

Our Times

MAKING DECISIONS

A FAMILY MAGAZINE FOR BETTER LIVING

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REVIEW AND HERALD

...and on earth peace,
good will toward men.
Luke 2:14



Who was Jesus Christ?

NO ONE in all history has been more loved, or more hated, than Jesus Christ. No person has been subjected to so great a barrage of criticism, vilification, misrepresentation, and mockery, as the Son who was born to Mary in that lowly stable of Bethlehem two thousand years ago. Yet no person has ever influenced humanity for good to an extent that even begins to compare with that of Jesus. His life and teachings have done infinitely more to elevate and ennoble the world than anything or anyone else. Nobility of character, with all the wonderful virtues of kindness, truth, mercy, forgiveness, benevolence, works of mercy for the sick and infirm, sympathy for the weak and downcast, spring from the dynamic power and inspiration of Christ's teachings and example. The world today is at a low spiritual ebb. But what degree of genuine goodness and sanity still remains, is really due to Jesus of Nazareth.

Was Jesus merely a man, or was He divine? Was He a deity, or merely a superior Craftsman in the art of living? Was His claim that He and His Father (God) were one (John 10:30) to be interpreted theologically or, as some suggest, was it to be understood as having merely a psychological significance?

The Bible leaves no doubt in the mind of the open-hearted reader. The angel who told Mary the thrilling news that she was to bear a Son, assured both Joseph and his betrothed that "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost," and that "that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Matthew 1:20; Luke 1:35. According to this divine messenger, Jesus was, in fact, the Son of God. The prophet Isaiah was also given a prophetic vision of Christ's birth. The names of the Child who should be born were declared to be, "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6.

Tremendous claims! Jesus Christ was God. He was one with the Father, He was the Creator, He was eternal. But in Bethlehem He assumed our nature, identifying Himself with man, as the first great step in God's marvellous plan whereby we may be reconciled to Him.

Jesus came as the "Desire of all nations" (Haggai 2:7), at a time when spirituality was at a low ebb, when many honest souls were weary of their own unsatisfied aspirations, and sensed the world's supreme need of the true God to manifest Himself in human form. It was felt by such philosophers as Plato that since men could not climb to God, God must somehow stoop to men. He said, "We will wait for one either God or a God-inspired man, to teach us our religious duties and to take away the darkness from our eyes." (*The Unrealized Logic of Religion*, page 35.) Jesus Christ was the fulfilment of this need. He came to show men the way back to God.

Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. And to each soul in the world today, He extends the invitation: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28.

Wish you all a Happy and Blessed Christmas!

--Annie R Hammond

MAKING DECISIONS

by John Brunt



Can the Bible Really Help?

Why can't we just pull the Bible off the shelf, turn to the right page, and find a clear ANSWER?

The student who came into my office one morning had a question that, to him, was very important. He wanted to know about dating. But his question had a specific focus. He was a Christian student, and he wanted to know what the Bible taught about dating.

What did it say about when to start dating, what to do on a date, and what kind of physical expression was appropriate at various stages of dating? He made it clear that he didn't want my opinions. He wanted to know what the Bible said. He was facing personal

decisions, and he wanted those decisions to be guided by Scripture.

His motive was certainly admirable, but, of course, I had to tell him that the Bible doesn't really talk about dating. No such thing existed in biblical times. Parents arranged marriages so the

Bible simply didn't speak directly to his questions.

Such discoveries have led some to question whether the Bible can be of any relevance to modern decision making. How can a book which ignores such contemporary issues as dating, and at the same time gives lengthy admonitions concerning animal sacrifice, possibly be of relevance in a modern world? Does the Bible really help when we are confronted with difficult dilemmas?

Some Christians would affirm that the Bible is relevant for us, but would deny that Christians face difficult dilemmas for which they need the Bible's guidance. One such group would say that Christians are not to decide questions for themselves; they are simply to obey God. They emphasize that the Bible gives many direct commands and that the Christian's responsibility is simply to obey them. Christians can't be trusted to face dilemmas and make decisions. Such a process would involve reason, and human reason can't be trusted. Any process that affirms the responsibility of decision making is too humanistic. Christians really make only one decision: Will they obey God or not?

Now this position has an element of truth in it. Scripture does give many commands. But this position has problems as well. As the student in my office discovered, the Bible doesn't speak directly to every situation in life. God appears to have left

us with the responsibility to make some decisions for ourselves. He hasn't spoken to every circumstance that we might face with a direct command. This does not detract from the importance of such commands where they are present, but our question is, Can the Bible still be relevant even when we have no direct command?

