



CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO
THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS
(1 TIMOTHY 1:15)

January 2023 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Word from the Manse.....	2
News & Events.....	3
Directions for Profitable Scripture Reading (2).....	4
Why Become A Christian?.....	5
Test Your View of the Cross.....	7
Children's Corner.....	8

CONTACT DETAILS

Stornoway RPCS
Bridge Community Centre
Bayhead Embankment
Stornoway, Isle of Lewis,
Scotland, HS1 2EB

www.stornowayrpcs.org

info@stornowayrpcs.org

Scottish Charity No: SC043043

WORD FROM THE MANSE

Very recently (the evening of the Sabbath, 11th December), we considered Herod celebrating his own birthday and, particularly, we noted the solemnity involved in someone celebrating his birth only to end up wishing he had never been born at all.

These things reminded me of a devotional passage written some years ago by Rev William Jay, a Baptist minister who ministered in the Argyle chapel in Bath for over 60 years, from 1791 until his death in 1852. (Incidentally, for depth of thought, spirituality of mind, richness of experience and beauty of expression, William Jay's 'Morning and Evening Exercises' are well worthy of anyone's investment of both time and money). What follows is extracted, with some editing, from his meditation for January 14th in which he reflects on events associated with Pharaoh's birthday (Genesis 40: 20) and closes with a profound and vivid contrast between two famous men – one who was thankful to have been born and another who wished he had never been born at all.

'The birthday of princes has been historically and generally solemnized as a token of the respect due to their sovereignty: but it has often been abused and has given rise to wickedness and mischief.'

We see this in the case of Jeroboam: At the commemoration of his birth drunkenness abounded, and the intoxication of the king himself injured his health and made him forget his dignity in his joining with buffoons and jesters: 'In the day of our king, the princes have made him sick with bottles of wine; he stretched out his hand with scorner.' (Hosea 7: 5)

And so it was on a similar occasion with Herod: 'Herod on his birthday made a supper for his lords, high captains, and chief estates in Galilee'; the daughter of Herodias danced, the King was excited – and John was beheaded (Mark 6: 14-29)

But in almost every rank of life, the custom prevails, of people observing with some degree of festivity the day of their birth. But as well as a day of congratulations, our pious forefathers made of it a day of pious feeling and regard.

And, first, surely it should be made a day of *thanksgiving* – to the Author and Giver of life for our being; for the place we occupy in the scale of creation; for the country and family in which we were born; for our civil and religious advantages and for our preservation through so many perils when so many have been cut off.

And, second, surely it should be made a day of *humiliation* – that we were shaped in iniquity and conceived in sin; that we went astray from the womb; that our transgressions are innumerable – and that we have not improved as we ought to have done, any of our privileges: 'I do remember my faults this day.'

And, third, surely it should be made a day of *reflection* – that as there is a time to be born, so there is a time to die; that so much of life is already passed away as a shadow; that when a few years are come, we shall go the way whence we shall not return; that our continuance here is as uncertain as it is short; that we may never see this day again – and if we do not, where shall we be when it returns?

And, fourth, surely it should be made a day of *prayer* – that we may so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom; that we may obtain pardoning mercy and renewing grace; that we may be prepared for all the duties and trials that lie before us; that 'whether we live, we may live unto the Lord, or whether we die we may die unto the Lord'; so that, living and dying, we may be the Lord's.

Happy are they who, without complaining of their lot, or being impatient to be gone, yet know that *the day of their death is better than the day of their birth*. Though for them to live is Christ, yet, to die is gain. Every returning birthday tells them, 'So much nearer your heavenly home.'

But how dreadful the state of those who must know that every year advances them so much away from all they love and brings them so much nearer a world which they do not desire. A birthday to them is far from enviable: Verses may be written, speeches may be received, smiles may be put on – but 'even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness' (Proverbs 14:13)

Jay then went on to contrast two deathbeds and their respective views on the day of their birth.

First, the thoughts of Voltaire (French writer and atheistic philosopher 1694-1778): "Who can, without horror, consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders; it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is without pity pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water. In man there is more wretchedness than in all the other animals put together. He loves life, and yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys a transient good, he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms. This knowledge is his fatal prerogative: other animals have it not. He spends the

transient moments of his existence in diffusing the miseries which he suffers: in cutting the throats of his fellow-creatures for pay, in cheating and being cheated, in robbing and being robbed in serving that he might command; and in repenting of all he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches equally criminal and unfortunate, and the globe contains carcasses rather than men. I tremble at the review of this dreadful picture to find that it contains a complaint against Providence itself; ***and I wish I had never been born***.

