

STORNOWAY
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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

April 2024 Newsletter



WELCOME

LORD'S DAY

Morning Worship—11.00am

Evening Worship—6.30pm

PRAYER MEETING

Thursday—7.30pm

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WORD FROM THE MANSE

Dear congregation,

The incessant demonisation of Israel by the Western media outlets is as remarkable as it is relentless. All pretense of impartiality was dropped long ago. Increasingly liberal and 'woke' media outlets, including the BBC, adopt Hamas propaganda pretty much without question. Complicit in this are the UN agencies, themselves now little more than vehicles for 'progressive' agendas.

To highlight the UN bias, it should be sufficient to point out a remarkable statistic: since 1967, and Israel's victory in the 6-day war (initiated by the aggression of surrounding Arab countries opposed to Israel's existence) the UN has condemned Israel in no less than 67 resolutions while passing no resolutions against China, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria or Zimbabwe. Enough said.

The whole conflict in the middle east is awash with myth and the Palestinian narrative has been pushed so hard and for so long, in the academy and in the media, that some important facts are seldom heard. But facts are stubborn and persistent things and, this month and next, we will consider some of them. Of course, we can barely touch on the issue, but I hope enough will be written to challenge the prevailing narrative which contains so much that is false.

My desire here is in no way to be 'political' – something from which I refrain as much as possible. However, the fate of the Jewish people is bound up with the history and destiny of the church in remarkable ways: As I highlighted recently in a sermon, Paul tells us that 'God has not cast away his people whom he foreknew...(that their fulness (to come) shall be riches for the world...(that their calling) is irrevocable...(and that, although they are, for now, enemies to us) they are beloved for the sake of their fathers'. So, we pray for the people and for the nation – in a special way. And although we are all free to criticise this nation, it is important that we remember her place in God's programme and, as well as that, that we avoid falling into the antisemitic trap of holding Israel to a different political and moral standard to other countries – as the UN does constantly.

Israel has never been an aggressive state: her military has always gone to extraordinary lengths to limit civilian casualties and has been far more successful in doing so – even in this most recent conflict – than America, for example, in her bombings of Libya, Afghanistan, and Iraq where civilian casualties were very high. Hence, again, the bias in the UN resolutions as highlighted above.

As to the exclusive claim of the Palestinian people to the land, the following should be noted. Unknown to most people, the Jewish people have been present on that land, in continuous existence, for nearly 3,500 years. After replacing the Canaanite people at that time (who now have *no distinct existence* and, therefore, no claim to the land and who, incidentally, have no connection whatsoever to the Palestinians, despite absurd claims made recently to the contrary) the Jews established a large Kingdom, reaching its zenith around 3000 years ago. Even when the historic Jewish capital of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans 1000 years later, in 70AD, with the forcible eviction of the Jews (a woeful pattern to be repeated throughout history) many Jews remained and since the mid-19th century, they have constituted the largest single people group in the land.

Since returning to the area in significant numbers, in the 19th century and long before the reconstitution of Israel in 1948, the returning Jews bought up poor quality, marshy land which no one else wanted or felt could be used, at exorbitant prices (from absentee landlords), worked extremely hard (which even Arabs acknowledge) and shared their skills with their Arab neighbours for whom they provided much needed employment. Their expressed desire was to help their 'brother Ishmael.' As for the Palestinians themselves, they remain what they always were and what, until very recently, they all considered themselves to be – Syrian Arabs. Right up until 1967, their expressed desire was simply to be a part of Syria or Jordan. *There was never a 'Palestinian' state and neither did the Palestinians desire one.*

Historic 'Palestine' (a name given to the land by the Romans, to spite the Jews) included Israel, the West Bank and the whole of Jordan. Israel currently accounts for only just over 20% of that land, far less than was originally envisaged for her, so that no less than 80% of Palestinians are already living in historic Palestine. Now, to the specific myths and, although they are 'legion,' we will confine ourselves, this month and next, to the most common ones.

First, the belief is widespread that the Palestinians just want their own state – a desire which Israel has always frustrated. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth.