Another group of Christians emphasizes the fact that the Christian life should flow spontaneously. They argue that once Christians face dilemmas, the battle, is, in a sense, already lost. The Bible's purpose is to develop our characters in such a way that right decisions and actions will flow naturally from a good character. If we continually turn to Scripture and let our lives be shaped by it, then we will naturally do what is right.

There is a strong element of truth in this position as well. The continual study of Scripture does shape our character and cause growth in life with Christ. And it is true that many actions flow spontaneously from a scripturally-informed character. For example, we would certainly be disappointed if a Christian had to deliberate seriously whether to return a wallet or purse that someone had accidentally left behind. Such a question shouldn't really be a dilemma for a Christian.

But is all of life that clear? Don't Christians at times face genuine dilemmas in which values come into conflict?

Even though we genuinely want to do what is right sometimes we aren't really sure what that is. In such times can the Bible help us know what God would have us to do?

First, we must admit that the Bible will never be a ready-reference guide for quick decision making that we can leave on the shelf until a dilemma confronts us and then take it down, turn to the appropriate page, and find a clear, right answer. Only through diligent, continuous, reflective, and prayerful study will the Bible be of help to us.

We must also admit that it isn't always easy to bridge the gap between the scriptural world and our own. We live in a different culture. The Bible often addresses specific situations and circumstances that differ widely from our circumstances.

One way to bridge this gap is by studying Scripture within its historical context. This means noting carefully the initial circumstances to which God's Word was addressed. It means being attentive to the particular circumstances of the people to whom God was originally speaking. Once we've done this we need to ask why God said what He did in those circumstances to those particular people. Then we can discover what issues or principles were at stake in God's message to them.

This frees us to move on and reflect on our own circumstances. In what ways are the situations we face comparable to the circum-



stances of the people addressed in the Bible? Are the issues and principles at stake in our decisions similar to theirs? I believe that through such a system of reflective, prayerful study, God will speak to us.

But I can hear someone say, "Wait a minute! Once you allow reason to be active in this process, once you let humans *reflect* on what the Bible is saying, then everyone will simply make the Bible say whatever he wants it to say, and the door will be open for anything."

I don't believe this is so. If we truly pay attention to Scripture, we will find clear directions in it that will give us specific guidance for our decisions.

For example, who can read of Jesus' encounters with women, in which He shattered conventional wisdom of the day by treating women as persons, without asking the question, "Are we still, in our culture, discriminating against women in ways that would violate the spirit of Jesus?" or who can read Jesus' parables about the folly of riches without thinking about what it means to be a wealthy American in a hungry world? Who can read Paul's repeated affirmations that God shows no partiality without feeling that pull to put aside every vestige of prejudice that is within us?

Asking such questions can be dangerous, for we find very quickly that the Bible is

capable of challenging our conventional ways of thinking and acting. The Bible may not give us easy answers to every dilemma, but we certainly can grow by letting biblical principles guide us as we face decisions.

Take our initial illustration. Although the Bible doesn't speak directly to the situation of dating (a situation that people in Bible times never experienced), the Bible certainly does have principles that would offer guidance to this sincere young student. It contains principles having to do with the sanctity of marriage. The permanence of marriage, and the role of sexual expression as an exclusive part of the marriage relationship.

Let's try to be more specific now. When a Christian faces a puzzling decision, how should he or she use the Bible? Can it really help? Here are several suggestions:

1. Make sure you are involved in a continual programme of Bible study. The Bible will never serve you well if you try to use it as a reference book to be taken off the shelf for quick decision making. When a specific dilemma comes, you need to be able to draw from a deeper well of continuous study.

2. Look for specific commands related to your decision. What has God commanded? Why did He based on general principles that are applicable to every-one, or was it addressed to an individual or a group for a specific reason? For example, God instructed Jeremiah not to marry, but the command had to do with his special role as a prophet in a crucial time for his nation. Surely, that command is not generally applicable.

3. Does Scripture contain stories or incidents that speak to your decision or dilemma? By looking carefully at the story and its background, can you ascertain what principles or issues are at stake? What do these reveal about God's will and ideal for you?

4. You need to analyse your own circumstances. What are the principles and issues and values at stake in your decision? How do they relate to the biblical commands and examples you

have seen under numbers 2 and 3?

