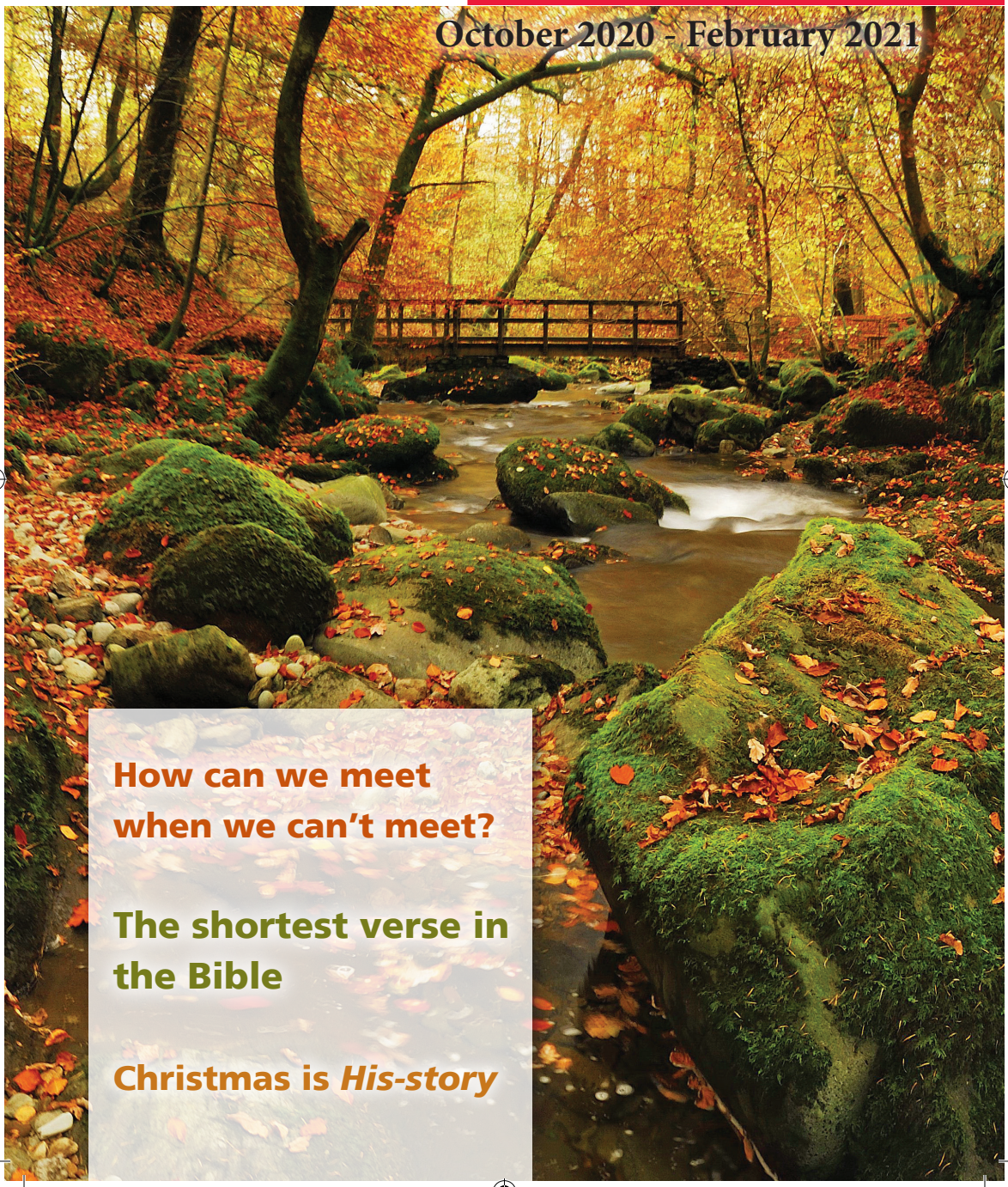
DayOne Magazine

October 2020 - February 2021



How can we meet when we can't meet?

The shortest verse in the Bible

Christmas is *His-story*



Editorial: *Mark Roberts*

The year 2020 is a year that will never be forgotten. For all of us it has led to differences in the work, home and church environments. Sadly, some have lost loved ones; some have been ill; others have lost their jobs, and unfortunately, maybe for the first time, some have suffered from mental health issues. We have had to learn how to use zoom and other types of software to communicate with others and function as churches.

But God has been good and His gospel continues to be proclaimed and people have been saved. What an amazing Gospel we have to proclaim, even during pandemics, when all around is bleak – His light still shines.