Over recent years (from a historical perspective), the land concerned has been under the control of the Turks, the British, the Egyptians and the Jordanians. At no point, during all these years, did the Palestinian people call for their own state. Even as recently as the period from 1948-1967, when Jordan controlled the West Bank, there was no demand for a separate Palestinian state. The reason for that has already been alluded to, in that the Palestinian people never viewed themselves as ‘Palestinian’ and neither did their Arab neighbours. They were content to be Syrian Arabs.

Again, it is a little-known fact that Israel has frequently offered a Palestinian state while the Palestinians on their part, have always rejected these offers. But who would know this from the output of the Western media?

Prior to Israel’s new existence, and as far back as 1917 and 1937, the Jews expressed their willingness to share the land. Later, after their reconstitution as the nation of Israel in 1948, they again offered to share the land – based on an explicit recognition of Israel’s right to exist. This offer was repeated in 1998, 2000 and 2008.

As to the sincerity of such an offer, it should be noted that Israel has consistently demonstrated a willingness to return conquered land (won from those who attacked her without reason) in return for a guarantee of stable peace.

As an example of this desire for peace with her Arab neighbours, note the lengths to which Israel went to secure peace with Egypt in the 1970’s. Although Egypt had been one of the aggressors against Israel in the 6-day war, and had lost control of the Sinaitic peninsula to Israel as a result, Israel was willing to give back 91% of the Peninsula, relocate 170 military airfields and army bases, give up a lucrative oil field – which Israel herself had discovered and developed – and relocate around 7,000 Jewish families, all for a peace based simply on her right to exist. All of this was done – and note that for contributing to it, the courageous President Anwar Sadat of Egypt lost his life. Does this indicate a people bent on genocide against Arabs or, rather, a nation simply desperate for peace?

Indeed, in 2000, the Israeli Prime Minister risked the wrath of his own people by offering an astonishingly favourable deal to the Palestinians, one which truly stunned most observers: Israel offered the Palestinians a state with East Jerusalem as its capital, 97% of the West Bank, the whole of an enlarged Gaza strip, the dismantling of 63 Jewish housing settlements and 30 billion dollars to help with any necessary relocation of people.

Foreign leaders and power brokers could hardly believe the generosity and President Clinton (who was ecstatic), virtually all of Europe and even Saudi Arabia urged Arafat to accept the deal. To their disbelief and dismay, in large and equal measure, Arafat refused and, significantly, made no counteroffer. Further, stung by the international reaction to his dismissive rejection, and realizing that his cover was blown, Arafat precipitated further conflict and, in what was to become a common tactic, he unleashed the intifada. Of course, the resulting and inevitable deaths of Palestinian women and children (who are often used as shields and paid to be martyrs – suicide bombers – so that their families will be richly provided for after their own martyrdom) meant that the blame was deflected onto Israel and the anger of the European and Arab worlds was stirred again. They fall for it – all the time.

Of course it is gut-wrenching to see women and children killed – but the blame needs to fall where it lies, with an unscrupulous, callous leadership who train their own population, from a very young age, to hate Jews (witness the abhorrent content of Palestinian Authority school text books) and who are so inhumane as to use ambulances to transport terrorists and munitions, and to use schools and hospitals as bases of operations.

The sad fact is that the Palestinians know that their relatively recent call for a two state solution flies well in the West, but they have rejected it every time it is proposed – even when accepting it would lead to a diminished and vulnerable Israel. And why could that be? Would it, perhaps, have something to do with the fact that accepting a two-state solution would legitimize Israel’s existence? Arafat was not slow to state that anyone willing to relinquish an inch of Jerusalem was neither a true Arab nor a true Muslim (even though Jerusalem had never been an Arab capital) while the current leader of the Palestinian Authority stated in 2010 that no Jews would be permitted to live in a Palestinian State.

How, precisely, do you negotiate with people (Palestinians represented by the Palestinian Authority and Hamas) and nations (such as Libya and Iran) who deny your right to exist and who view it a duty to wipe out your people based on their birth and religion?