5. You need to reflect prayerfully on these biblical principles in relationship to your circumstances to see what God is saying to you.

6. Finally, you must be willing to follow where God leads. It isn't enough just to know His will. You must be willing to act on His will. Here is where you especially need to pray for God's Spirit to make your heart willing to respond.

Even after you have done all this, it may be that the answer is still not clear. What do you do then? Maybe God is saying that you need to study further. Or maybe He is saying that either alternative in this decision is within the frame work of His will. Often, rather than give a direct command, God gives certain parameters—boundaries that tell you when you have moved outside His will. But within those parameters He allows you freedom to act.

Throughout this process we need to keep one thing in mind. The Bible not only helps us with our decisions, it also puts the whole process of decision making into proper perspective. It shows us that we are not saved by our good decision making or the good actions that follow our decisions. We are saved by God's grace. It also shows us, however, that having been saved by grace, our actions are significant. They can help or hurt other people. They can further or thwart the purposes of God. They

can support or hamper the work of God's kingdom. Thus, while our actions are not ultimate in determining our salvation, they are very significant. Therefore, our decisions require the careful study of God's Word that is necessary if it is to be relevant for us.

Speaking to a group about Christian decision making, I told them about the student who had come to me wanting to know what the Bible said about dating, when I finished, a father of young teenage daughters spoke up and said that if the Bible said nothing about dating, he thought that Christian parents shouldn't allow their children to date! If people didn't date in Bible times, then we shouldn't date today. We ought to do things the way they did in the Bible.

I reminded him that the reason the Bible doesn't talk about dating is that marriages were arranged, I went on to tell him that in Bible times most young girls married by the time they were 12 or 14 years old, and therefore doing it just as they did in the Bible would be a radical change indeed. Suddenly, he wasn't sure that we ought to do things just the way they did in the Bible.

The fact is that we cannot live exactly as people did in Bible times. But I am grateful that we can be guided by biblical principles as we face the decisions of everyday life.



MAN'S PREDICAMENT AND GOD'S REMEDY

(First article in a short series)

by Dr M E Cherian

THE PROBLEM

What Next?

A brilliant and talented young man had just completed his study of law and passed with highest honours in the University. To celebrate this the family held a reception and the leaders of the city and family friends were invited. After the dinner a number of prominent people asked the young man a variety of questions and sought his views on wide ranging topics. Finally one who had taught him in his lower class, now an elderly man, well respected in the community turned to the young man and said, "Son now that you have completed your studies and passed with such distinction, what do you plan to do next?"

The young man replied, "Sir, I now plan to set up my practice as a lawyer in the highest court of the land."

Then the teacher enquired, "What will you do next?" The young man said, "I expect to do well, and after a few years get married to a beautiful and talented young girl."

Teacher: "What next?"

Young Man: "Well, when I have earned enough to provide a comfortable life for my wife and myself and a good inheritance for my children, and have earned for myself fame as a good lawyer, I think I will set up a good home on a country estate and retire to enjoy life in leisure with my wife and children and their families."

Then the teacher said, "Son, you have spoken well and these are worthy ambitions and dreams and I wish you every success in this. But I like to ask: "What next?"

The young man paused a little and then said, "I suppose I will get old and like all people die in my old age."

Now the teacher paused with the question, "Son, what next?"

Then the young man became serious, thought a while, took a deep breath and said, "Sir, to be frank, I do not know. This is something to which I have never given any serious

thought so far."

Then the old *Guruji* replied, "Young man yet that is the question that will surely confront you for which it is imperative you have an answer, if your life is to have meaning, purpose, and direction."

The Question that Counts

When this life's journey comes to an end and man meets that inevitable death, the question "What Next?" haunts the entire human race. Is death your inevitable end? If so, does life have any meaning and purpose? Was man created by an Almighty God to suffer and die? Is there a way out of this dismal end?

About four thousand years ago, one of the greatest men who ever lived, Moses, reflecting on our lives remarked, "In the morning it flourisheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth... We spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threes

core years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:6,8-10)

This reflection constrained Moses to cry out, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." (Psalm 90:12)

The Man God Made

The Holy Scriptures affirm that God created man in His image as a moral being with a spiritual nature and with the capacity to establish and nurture a relationship with Him. This world was made to be the home of man. The Bible contains a beautiful account of this creation in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. The account concludes with these words: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. And God blessed them and said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." (Genesis 1:27-29).