Then, the thoughts of Thomas Halyburton (Scottish minister and professor in St Andrews University 1674-1712): 'I shall shortly get a very different sight of God from what I have ever had and shall be made able to praise him for ever and ever. Oh, the thoughts of an incarnate Deity are sweet and ravishing. How I wonder at myself that I do not love him more, and that I do not admire him more! What a wonder that I enjoy such composure under all my bodily pains, and in the view of death itself. What a mercy that, having the use of my reason, I can declare his goodness to my soul. I long for his salvation; I bless his name I have found him and die rejoicing in him. *Blessed be God that I was born!* Oh, that I was where he is! I have a father and mother, and ten brothers and sisters, in heaven, and I shall be the eleventh. Oh, there is a telling in this providence, and I shall be telling it for ever! If there be such a glory in his conduct towards me now, what will it be to see the Lamb in the midst of the throne! ***Blessed be God that ever I was born!***'

These contrasting words, on account of their plainness and profundity, are best left without further comment.

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

BIBLE READING PLAN 2023

As we begin another New Year and make plans for 2023, we encourage you to prioritise God's Word and follow a Bible reading plan.

It has been suggested that there are two approaches to daily Bible reading, intimacy & familiarity. Intimacy comes through slow meditative reading of smaller portions, whereas familiarity comes through faster reading of larger portions.

There are many Bible reading plans which take us through the whole Bible in a year. The Robert Murray M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan, takes you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament and Psalms twice each year, by reading four chapters a day.



If you haven't read through the whole Bible in a year, it may sound like an onerous task, but you might be surprised to find that it is both an obtainable and a rewarding goal. Why not try it for 2023?

NEW MINISTER IN SEATTLE

Members of presbytery and the broader RPCNA enjoyed a wonderful evening of fellowship with the saints of the Seattle RPC for the ordination and induction of their new minister, Rev David Witmer (pictured in the middle).



DIRECTIONS FOR PROFITABLE SCRIPTURE READING (2)

17. "Compare yourselves with the Word."

Let us see "how the Scripture and [our] hearts agree ... Are [our] hearts, as it were, a transcript and counterpart of Scripture? Is the Word copied out into our hearts? The Word calls for humility; are you not only humbled, but humble? The Word calls for regeneration (John 3:7); have you a change of heart – not only a moral and partial change, but a spiritual?" Etc.

18. "Take special notice of those Scriptures which speak to your particular case."

Do you feel heavy with lust? Cling to those passages which deal with lust, its sinfulness, its punishment and its remedy. Do you lack assurance? Bring those passages into your heart which deal with God's promises of love and preservation over His saints. "In reading, observe those Scriptures which do touch upon your particular case. Although all the Bible must be read, yet those texts which point most directly to your condition, be sure to put a special star upon."

19. "Take special notice of the examples in Scripture; make the examples of others [to be] living sermons to you."

Observe the examples in Scripture of God's judgments upon sinners, His mercy upon His saints, His dealings with man, and man's responses to God. Learn how those before us triumphed and failed, and apply it to yourself.

20. "Leave not off reading in the Bible till you find your hearts warmed."

Watson writes, "Read the Word not only as a history, but strive to be affected with it. Let it not only inform you, but inflame you ... Go not from the Word till you can say as those disciples, 'Did not our heart burn within us.' (Luke 24:23)" Do not read the Word as a mere religious discipline, rather read the Word expecting to meet with God and be taught of Christ.

21. "Set upon the practice of what you read."

"I have followed Thy commandments." (Ps. 119:66) Do not leave the Word where you read it, but take it up into your heart and walk it out in practice. "Christians should be walking Bibles" says Watson. For David the Word was "a lamp unto his feet." (Ps. 119:105) "It was not only a light to his eyes to see by, but to his feet to walk by ... Reading without practice will be but a torch to light men to hell."

22. "Make use of Christ's prophetic office."

Christ is Prophet, Priest and King. He is Prophet to teach us God's will, Priest to reconcile us to God and King to rule over us. In His prophetic office He teaches us what we are to believe about God and how we are to live for Him. "Such as would be proficient in Scripture must [have] Christ to be their teacher." It was Christ who opened the minds of the disciples to "understand the Scriptures." (Luke 24:45) Those who desire to profit in the Word must still come to Christ for understanding.

23. "Tread often upon the threshold of the sanctuary."