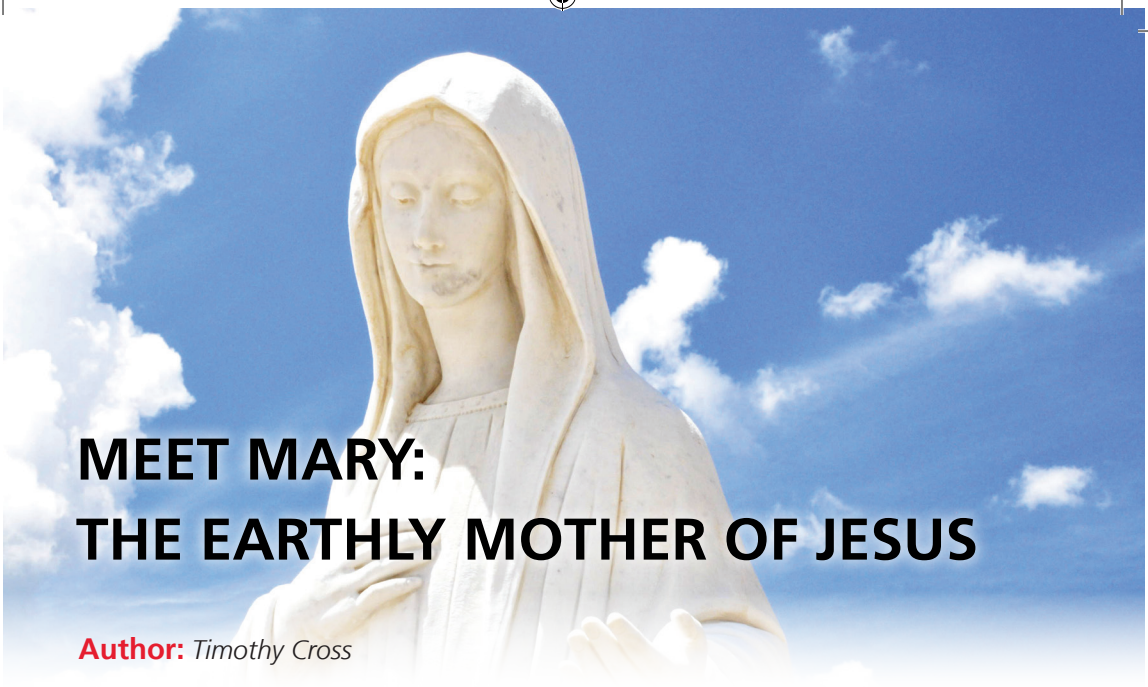
As the long summer days start to disappear and the autumn season begins with the long clear shadows changing to short dull images, it is wonderful to remember the words in James 1:17**:** 'Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does **not change** like shifting shadows.'

In days when items change so quickly, when gadgets are out of date before we understand how to use them. When the political world changes on a daily basis; when we a never sure what new regulations are to come into force in our areas, to know that our God changes not, is a wonderful comfort.

To be able to rest in his unchanging word and to remember his unbreakable promises should give us cause to be thankful.

In this issue of Day One are a number of items I trust will be of interest to you. Our gifts catalogue is also now available. If you don't already have one please get in contact with us and we can supply you with one.

Enjoy the magazine and, if you have any comments or articles that would be of interest then please, send them in to us at the address on the final page. •



MEET MARY: THE EARTHLY MOTHER OF JESUS

Author: *Timothy Cross*

Mary the mother of the Jesus is somewhat of a controversial figure. There are those who worship and pray to the 'Blessed Virgin Mary.' This however is misguided at best and idolatrous at worst. The 'cult of Mary' which has grown up around her has no scriptural warrant at all. Only God Himself is to be worshipped, and only the omnipresent God is able to hear our prayers. Mary was not and is not God. Mary also figures much in the artwork produced by Christendom. She has been variously portrayed both in painting and sculpture over the centuries. Scripture however gives us no indication as to her physical features, so such art is pure speculation - *a representation by the art and imagination of man* (Acts 17:29).

Perhaps to avoid the above errors, Mary does not feature much in Protestant thinking, if at all. Yet Mary cannot be ignored totally as she does figure in the Bible, and in the creeds and subordinate standards which seek to distil the message of the Bible. *The Apostles' Creed*, for instance, reminds us that the Lord Jesus 'was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary…' We must seek a scriptural balance, and neither overplay nor underplay the significance of Mary in the saga of redemption.

What then does the Bible teach about Mary? The answer is: 'Not a great deal.' For the emphasis of the Bible is not on Mary but on Mary's Son - *that in everything He might be pre-eminent* (Colossians 1:18). The following four points, however, give us a Scriptural perspective on Mary, the mother of Jesus:

i. Mary's Virginity

Mary's main significance in the saga of redemption is that, of all the women in the world, Almighty



God singled her out to have the honour of giving birth to His Son, the longed-for Messiah and Saviour of the world. Scripture is adamant that Mary was still a virgin when Christ was conceived in her womb. At the time of Christ's conception, Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, but was not actually married to him yet. Scripture is clear that whilst Christ's birth by Mary at Bethlehem was normal, His conception in Mary at Nazareth was not normal. His birth was natural, whereas His conception was supernatural:

> Christ the Son of God became man by taking to Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary and born of her, yet without sin (*Shorter Catechism).*

The eternal Son of God entered the world supernaturally, just as he eventually exited from the world in a supernatural manner by ascending into heaven. The only way to explain Christ's conception is by using the explanation which the angel Gabriel gave to Mary when she was puzzled as to how she could conceive a child without a human father: *'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God'* (Luke 1:35).

The virgin birth of Christ is one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It is vital, as Mary's virginity is bound up with Christ's impeccability - that is, His sinlessness. Had Christ been conceived by a human father, such as Joseph, He would have been born a sinner, having inherited Adam's sinful nature. And had Christ been born a sinner, He would not have been able to offer up His life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of others. Scripture, however, is clear. Christ had no human father. God was His Father. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and He thus had a sinless nature. He was like us, yet paradoxically unlike us, for *He knew no sin* (2 Corinthians 5:21), *committed no sin* (1 Peter 2:23) and *in Him there is no sin* (1 John 3:5). Hence, He alone was qualified and able to offer up His sinless life as an eternal and saving sacrifice *like that of a lamb without blemish or spot* (1 Peter 1:19). The four 'building bricks' of Christ's virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death and

victorious resurrection are all apiece, and inextricably bound up with the Christian's eternal salvation. Take one brick away, and the whole house falls down.

