Erich Sauer, '*The Triumph of the Crucified*', pages 145-146.)

Peter's 'threes'.

1. There are three recorded occasions when Peter uses the word 'never' when addressing the Lord:

- (i) In the Upper Room: 'You shall never wash my feet' (John 13. 8a).
- (ii) On the way to Gethsemane: 'I will never be made to stumble' (Matt. 26. 33).
- (iii) At the house of Simon the tanner: 'I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean' Acts 10. 14).

On each of these occasions, the apostle received a much-needed correction from the Lord (John 13. 8b; Matt. 26. 34; Acts 10. 15). And afterwards: (i) he did have his feet washed (John 13. 12), (ii) he did stumble (Matt. 26. 69-75), and (iii) he did eat non-kosher food (Acts 10. 48; 11. 3. Cf. Gal. 2. 12).

2. On the housetop at Joppa, (i) heaven's command, (ii) Peter's objection, and (iii) heaven's correction are repeated, each occurring three times (Acts 10. 9-16).

3. Peter accompanied James and John on three special occasions during our Lord's public ministry: (i) at the house of Jairus (Mark 5. 37-38), (ii) on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9. 2), and (iii) in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14. 33).

4. Alongside a fire of coals (John 18. 18) at our Lord's so-called trial before the Sanhedrin, Peter was challenged three times about his association with 'Jesus of Nazareth' and he denied Him three times (John 13. 38 with Mark 14. 72). Alongside another 'fire of coals', the apostle is required to affirm three times his love for the Saviour (John 21. 9, 15-17).

(iii) Go on, smile.

The Irish barber.

When on holiday in Ireland, an Englishman went to a barber to have his moustache trimmed. When the job was done, he asked, 'What will that cost me?'

'No charge for a pleasant Englishman such as yourself', the barber replied.

When the barber came to open his shop the next day, he found a dozen rosy apples on his doorstep.

Later that day, a Welshman came to have his hair cut. When the job was done, he asked, 'What will that cost me?'

'No charge for a pleasant Welshman such as yourself', the barber replied.

When the barber came to open his shop the next day, he found a dozen fresh eggs on his doorstep.

Later that day, a Scotsman came to have his beard shaped. When the job was done, he asked, 'What will that cost me?'

'No charge for a pleasant Scotsman such as yourself', the barber replied.

When the barber came to open his shop the next day, he found *a dozen Scotsmen waiting at his doorstep!*

Growing older – gracefully or otherwise.

'Memory, or more precisely its deterioration, is one of the banes of getting older.

'They don't call them the wonderful years for nothing: *wonder what day it is, wonder where my keys are, wonder where I left my glasses ...*

'It's all to do with your left brain/right brain balance: *there's nothing right on your left brain and nothing left on your right brain ...*

'If you're worried about your ability to drive, see a doctor. If you can't see him, your eyesight's probably not good enough to drive. If you can't read his writing, that's nothing to do with your eyesight—it's because *he's a doctor and uses hieroglyphics rather than letters*'.

(Boris Starling, 'Haynes Explains Pensioners', pages 23 and 28.)