By this Watson means that we must often attend the means of grace in preaching. We must sit under the sound preaching of our pastors if we are to profit in what we read. What we read in the Word will be explained and applied in the pulpit. Ministers, says Watson, are earthen pitchers, "but these pitchers have lamps within them, to light souls in the dark."

24. "Pray that God will make you profit."

David prayed, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law." (Ps. 119:18) "Pray to God," writes Watson, "to take off the veil from the Scriptures, that you may understand them; and the veil of your heart, that you may believe them." We must come to the Lord in our Scripture reading as the father in the gospels came to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (Mark 9:24) If we are to have any hope of profiting in the Scriptures, even after observing all of Watson's previous directions, we must anchor the whole endeavour in prayer. Without God's aid we shall never understand, and His aid is obtained only by fervent prayer.

WHY BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

Many Christians feel uncomfortable witnessing to unconverted friends and neighbours. Among the various possible reasons for this can sometimes be a nagging feeling that non-Christians would have a point if they were put off by how inadequate existing Christians are, and how unappealing organised religion often is. But what the unconverted person is missing out on is not so much to do with Christians or the church, but the wonderful Saviour and His amazing salvation. In the following shortened and updated extract, Samuel Rutherford lists a number of ways in which the unconverted should find Christ Jesus attractive. Perhaps if believers themselves were more struck with the loveliness of Christ and more convinced about the benefits of Christ's salvation, it would come more easily to speak to others about Him.

The Lord Jesus Christ draws you to come to Him with various kinds of reasons to persuade you. One reason is the pleasure and enjoyment you can have from the beauty that is in God.

GOD IS BEAUTIFUL

What then is the beauty of God? I conceive it to be the loveliness of His nature, and all infinite perfections, as this loveliness offers itself to His own understanding and the understanding of humans and angels. David makes this his one desirable thing, 'That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and enquire in his temple' (Psalm 27:4).

The Lord is beautiful because infiniteness, and sweetness of order, is spread throughout His nature and attributes. Nothing can be added to Him, nothing taken from Him; and He is not all mercy only, but infinitely just. So then one attribute does not overtop, out-border or limit another, which would deface His beauty.

And what is beautiful must be natural, and truly and really there. Borrowed colours, and painted embellishments, are not beauty. The Lord, in all His perfections, is truly what He seems to be.

This is why the perfect blessedness of heaven is described as seeing God face to face (Rev. 22:4; Matt. 18:10). God does not have a face; but to see God's face, is to behold God's blessed nature (as far as the creature can see God). We see God's face when we behold Him at close range – not by hearsay, but directly. Let us imagine that millions of suns were all amassed in one: this sun would far excel the sense of seeing in everyone who has ever lived. Now imagine that the Lord created an understanding faculty, millions of degrees more vigorous and apprehensive than if all who have ever been created were consolidated in one. Yet even this understanding could not see God's transcendent and superexcellent beauty! There would remain unseen treasures of loveliness never seen. In fact, it involves an eternal contradiction, that the creature can see to the bottom of the Creator.

GOD'S BEAUTY IS IN CHRIST

But all this beauty of God is held out to us in Christ! He is fairer than the sons of men (Psa. 45:2), handsome with a double excellency. 'Behold thou art fair, my Beloved, yea pleasant,' lovely, delightful, most acceptable (Cant. 1:16.) He is white and ruddy (Cant. 5:10.). His countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars (v. 15). His countenance is as when the sun shineth in its full strength (Rev. 1:16). All the beauty of God is put forth in Christ. Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty (Isa. 33:17). Christ is the brightness of His Father's glory (Heb. 1:3). The light of the sun in the air is the 'accidental' reflection of the sun's beams; but Christ is the substantial reflection of the Father's light and glory, for He is God equal with the Father, and the same God.

GOD'S BEAUTY IS WORTH SEEING

This beauty is outstanding to human and angel observers. Angels are said to have eyes within and without, in front and behind (Rev. 4:6), to behold the beauty of the Lord; and their eyes are absorbed always in beholding His face. They stoop down, as if looking into a dark and veiled thing, with the head bent and the neck outstretched, with great attention of mind. Angels are not nosey, but this exceeding great beauty they must see. They cannot get their eyes pulled off Jesus Christ

COMMUNION WITH GOD IS BEAUTIFUL

We have communion with God in Jesus Christ, when we love Jesus and Jesus shows us that He loves us. There is a beautiful sweetness in being conscious of the love of Christ, which delights all the spiritual senses.