Mary was a virgin when she conceived the Saviour. Her joy at being singled out by God for such an honour emitted from this godly young woman a peon of praise known as the 'Magnificat': *'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden…'* (Luke 1:46 ff).

ii. Mary's Normality

Her conception of Jesus apart, Scripture records that Mary was not untypical of the women who lived in Israel in that day. She married Joseph, a carpenter by trade, and had several children by him. Mary thus knew the joys and trials of motherhood and family life.

Luke 2 suggests that Mary was a devout Jewess, for there we see that she was regular in her attendance at the annual feasts of the Lord in Jerusalem, as laid down in the law of Moses. In John 2 we glimpse Mary's attendance at a wedding celebration at Cana in Galilee. There she shared in the joy of the day, and also witnessed her Son's first miracle of turning water into wine. Otherwise, Scripture is silent as to the details concerning Mary's life and her rearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The suggestion is that she was widowed fairly young, as Joseph has no mention after Jesus' visit to Jerusalem aged twelve, whereas Mary does.

The silence of Scripture apart, can we not employ sanctified imagination? In Luke 13 Jesus told a parable about a woman making bread. As a child, He surely witnessed His mother Mary doing this. In Luke 15, Jesus told a parable about a woman who had lost a precious coin - probably the coin in question was a 'nuptial coin', worn as part of a headdress. The woman was almost frantic. She lit a lamp, swept her house and did not give up until she had found her precious coin. The vividness of the parable suggests that the Lord Jesus was relating an incident which really happened to make His point. Was the woman in the parable based on Mary His mother?

Scripture records Mary's normality. She was a mother of children. She worshipped God. Her life was bound up with both divine and family obligations.

iii. Mary's Perplexity

When the infant Jesus was presented to the Lord by Mary and Joseph in the temple at Jerusalem, in obedience to the law of Moses, an aged man named Simeon was led by God's Spirit to make a specific prophecy to Mary. Luke 2:34 ff. records, *Simeon … said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, and a sword will pierce through your*

own soul also.' Simeon thus predicted that a sharp sword of sorrow would, in a coming day, break Mary's heart very badly. Mary must have wondered what Simeon's prophecy meant.

Thirty-three years later she would know only too well. Mary witnessed her beloved, first-born Son suffer the most unimaginable cruelty possible. She witnessed cruel men taking Him, nailing Him to a plank of wood and hanging Him up to die. Crucifixion was the ultimate as regards public humiliation and personal excruciation. *'A sword will pierce through your own soul also …'* The sword prophesied by Simeon did indeed pierce Mary's soul without mercy, as John 19:25 records that *standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister.* We cannot comprehend the sorrow, pain and perplexity of Mary's heart as she witnessed the public crucifixion of her Son. Yet with our New Testament hindsight we know that the cross was no mere act of man but an act of God Himself. It was necessary for our redemption, for *without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins* (Hebrews 9:22).

Paradoxically, the cross of Christ - that which lies at the heart of the Christian faith - is both terrible and wonderful, for if we belong to Jesus, we have salvation from His suffering, atonement from His agony and life by His death. Mary watched the indignity and cruelty of her Son's death at Calvary. But Jesus was dying there to procure her salvation as much as He was dying there to procure the salvation of every one of God's elect. Redemption was wrought at Calvary!

Jesus was slain for me - at Calvary
Crowned with thorns was He -
at Calvary
There He in anguish died
There from His opened side
Poured forth the crimson tide
At Calvary

Pardoned is all my sin - at Calvary
Cleansed is my heart within -
at Calvary
Now robes of praise I wear
Gone are my grief and care
Christ bore my burdens there
At Calvary.



iv. Mary's Christianity

Scripture records that Christ held His earthly mother in the highest esteem. The law of God commands, *Honour your father and your mother* (Exodus 20:12). Jesus certainly did so. When He died at Calvary, all of God's elect were on His heart. Yet this notwithstanding, He ensured that His earthly mother was well cared for, physically and emotionally. Whilst dying at Calvary, Jesus entrusted His mother to the care of the apostle John: *When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home* (John 19:26-27).

Go forward now three days to Easter Sunday. Witness Peter and John running to the tomb of Jesus. They found it was empty! The grave clothes lay there undisturbed. Christ had risen. He had defeated death and conquered the grave. John *went in, and he saw and believed … Then the disciples went back to their homes* (John 20:8). John then was one of the first witnesses to the fact of Christ's resurrection. *He saw and believed,* and then he went back to his home. Who was now resident in his home? Mary was! Mary the mother of Jesus was now under John's care, so John had the joyful task of telling Mary that Jesus had risen. Scripture however is as silent as to Mary's ecstatic joy as it was to her deepest sorrow.

Our final glimpse of Mary in the Bible is that of her being an ordinary - though no doubt highly valued - member of the Christian community which met together to worship their common Lord and Saviour. The early Christians in Jerusalem met in *the upper room* (Acts 1:13) - a place with so many sacred associations. Luke records that in that upper room, the early church *with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers* (Acts 1:14). From this we see that Mary had no special prominence in the church at all. The prominence given to Mary in later Christendom can only be described as an unscriptural aberration. The early church did not worship Mary, but rather joined Mary in worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary was just an 'ordinary' Christian - if any recipient of God's saving grace in Christ can be described as 'ordinary'. For Mary was a sinner saved by grace, and so she took her place in the Christian congregation to give thanks and praise to God for His mercy. The stress of Scripture is not on Mary but on Mary's Son, for the Son of Mary is also the eternal Son of God. He alone is to be worshipped, trusted and adored.•

How can we meet when we can't meet?



Author: *Ian Cooper*

Hebrews 10:25 *'.... not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'*

In recent church history there has never been a period quite like the present time. At different times and in different places, the church has found itself under persecution or oppression and has been forced to close the doors of its buildings and find other ways to meet, worship and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. The disciples met in a 'locked room' for fear of the Jews after the resurrection of Jesus - but they still met! Often under the most intense pressure, the early church found ways and places to meet -even when the risks were high.