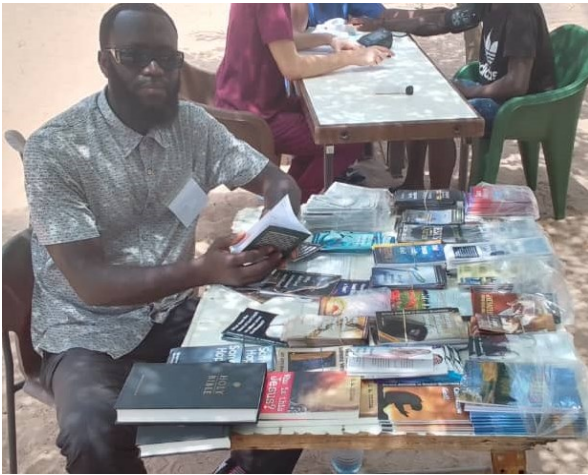
Which takes me to the next myth – that of genocide – which I will pick up next time...

Your minister

NEWS & EVENTS

GAMBIA—GOSPEL TRACTS

The Gambia Partnership recently sent out a few pallets from Stornoway to Gambia, which included a large number of Bibles and Gospel tracts. Pastor Edrissa Colley was recently on a medical outreach where he had the opportunity to share these tracts with those who attended and are “without Christ...having no hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). Please remember those who were in receipt of tracts and pray that they would be a means of bringing them to Christ.



Pastor Edrissa Colley



Medical Outreach

GAMBIA—BIBLE STUDIES

Each week, Brikama RP Church hold Bible studies in both Brikama and Kabekel, a nearby village. Many who are attending have requested and been provided with Bibles. Please remember these weekly Bible studies, as the church reaches out with the Gospel. They have been looking at the deity of Christ and the fatherhood of God. They have been particularly encouraged by interest in the Bible studies from an increasing number of younger people.



Kabekel Bible Study



Brikama Bible Study

THE COSTLY OINTMENT



"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head as he sat at meat. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." (Matthew 26:6-15)

From John's Gospel we know that this woman was Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus. She seems to have been the only person who really understood the Lord's prediction that he would rise again after being crucified. Here in these verses we see the token of very great love and gratitude being bestowed on Christ. Mary brings an alabaster box of very precious, fragrant ointment, and pours it on Jesus' head. To Jesus she gave the best she could as the token of love and devotion.

The world cannot understand the Christian's love and devotion to Christ. "But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." The world values philanthropy higher than worship and devotion. For the world does not know Jesus and feels no love toward him. In one of his sermons the Scottish preacher of a century ago, Robert Murray McCheyne, speaks as follows: "When you are weeping by the chiselled monument of a departed friend, you do not wonder that the careless crowd passes by without a tear. They did not know the virtues of your departed friend; they do not know the fragrance of his memory. Just so the world cares not for the house of prayer, the sprinkled water, the broken bread, the poured-out wine; for they never knew the excellency of Jesus. But with believers it is far otherwise. You have been divinely taught your need of Jesus; and therefore you delight to hear Christ preached. You have seen the beauty of Christ crucified; and therefore you love the place where he is evidently set forth. You love the very name of Jesus; it is as ointment poured forth; therefore you could join for ever in the melody of his praises

The world does not realize who Christ is, nor does it have part nor portion in the redemption which he has purchased for his own. No wonder the world thinks lightly of Jesus! But here in this text of Matthew we find not the world but **the disciples** thinking lightly of Jesus: "To what purpose is this waste?" As if something given to Jesus was wasted! What a tragedy that sometimes the disciples, Christian people, think and speak just like the unsaved world!

But Christ values and appreciates the devotion and love of his people. He took Mary's part and defended her action. He said that she was right, and had done a good work on him. Jesus values worship higher than philanthropy. And those who follow Jesus and place the higher emphasis on worship will not usually be found lacking in a proper concern for the needs and sufferings of their fellow men.

May we, too, have the love and devotion to Jesus that Mary of Bethany had, giving our best - and ourselves - in love and devotion and service to him.