1. The smell of Christ's spikenard, His myrrh, aloes, and cassia. His ivory chambers smell of heaven. The ointment of His garments brings God to the sense. (Psa. 45:8; Cant. 1:13)
2. To the sight, Christ is a delightful thing: to behold God in Christ, is a changing, transforming sight. (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:17; Matt. 16:17; 1 John 2:27.) To see the King in His beauty is a thing full of ravishing delight.
3. It captivates the spiritual sense of hearing. The spouse is so taken with the sweetness of Christ's tongue that, for joy, she can only speak broken and imperfect words. 'The voice of my Beloved!' is not a perfect sentence, but for joy she can speak no more (Cant. 2:8). It is the voice of joy and gladness, that with the very sound can heal broken bones (Psa. 51:8). O if you heard Christ speak! Christ's piping the joyful gospel tidings should make us dance (Matt. 11:7). Christ harping and singing sinners with joyful promises, out of hell to heaven, must have a drawing sweetness to move stones, if the sinner has ears to hear! And what warmth of love must it bring, when Christ is heard say words of comfort (Isa. 54:11; Isa. 40:1).
4. Christ is sweet to the spiritual taste. 'I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet in my mouth' (Cant. 2:3; also Psa. 34:8). The wine, the milk, the honey, and the fatted calf, are all but shadows to Christ's excellent gospel dainties.
5. The sense of touch, which is the most spiritual, is the heavenly feelings, sense, and experience of God's consolations; and this sense is fed with the kisses of Christ's mouth (Cant. 1:3), and with the hid manna, the white stone, the new name.

JOY IN GOD IS BEAUTIFUL

Joy is a drawing delight, and in His face there is fulness of joy (Psa. 16:11). Look, however far God's face casts down from heaven sparkles of joy on us, as far goes our joy; and we are said, in believing, 1 Pet. 1:8. to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and glorious.

THE ABUNDANCE IN GOD IS BEAUTIFUL

'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink the rivers of thy pleasures' (Psa. 36:7). Should not this draw people to Christ? There must be abundance of pleasures where there is a river of pleasures (as in Psa. 46:4). What a sea of seas must God Himself be! His full and bright face, His white throne, His harpers and the heavenly troops that surround the throne, the Lamb, the heaven of heavens itself, the tree of life, eternally green, eternally at once both adorned with soul-delighting blossoms and loaded with twelve manner of fruit every month; peace of conscience from the sense of reconciliation, the first fruits of Emanuel's land, that lies beyond time and death! This must all be above expression.

Reformation Scotland

MOST OF THE GRAND TRUTHS OF GOD HAVE TO BE
LEARNED BY TROUBLE. THEY MUST BE BURNED
INTO US WITH THE HOT IRON OF AFFLCTION:
OTHERWISE WE WILL NOT TRULY RECEIVE THEM.

C.H. SPURGEON

© CHALLIES

**He who loves God
cannot find contentment in
any thing without Him.**

THOMAS WATSON



TEST YOUR VIEW OF THE CROSS

The Cross does not merely tell us that God forgives, it tells us that that is God's way of making forgiveness possible. It is the way in which we understand how God forgives. I will go further: how can God forgive and still remain God? — that is the question. The Cross is the vindication of God. The Cross is the vindication of the character of God. The Cross not only shows the love of God more gloriously than anything else, it shows his righteousness, his justice, his holiness, and all the glory of his eternal attributes. They are all to be seen shining together there. If you do not see them all you have not seen the Cross. That is why we must totally reject the so-called 'moral influence theory' of the Atonement — the theory which says that all the Cross has to do is to break our hearts and to bring us to see the love of God.

Above and beyond all that, Paul says, 'He is declaring his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past'. Why this, if it is merely a declaration of his love? No, says Paul, it is more than that. If it merely proclaimed his forgiveness we would be entitled to ask whether we can depend on God's word, and whether he is righteous and just. It would be a fair question because God has repeatedly stated in the Old Testament that he hates sin and that he will punish sin, and that the wages of sin is death. The character of God is involved. God is not as men. We think sometimes that it is wonderful for people to say one thing and then do another. The parent says to the child, 'If you do this thing you shall not have that sixpence to buy your sweets'. Then the boy does that thing, but the father says, 'Well, it is all right', and gives him the sixpence. That, we think, is love, and true forgiveness. But God does not behave in that manner. God, if I may so put it, is eternally consistent with himself. There is never a contradiction. He is 'the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning'. All these glorious attributes are to be seen shining like diamonds in his eternal character. And all of them must be manifest. In the Cross they are all manifested.