But the present Coronavirus crisis is like no other, affecting large parts of the world and having a unique impact on the Church of the Lord Jesus. The very things that make meeting so important - communal singing, close fellowship and sharing communion, are the things that increase the risk of spreading the virus.

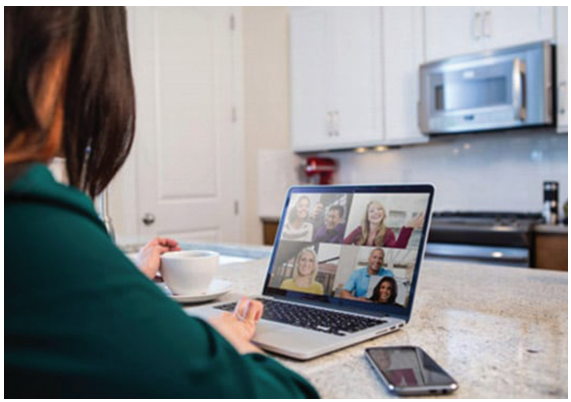
Whilst much of life seems to be heading back to a kind of normal, that is far from the case in the local church. Many congregations will have felt a kind of bereavement over the last few months, being forced to reflect on what is really important as far as the local church is concerned. Physical meetings and activities were suspended completely for several months and, although the Government has allowed churches to start meeting again, the restrictions and conditions placed upon them are onerous, potentially rendering the time there somewhat joyless and sterile. I am sure many a pastor will acknowledge how hard it is to preach to a largely empty church, where the people who *are* present are wearing face masks, and no-one sings! In fact, I personally found it is harder to preach in these circumstances than to

a camera lens alone. In addition, it has been hard to balance the zeal of some for returning to physical meetings against the genuine fears and concerns of those who are reluctant to do so.

However, we are grateful for the modern technology available to us - many previously technologically illiterate congregations found themselves with a Youtube channel and even broadcasting live on Sunday mornings, evenings and midweek. These meetings, though far from being the best that 'meeting together' can offer, gave us a way of being together when we were forced to be apart. There is something delightful in the thought that all over the world, hundreds of thousands of households of believers gathered round their tablets, TVs, smartphones and computers to worship, praise and hear God's word. Many sang along with the songs and hymns in their homes and there were opportunities to pray together and fellowship together online. As the weeks rolled by, it became possible to engage others in the time of worship, bringing mission reports and testimonies as well as reading the scriptures and leading worship, with real creativity and imagination, making the distant gathering a meaningful experience. We remember of course, that there are many of our brothers and sisters who have no such access to this technology and who have found the period of enforced separation even harder as a result.

At a recent online Bible study, one of our folk said, "You can't close the Church" and that is very true. You can close buildings and place such restrictions on meeting that it becomes onerous, but the Church is never 'closed' - or as Paul said from his prison cell, "The Gospel is not chained". It is true for our present predicament. Many churches report being contacted by people seeking to engage with the church during lockdown, listening to services and Bible studies online when they would never have entered a church building, fearful of trampling on the protocols of church gatherings.

One fear is that the initial 'excitement' of the crisis will quickly pass and people on the fringes of church life will establish other patterns of behaviour which will tend to draw them away from the impulse to 'meet together'. If no-one knows they are 'there', they can absent themselves with little accountability. It is imperative that church leaders have a co-ordinated plan to keep that vital contact with the whole church during



this time - an opportunity to show a love and care that is new and crucial in the crisis. A few straying sheep will need to be pursued when all this comes to a close.

Another concern is that many will conclude that watching a service from home is more convenient than having to attend a building - the kids can play and we can lie-in even more on a Sunday! Whilst the new technologies will continue to be a valuable resource for those who are unable to attend church - parents of young children or the housebound for example - it must never be allowed to become the norm, or even a substitute for true fellowship. We were saved for fellowship with one another, with the Lord Jesus and with the Father - and He reserves the most precious of blessings for those who gather together in His Name.

There is also a danger that faithful friends who have previously given time and energy to lead meetings, outreaches and activities will find themselves less inclined to do so. The pace of daily life and the demands of ministry have grown in recent times - who will be ready to take up the challenge when this is all over? Some fellowships will find it impossible to reconvene under the restrictions currently in place - perhaps some will never open again?

It is well known that people behind Facebook posts and camera lenses behave in a way that is not 'real', and this online fellowship will only reinforce the distance between believers rather than draw us closer together when it is used over a long period. There is no substitute for the countless little conversations over coffee after morning worship - where



we detect the struggles and challenges of daily life for our folk and can follow up or simply uphold them in prayer. One of the many reasons the writer of Hebrews commanded us to meet together is that the physical distance between us gives space and opportunity for the evil one to divide and discourage. How important the face-to-face interaction of believers is in preventing division and resentment from growing in Christian communities (Matt 18). It's hard to hold a grudge against someone who is stood in front of you - but much easier when you have not seen them for some time.



There is little doubt that the Lord will use this time to sift and refine His church. When we finally make our way up to the house of the Lord without masks, signs, sanitiser and can fill all the seats - what will the church look like then? There will certainly be good things we have discovered during this time, and new practices that we will carry into the future, but at the moment we simply long to be found together among the Lord's People, treasuring the joys of true fellowship all the more now that they have been taken from us.

"...we simply long to be found together among the Lord's People, treasuring the joys of true fellowship all the more now that they have been taken from us."