J.G. Vos, Blue Banner Faith and Life, Volume 1, January 1946

NINE WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM FALSE TEACHING

Souls are saved, settled and sanctified through the truth. When there is so much false teaching around, it brings spiritual damage and it is dishonouring to God. Those who are susceptible to false ideas need to be established in the truth. False teachings can be very enticing, but we need to resist them. Stability in the truth and opposition to false teaching are clear and recurring priorities in the writings of the Apostles. Indeed, the purpose of Scripture is to give us certainty in the truth (see, e.g., John 20:31). The theologian **George Gillespie** had a great concern to protect souls from error. In the following updated excerpt from one of his treatises, Gillespie gives nine positive ways in which we can protect ourselves against false teaching. He calls them “preservatives against wavering, and helps to steadfastness in the faith.”

GROW IN KNOWLEDGE AND DISCERNMENT

Do not be simple, as “children in understanding”. There is such a thing as the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive. That is how the apostle describes those who spread diverse and strange doctrines (Eph. 4:14). In Romans 16:18 he warns us that “by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.” You therefore have need of the wisdom of the serpent so that you will not be deceived, as well as the simplicity of the dove, so that you yourself would not be a deceiver (Phil 1:9-10). Do not rashly commit yourself to any new opinion, much less get involved in spreading it. With the well-advised is wisdom. Pythagoras wanted scholars only to hear, and not to speak, for five years. Be swift to hear but not to speak or commit yourself. Prove all things, and when you have proved, then be sure to hold fast that which is good (1 Thess. 5:2; Matt. 7:15-17). There was never a heresy yet broached, but under some attractive, plausible pretence, “beguiling unstable souls,” as Peter puts it (2 Pet. 2:14). “The simple believeth every word” (Prov. 14:15). Do not be like the two hundred who went in the simplicity of their hearts after Absalom in his rebellion (2 Sam. 15:11).

GROW IN GRACE AND HOLINESS AND THE LOVE OF TRUTH

The stability of the mind in the truth, and the stability of the heart in grace, go hand in hand together (Heb. 13:9). David’s rule is good, “What man is he that feareth the Lord? Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose” (Psa. 24:12; see also Jn. 7:17; Deut. 11:13, 16). Similar to how Elisha healed the unwholesome waters of Jericho by throwing salt into the fountain (2 Kings 2:21), so must the bitter streams of pernicious errors be healed by the salt of mortification, and true sanctifying grace in the fountain.

CLING TO TEACHERS WHO ARE FAITHFUL AND SOUND

The sheep that follow the shepherd are best kept from the wolf. I find that the exhortation to stability in the faith is joined with the fruitful labours of faithful teachers (Phil. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:7-9). Likewise, in Ephesians 4, the apostle moves from the work of the ministry (v. 11-13) to draw the consequence “that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (v. 14). The Galatians were easily seduced, as soon as they were made to take against Paul.

WATCH AGAINST THE FIRST BEGINNINGS OF DECLINING

Be vigilant against the first seeds of error. It was while they slept that the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and when he had done, went his way (Matt. 13:25). Therefore, “watch ye” and “stand fast in the faith” go hand in hand together (1 Cor. 16:13).

AVOID AND WITHDRAW FROM THOSE WHO START AND SPREAD HERESIES AND DANGEROUS ERRORS

This is clear from Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:5; 2 John 10-11; Philippians 3:2. Those who want to be godly should not usually be in ungodly company, and those who want to be orthodox should not usually be in heretical company. Chrysostom in various places warns his hearers how much they endangered their souls by going into the Jewish synagogues, and there was a great zeal in the early church to keep Christians who were orthodox away from the assemblies and company of heretics.

GET CHURCH DISCIPLINE ESTABLISHED AND DULY EXERCISED

Church discipline is ordained to purge the church from false doctrine (Rev 2:14-20).