How can God be just and justify the ungodly? The answer is that he can, because he has punished the sins of ungodly sinners in his own Son. He has poured his wrath upon him. 'He bore our chastisement.' 'By his stripes we are healed.' God has done what he said he would do; he has punished sin. He proclaimed this through the Old Testament every-where; and he has done what he said he would do. He has shown that he is righteous. He has made a public declaration of it. He is just and can justify, because having punished another in our stead, he can forgive us freely. And he does so. That is the message of verse 24: 'Being justified [being regarded, declared, pronounced righteous] freely by his grace through the redemption [the ransoming] that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood.' Thus he declares his righteousness for having passed over those sins in his time of self-restraint. 'To declare, I say', his righteousness then, and now, and always, in forgiving sins. Thus he is, at one and the same time, just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.

Such is this great and glorious and wonderful statement. Make sure that your view, your understanding of the Cross, includes the whole of it. Test your view of the Cross. Where does this statement about 'declaring' his righteousness and so on, come into your thinking? Is it something that you just skip over and say: 'Well, I don't know what that means. All I know is, that God is love and that he forgives.' But you should know the meaning of this. This is an essential part of the glorious Gospel. On Calvary God was making a way of salvation so that you and I might be forgiven. But he had to do so in a way that will leave his character inviolate, that will leave his eternal consistency still absolute and unbroken. Once you begin to look at it like that, you see that this is the most tremendous, the most glorious, the most staggering thing in the universe and in the whole of history. God is there declaring what he has done for us. He is declaring at the same time his own eternal greatness and glory, declaring that 'He is light and in him is no darkness at all'. 'When I survey the wondrous Cross. . .', says Isaac Watts, but you do not see the wonder of it until you really do survey it in the light of this great statement of the Apostle. God was declaring publicly once and for ever his eternal justice and his eternal love. Never separate them, for they belong together in the character of God.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

An extract from Romans: An Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25

Children's Corner



'You have not passed this way before' (Joshua 3: 4)

A very Happy New Year to you!

We must begin by saying a very big 'thank you' to Granny M for all her messages over the past eight years. I know you will agree that she did a great job!

A new year always brings new opportunities and new adventures and, as I thought of the text which I chose for this month's message, I remembered my first experience of moving house. I don't know if you have ever moved house but if you have, there will be some things about it that you will never forget.

When I first moved house, I was only three years old. I moved with my mother and father, my three brothers and my sister from a tiny house – which had just one bedroom, a box room, a kitchen, and a living room – to a brand-new council house which had *three* bedrooms, a kitchen, a sitting room, and a bathroom! The smell of that new house is as clear to me as the day we moved in! It spoke to me of new opportunities and new adventures.

God willing, 2023 will be full of new opportunities and new adventures too. But you need to remember that there are two very different paths you can take in 2023 - and you *have to* take one of the two! Which one will it be? (Jesus tells us about these two paths in Matthew 7: 13,14).

The first path is the *path of life*. This path can be quite difficult sometimes, but if you choose it, you have a good compass to direct you – the Bible (the *Word of Life* to guide you on the *Path of Life*). If you follow this compass carefully, it will keep you on the right path and with every day that passes, you'll be glad you chose it and it will take you to your destination of never-ending life and happiness with God, in a wonderful place called 'heaven'.

The other path is the *path of destruction*. If you take this path, you won't be using the Bible as your compass but your own sinful heart. On this path, the choices you make will be against the teachings of the Bible and even if that feels good at the time, walking on this path will slowly destroy your body and your soul and, worst of all, the path leads to destruction and unhappiness, in a terrible place called 'hell'.

I hope you want to take the path of life? Well, if you do, I need to tell you that to get on the path of life you need to go through a special gate. The good news is that it's free for you to get through that gate, but to still need to honestly ask God to forgive all the bad things you have done already and to wash them away with the blood of His Son because 'the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin' (1 John 1:7).

And then, trusting in God, you need to start the new journey on the path of life. It's a difficult path sometimes and, as our text says, 'you have not passed this way before', but God will walk with you as well as showing you where to go.

Well, my new house turned out to be full of opportunities and adventures and I'm so glad we moved there – and I hope and pray that you will choose the path of life at the beginning of 2023. You'll be glad you did as well!

With my love & prayers,

Mrs S,

PS

Make sure you read chapters 3 and 4 of Joshua on your own or with an adult and find out what it is all about.

You can also try and learn the order of the books of the Old Testament of the Bible over the next month.