Until then we may echo the words of Psalm 137: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion... How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill, may my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy." (v:1,4 - 6) •



WAKE UP CALLS

Author: *Timothy Cross*

I cannot get by without my alarm clock on the bedside cabinet. My last job entailed my getting out of bed at 4.45 am each day. One of my fears was that of finding my alarm clock had broken down during the night, and that I should have been in work two hours ago! Thankfully, my fears never materialised, and I was never late for work. I was, however, very dependent on my 4.45 alarm call to get me awake and up.

Did you know that the Bible – God's Word – has some alarm calls within its sacred pages? Let us focus our attention on some of these vital alarm calls:

1. The Commencement of the Christian Life

The Christian life actually begins with an alarm call – a call to wake up. In Ephesians 5:14 we read the exhortation, *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.* By nature, our sin puts us in a state of spiritual slumber. We are oblivious and unconcerned about God. We are ignorant of our lost plight. We are dead to the delights of heaven and fellowship with God, as well as to the terrors of hell. We see no need for personal salvation. But God, in mercy, gives us an alarm call. He wakes us up to our lost plight. He rouses us out of our spiritual slumber. His Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin and need, and then directs us to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Saviour

and enables us to cleave to Him with saving faith. We are now fully awake and alive. God's Holy Spirit has bestowed on us the new birth. *Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.* The Christian life begins with God's wake up call to us in the Gospel. It is, of course, initially something of a shock to us. Alarms are jolting. Yet the alarm of God's call can only be explained by God's grace – a grace which does not leave us in a state of spiritual slumber but bestows on us eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. The Continuation of the Christian Life

Secondly, it is the experience of most Christians that God continues to give us wake up calls throughout our Christian life on earth. In 1 Thessalonians 5:6, Paul wrote the following words to those who were already believers: *So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober.* There is always a subtle danger of spiritual complacency. The desire for ease and comfort is deeply ingrained in us. The trouble with getting too comfortable is that we are then in danger of forgetting our total dependence upon God. We think that we have got all things covered and under control. So what does God do? He stirs up the nest a bit (Deuteronomy 32:11). He sends us a disappointment, an illness, a tragedy, a change of circumstances or some pain or perplexity. These are unwelcome to us, yet beneficial in their effects. They wake us out of our spiritual complacency. They humble us and cast us more closely on God and His mercy. We look to Him for help and support. He is our only refuge when our human props have been removed and there is no human way out. Such trials then act as alarm calls. They get rid of all spiritual unreality and formality. They make our prayers to God earnest and sincere. They are, truth be told, blessings in disguise – evidence of God's love, not His apathy. The Psalmist wrote, *It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes* (Psalm 119:71); and *I know, O LORD, that Thy judgements are right, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me* (Psalm 119:75). Truly, *He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness* (Hebrews 12:10).



3. The Consummation of the Christian Life

Finally, the Bible also gives us a glimpse of the Christian's final wake up call. Psalm 17:15 reads: *As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with beholding Thy form.*

It is good to know that our Father in heaven has His own all-wise clock face for our lives. Our times are in His hands. If we belong to Jesus, one day, the alarm He has set will ring, and we shall wake up in His presence, in heaven. The local newspaper will report that we have died, but in actual fact, we have never been more alive! The Christian's future prospects are absolutely glorious. When we die, we go to *be with Christ, for that is far better* (Philippians 1:23). Hence Paul could say in Philippians 1:21: *For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.* Death, for the Christian, is the entrance into the Saviour's presence. Then, like the Psalmist, we too shall be eternally satisfied in beholding the form of the One Who loved us and gave Himself for us. Whilst the non-Christian's lot is that of a hopeless end, the Christian's lot is that of an endless hope.

These, then, are some of the alarm calls of the Bible – God's wake up calls to us. There is the initial call of salvation. Then there is the call to deeper consecration. And finally, there is the glorious call of glorification – to be at home with Christ forevermore.

When all my labours and trials
are o'er
And I am safe on that beautiful shore
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory
for me

When by the gift of His infinite grace
I am accorded in heaven a place
Just to be there and to look on His face
Will through the ages be glory for me

Oh, that will be, glory for me
Glory for me, glory for me
When by His grace, I shall look on His face
That will be glory, be glory for me. •



CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT *HIS-STORY*

Author: *Rev Ian S McNaughton*

Stories make the world go round (or so we are told). They communicate knowledge and build trust. They speak of life and death and love and hope. They are powerful and at times exciting. 'Anthropologists *tell* us that storytelling is central *to human* existence … *We* use *stories to* make sense of *our* world and *to* share that *understanding* with *others*'.[1] The Bible is written as a call to faith and worship because it is the greatest story ever told, namely, the story of Jesus.

Biblical history is the door which opens personal salvation. God has given a written record of the life, death and resurrection of his Son who came into the world, born of a virgin. This is *His*-story. God has made sure all who are alive know the truth about Jesus Christ, which is essential when death beckons to remove weary pilgrims away. In the Bible God speaks to us in a way that is clear and understandable. William Tyndale (the man who translated most of the Bible into English) said a plough boy would be able to understand it in the vernacular and he gave his life in that pursuit. The gospel story of the coming of Jesus Christ was witnessed by reliable observers and his birth, ministry, miracles, passions and resurrection are recorded for us accurately in the New Testament. The ancient scribes have preserved *His-story* for us in thousands of ancient manuscripts (this is a miracle in itself). Since the invention of the printing press publishers have produced millions of copies of Scripture for us to read in many languages. Surely this story – *His-story* – is the greatest story ever told!