DO NOT DEPEND ON YOUR OWN REASON

“Lean not to thy own understanding, and be not wise in thine own eyes” (Prov. 3:5-7). Let reason be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). What made the Anti-Trinitarians and Socinians fall away from believing in the Trinity of persons in the Godhead, and the union of the two natures of God and man in the person of Christ, was because their reason could not comprehend these articles of the faith. Their own reason is the basis of their opinions they profess. When I say reason must be captive, I mean that the eyes of my understanding must be opened by the Holy Spirit so that I may know that this doctrine is presented in Scripture to be believed, and therefore I do believe that it is true, even if my reason cannot comprehend how it is.

COUNT THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Count the cost to yourself, and be well resolved beforehand what it will cost you to be a disciple of Christ, and to be consistent in professing the truth (Lk. 14:26-34). “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). This is safer than to confirm ourselves in the hopes of a golden age of prosperity in which we shall feel no affliction.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

This advice is given in John 5:39 (see also Acts 17:11). Do not take new light on trust from anyone, be they never so eminent for gifts or for grace, but go to the law and the testimony.

CONCLUSION

The upshot of all this is that we ought to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and be steadfast and even unmoveable in the truth, and not give place to the adversaries, no, not for an hour (Gal. 2:4-5). I do not mean perverse obstinacy in the least error, nor a vain, presumptuous, overweening conceit of our knowledge, to make us despise any light which others may give us from Scripture. Obstinacy is an evil on the one hand, and holding too tenaciously to our own opinions. But fickleness, inconstancy, or wavering is an evil on the other hand. “Be not soon shaken in mind, etc” (2 Thess. 2:2). Fickleness is an epidemic among the sectarians of this time. Their word is “yea and nay,” not unlike what Sallust accused Cicero of, “He says one thing sitting, and another thing standing!”

Yet it may be sometimes observed that those who are the greatest sceptics in reference to the common and received tenets, are the most obstinate and tenacious in tenets invented by themselves. Socinus set at nought the church fathers, church councils, and the whole current of ancient and modern interpreters of Scripture, yet vainglory made him stiffly and tenaciously maintain any opinion or invention of his own, as if he had been infallible.

People are drawn from truth sooner than they are drawn from error. Yet some are unstable in the truth, and unstable in error too. They are of a new faith, and a new religion, every year, if not every month. Remember Reuben’s reproach, “Unstable as water, thou shall not excel” (Gen. 49:4). Indeed, there are even some who do not commit themselves to believing any thing, but are known by believing nothing. These pass now under the name of “seekers,” but we might as well call them atheists.

Rev George Gillespie (1613-1648)



Children's Corner



Dear Children,

I'm sure you have all seen a Sat Nav in your car? It's a very special kind of map. It's a computerised map. That means that instead of seeing where you're going on a paper map, you see it on a screen.

This special map speaks to you as well! It tells you out loud which road you should take to get where you're going. It's really helpful when you are lost and when you don't know the right road to take. If you've got one in your car, maybe your parents can show you how it works?

The Sat Nav was invented in 1960. I suppose you think that's a long time ago? Well, in one way it is – it's even before I was born! In another way, it's not that long ago. Long, long ago, around 6,000 years ago, God made a very special kind of Sat Nav – lots of them! They're not the same kind that we use but they work in the same kind of way and we can still see them work.

Some of them are inside birds – in their brains. God has made their brains so that they know where they should go – even when it's very far away. They can fly from one part of the world to an exact spot in another part of the world and then they come back to the same spot that they left. Isn't that amazing? God gave them an inbuilt navigation system that is so accurate.

Now, in a way, you have a Sat Nav built inside you as well. It's called 'conscience'. It guides you like a Sat Nav and it's almost like a map, and it has a 'voice'. It tells you to turn away from wrong and sinful things and to turn instead to do right and good things in your life. You must make sure that you keep this Sat Nav switched on and you can charge it every day by reading the Bible and praying.

If you do, it will tell you when you are on a wrong and sinful road and that you need to turn in another direction to Jesus to forgive your sins so that you can reach the happiest destination of all – heaven!

So, children, always follow the Sat Nav God gave you!

With my love and prayers.

Mrs S