1 https://www.wired.com/2011/03/why-do-we-tell-stories/

The Historical Jesus

Who was Jesus Christ? All four New Testament Gospels reveal the historical Jesus. They were written in order that the world would know who Jesus Christ really was and is and what he came to earth to achieve. Ancient historians such as the Jewish Titus Flavius Josephus (AD 37–*c.*100) and the Roman Publius (or Gaius) Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56–120) both acknowledged in their writings the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible does more; it records Jesus's works of power, his vicarious atonement and his God-man nature in a historical context in a distinct epoch of history. At birth, Jesus was laid in a manger in Bethlehem in Judea; yet, no other birth of man or woman or of demigod, general, king or queen in the history of the world has had an impact like the Son of God who became man by the virgin birth. The incarnation account of God becoming man is surrounded by historic dates and figures: consider King Herod I of Judea (d. *c.*4 BC,); Archelaus who reigned as Herod's successor; Caesar Augustus [2] (27 BC – AD 14); Quirinius Governor of Syria (*c.*6 BC) and Jesus Christ himself (4 BC – AD 30).

Pontius Pilate the Prefect of Judea (AD 26/27–36/37), who is known for adjudicating at the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, confirms the authenticity of the Man from Galilee.



Pilate is one of 23 New Testament figures whose existence has been confirmed by archaeology and they are added to over 50 Old Testament characters that have been identified as historical persons from outside of the Bible. One thing is for sure, these numbers only continues to grow. With the passage of time the Bible is not receding into myth, but is increasingly confirmed as history. Outside [extra-biblical] of literary references (the Gospels, Josephus, Tacitus and Philo) and a few coins bearing his name, there was no archaeological evidence for Pilate until 1961. Archaeologists excavating at Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast, found a large monumental stone 68 cm high bearing the inscription 'Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea'. Pilate had an official residence here, but the stone had been broken down and used as filler in a later building. It was quite 'accidental' that such a record was preserved for modern times.[3]

2 Gaius Octavius (Octavian).

3 e-n.org.uk/2019/01/regular-columns/pilates-ring/a67a6 – Chris Sinkinson, D L Moody Lecturer in Apologetics, Moorlands College.

God's Timeline

Jesus came into history at a time when the Messiah would be paid attention to and his followers would spread his words and teachings to the Gentile nations. God sent his Son, 'when the fullness of the time had come' on a mission of mercy and on a mission of love:

- *God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.* (Gal. 4:4b-5)

This 'fullness of the time' speaks of God's providential moment in world's history for the Messianic plan of redemption to be enacted as foretold:

- *The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.* (Isa. 7:14)

- *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.* (Isa. 9:6-7)

This was done so that 'in the dispensation of the fullness of the times God might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, in Him' (Eph. 1:9–10). As Martin Lloyd-Jones put it, 'The whole span of time has been divided by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world. That is the division that is emphasised in the New Testament. The times in which we live are called the last times, "the last days."'[4] This theme of the dividing of time is repeated again throughout the New Testament,

- *Now all these things happened to them [Israel] as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* (1 Cor. 10:11)

- *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son.* (Heb. 1:1–2)

> *The whole span of time has been divided by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ into the world.*

4 M Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose* (Banner of Truth, 1978), pp.199–207.



The moment the historical Jesus came into this world, the ends of the world have come. Time is divided once and forever by his first coming. His mediatorial work in heavenly session will go on until the Second Coming. This is God's original plan of redemption and it will come to completion in the 'last day' (2 Tim. 4:8; 2 Peter 3:12–13; Rev. 6:16–17).

Scepticism

Can the story as recorded in the Gospels be believed? There have been recent attempts to discredit it. Jeremy Hardy, in an article in the *London Times* wrote, 'Christmas is a mis-mash of stolen festivals'; 'It is largely a German import'; 'Even the virgin birth was nicked'.[5] A *Times* editorial, on 24 December said that Santa Claus 'is the most famous celebrity in the world. Millions who would not recognise the Queen or the Pope recognise him at once.'[6] That, sadly, is probably true.

On Christmas day 2008, Channel 4 (TV) put on a two-hour documentary on the virgin birth called 'The Nativity Decoded'. It was researched and narrated by Robert Beckford and was advertised as being a 'new' programme which tried to 'discover the meaning behind the Christmas story'. In this documentary Beckford set up spurious hypotheses which he rejected as impossible, leaving the impression that the Bible account of the nativity is at best unreliable and at worst total fiction. It was academic dishonesty pretending to be rational and believable. The issue, of course, is that of the veracity of the Bible. The point of the programme was to promote the liberal understanding of the birth event. Without denying the historicity of the person of Jesus, they wish to promote it as a 'faith story', which although not factual in their opinion, nevertheless does convey a central truth - that Joseph and Mary's escape into Egypt from the tyranny and murdering intentions of Herod the Great showed courage and fortitude which was an example to all modern refugees who face similar threats to their lives.

5 Jeremy Hardy, The Times, 11 Dec. 2008, in an article entitled "Our Christian traditions are seriously over rated."

6 *The Times*, Wednesday 24 Dec. 2008.

However, Luke's Gospel reveals the true uniqueness of the event by recording the historical facts of the virgin birth. For example, in chapter two, Caesar Augustus is identified as the great-grandnephew of Julius Caesar. He was known to secular historians as Octavian; he ruled the Roman Empire for nearly 42 years (27 BC-14 AD). These people were real and the Bible has accurately spoken about them and so we believe that the biblical story of the birth of Jesus is real too.

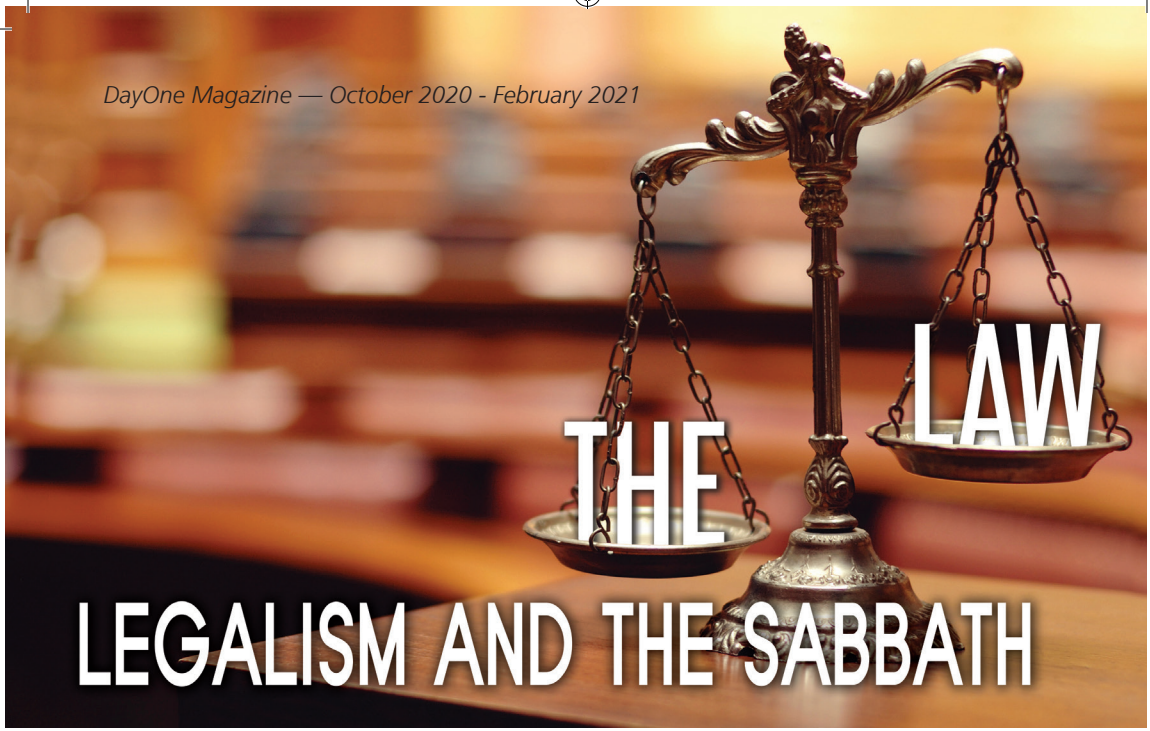
His-story as Truth

What should Christians say to negative attacks against the incarnation of Jesus? All four Gospels reveal the history and passion of Jesus written under the inspiration of God (2 Tim. 3:16). They were written in order that the world would know who Jesus Christ really was, and is, and what he came to earth to achieve (John 20:31). So Christians proclaim *His-story*. In John 17:17 Jesus makes a memorable statement about what truth is: '*Your word is truth.*' Christians accept his definition. This truth is to be understood as being the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments but not the apocryphal books; they form no part of the canon of Scripture and have no authority in the churches. The biblical canon is (now) complete and no addition can be made nor needs to be made to it (2 Tim. 3:16; Gal. 1:8-9). Tradition and human presumptions have no authority to overthrow God's Word; nor does tradition hold equal status, as this would result in the subordination of Scripture to the dogmas of fallible men. We must not be reluctant to accept the written history as well as the theology of the Holy Scriptures. J I Packer put it this way, 'What the Bible says, God says, without error.'[7]

The Bible asks those who believe to be 'always be ready to give a defence (*apologia*) to everyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear' (1 Peter 3:15b). *His-story* is for us to believe and defend and Peter certainly implies that the Christian faith is capable of reasonable defence. This means that *His-story* is true and God is pleased with it and the children of God are to embrace it by faith and repeat it with joy. Bible prophecy teaches that in the future Jesus Christ will come again a second time; then every eye will see him; then no one will doubt and all will know the truth of the gospel at the Judgement Day when the door of salvation will be closed. Today is the day of salvation! Today you must choose. The story of the incarnation of Jesus Christ has been written down that we might believe and become right with God.•

> His-story *is for us to believe and defend*

7 J I Packer, *God has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), p.28.



LEGALISM AND THE SABBATH

Author: *Don Olden*

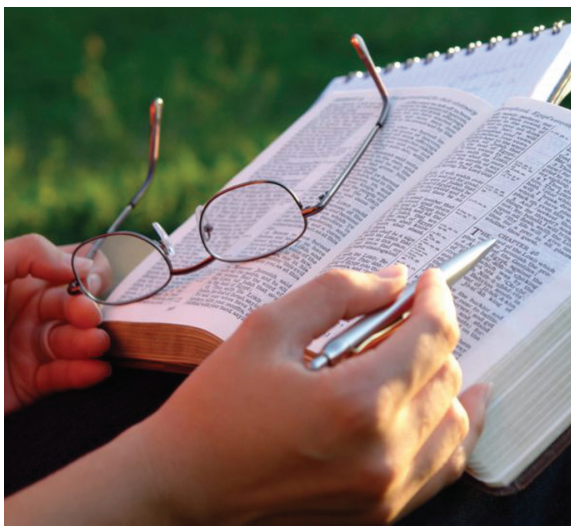
In this short series in considering the Law, Legalism and the Sabbath, we have seen that the moral law, which is summed up in the 10 commandments, was given for the benefit of all of mankind for all time. If we wish to show our love for God, then we will do our best to be obedient to all the requirements of God's Law. Grace exempts us from the consequences of the Law but not from obedience to it. Yet, in seeking to obey God's laws there is always a danger that we can become legalistic like the Pharisees and that needs to be avoided. We noted that legalism is an attitude not a behaviour; it's not about what we do, but why we do it. Two people can do the same thing; one can be legalistic and the other not. Yet, it is equally possible to use *legalism* as an excuse not to be obedient to what we know God wants.

In this final article we consider how this understanding of the law and legalism helps us to correctly interpret Sabbath Day requirements (if there are any) and their relevance (if there is any) today. Obviously, in this short article, I am not able to give detailed arguments and will undoubtedly, leave many questions, but I trust it will give food for thought at the very least. I believe that this, in reality, is a fairly straightforward subject that has been overly complicated, often because of terminology and sometimes by selfish desires.

'The Sabbath' is frequently regarded as an Old Testament and distinctly Jewish concept which is no longer relevant since the New Testament Church came into being. So, to get the right perspective on this we firstly need to consider the purpose of the Sabbath.

The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew "*shabbāt*" and the root word "*shabath*" meaning to cease or an intermission. The institution of this day was at creation: *By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested [ceased] from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*[1] We should not underestimate the importance of what we read here in Genesis. God took 6 days to create the universe and everything in it so that He might rest and make the 7th day holy. God didn't need to rest. He wanted to lay down a principle for His children to follow. The principle then is quite clear: one day in seven shall be a day of rest, but not only a day of rest, it is also to be a holy day – holy meaning set apart for God or different. This day is to be separate from the rest of the week. It is dedicated to God and is to be treated differently. I believe that thinking of the Sabbath as a purely Jewish day is a misunderstanding of the purpose of that day. Don't forget, this was a command originally given at the time of creation, well before any Jewish nation existed. The principle of one day in seven was given for mankind and not simply one nation. Therefore, the day itself is not the important issue; what matters is why such a day was ordained. It is a holy day given that we might rest from work and dedicate time to God. It affords us the opportunity to get together for worship and spend time with God and away from normal activities. The Sabbath principle is still part of the New Covenant relationship; it's simply a different day than it was under the Old Covenant. The newly formed Church knew the importance of having a 'Sabbath' day and so they chose to meet on the first day of the week (Sunday). It was called 'The Lord's Day' as a celebration of the day that Christ rose from the dead and that also ensured that it was distinct from the Jewish Sabbath, but the principles still applied.

What then does that mean for us in the 21st century? Is there any suggestion in the Scriptures that the purpose of the Sabbath Day has ever been done



1 Genesis 2:2-3

> *This day is a God-given opportunity to spend time with God's people worshipping Him; what could be better?*

away with for the Christian Church? Some people will point you to Colossians 2:16-17: *Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* The context here is that Jewish believers were trying to enforce the old Jewish ceremonies and regulations on the new Christian Church. Paul points out that these things have been fulfilled in Christ and are no longer a requirement. The reference to Sabbath Days is actually plural and refers to any of the ceremonial days that were set aside within the Jewish tradition. However, this is not a reference to *The* Sabbath Day because, as we have seen, that was not part of the ceremonial law. The Sabbath Day laid down at creation was not a shadow of what was to come in Christ, rather it is a necessity for the well-being (physically and spiritually) for all people for all time.

The big question then is, how should we treat this day? I believe this is a matter for individual conscience and we are not to be prescriptive or judgemental. There are however, some principles laid down by Jesus in Matthew 12. Here our Lord instructs the people (and the Pharisees in particular) what is 'lawful' to do on the Sabbath: namely, what is essential and doing good to help others. He picks some ears of corn so that He and His disciples may eat. This is the principle of doing what is essential; they needed to eat and Jesus met that need. He also talks of rescuing a sheep and then He heals a man's hand, this gives us the principle of doing good for those in need.

So, who decides what is essential and what is doing good? As I have said, that comes down to individual conscience, but perhaps if we were to ask ourselves the question, *Is what I'm doing in line with the 4th commandment and is it essential or necessary to help others in need?* we might gain a better perspective.

Sadly today, there is very little desire for keeping Sundays special, even amongst Christians. The prevailing view is that Sunday is a day for us to do what we want as long as we make a little time for God somewhere along the way. As long as I 'do church' for an hour in the morning the rest of the day is mine. Yet, this day is a God-given opportunity to spend time with God's people worshipping Him; what could be better?



Let me finish by hopefully framing this subject in a more positive light as we must each decide for ourselves how this should work out in our own lives.

It is the mark of a true believer that it will be our desire to obey God in all that He asks of us. This stems not from legalism but out of love in response to God's love for us. The commands we see in Scripture are not there to be restrictive or a burden, rather they are there for our benefit. Our obedience, out of love, will always be a blessing. This is best summed up in the following passage, with which I will close.

'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD'S holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.' The mouth of the LORD has spoken.[2] •

2 Isaiah 58:13-14

DayOne Magazine

There are no specific prayer request for this magazine due to the Covid 19 virus. We are not sure when meetings will be able to take place again – however we would encourage you to pray for the general work of the charity. We thank all our supporters for their support both practically and prayerfully especially during this uncertain time.

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ISSN 1463–9459
Charity Reg. No.233465
A Company Limited by Guarantee
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"Uphold and proclaim the Lord's Day as:
A creation ordinance
A command of God
A celebration of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ
A day of rest and worship of the glory of God and the benefit of man"

Day One have a number of representatives who would be very happy to come to your church or to an event to speak on the Lord's Day and other subjects. If you would be interested in a speaker for a Sunday or mid-week please get in touch with us. Please see our web site **www.dayone.co.uk** and scroll to the bottom and click on the area of interest to see extra dates of meetings which are added on a regular basis.