This world was made for man and he was to be its ruler. The great Psalmist, King David says, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet."

(Psalm 8:6). A devout Christian thinker provides a beautiful commentary on man as he came from the hands of the Creator God. Ellen G White says, "Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character... His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetite and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p 45

As Adam and Eve, our first parents, and the earth with its fullness came from the hands, of a great and loving God, there was perfection and holiness written on everything God had made. Nothing marred the creation of God. All was made perfect, made for eternity. Notice this very pertinent comment God Himself made on His creation. "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." (Genesis 1:31). Notice the very appropriate reactions of the heavenly beings as they saw a perfect world come into existence with man as the crowning act of God's creation on this earth. "When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:7)

Man Is to be God's Glory

God made man a moral, spiritual being. He made him perfect-holy and pure. He was to have constant and consistent relationship and communion with God. In this kind

of a life and in this state, man was to bring glory to God, his Creator. He was to glorify God by his life. The great prophet Isaiah quotes God's words, "for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. (Isaiah 43:7)

If God made man the end of man is in God. The meaning and purpose of man's creation and existence is to be found in God. So man is to be God's glory. By a life of perfect harmony with the will of God man was to live eternally in God's glory and for His glory.

If God made us for His glory, how do we glorify Him? By our lives. God made us to glorify Him in and through our lives. Saint Paul therefore admonishes us: whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31). Writing to the people of Philippi he also says, "And this I pray... That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence... being filled with the fruits of righteousness... unto the glory and praise of God." (Philippians 1:9-11)

The Lord Jesus Christ Himself identified this as the purpose of our existence. Addressing his disciples, He said, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." (John 15:8). Then in His famous sermon on the mount referring to our lives, he commented: "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16)

Man, a creature, realizes the object of his existence and reaches the summit of a meaningful and rewarding experience when his life fully and singularly glorifies God, his Creator. It is for this that man was made and brought into being.

Godship of God

God's right to be our God rests basically and fundamentally on His creatorship. He made us, so He must reign supreme in our lives, and our loyalty to Him must be unchallengeable. There can be no other God. God's godship rests on His creatorship. It becomes man's supreme moral obligation and duty to realize this and fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

God's creatorship enjoins that we glorify Him. We glorify Him by and through our life; by living a life in conformity to His will. Our first and unchallenged loyalty, affections and obligations should all be to our Creator. Therefore God says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3) This is the first commandment. This is the basic principle underlying the relationship between the creature and the Creator. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." (Matthew 22:37, 38).

The Creator-creature relationship between God and man demands steadfast obedience to His will, dedicated service to Him and His cause, and unflinching devotion and worship of Him as our only God. The Psalmist puts this relationship in beautiful poetic language with an insight that is deep and marvellous. "Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name." (Psalm 100:2-4)

In this context God Himself calls on us to honour, glorify, and worship Him. Saint John records: "Fear God, and give glory to him... and worship him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters." (Revelation 14:7). The great king Solomon realized this Creator-creature relationship as the most fundamental and vital aspect of our existence. He said, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the duty of man." (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

God is the source and author of life. In Him is life, underived, unborrowed. He is the fountain of life. *We are, because He is.* Saint Paul affirms this: "God that made the world and all things therein seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth. . . he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men For in Him we

live, and move, and have our being." (The Acts 17:24-28).

Disobedience to God is Cause of Man's Fall

God made man perfect. He was also created a free moral being with individuality. The capacity to think and act; the freedom to choose between what is morally right and wrong; the freedom to choose God or not to choose Him, to obey God or to disobey Him; to glorify God or dishonour Him.

What actually happened? Man chose to disobey God and thus sinned. Morally fell and broke that wonderful relationship that existed between him and his Creator.

While we wait for the next article to learn how this disobedience occurred and the resultant consequences, we observe here the awful predicament in which man finds himself today, death. It is the natural and inevitable result of going against the will of the Creator-God; it is because man failed in his loyalty to Him; failed to love and honour Him supremely as God who is the source and sustainer of life. Since God is our Creator, it is our *dharm*, our duty, to love Him with all our heart and all our soul.

"From all that dwell below the skies,

*Let the Creator's praise arise;
Let His almighty name be sung*

Through every land, by every tongue."

--Isaac Watts

JESUS WAS

by J. I.

What happened to me as my translation of the Gospels progressed was that the figure of Jesus emerged more and more clearly, and in a way unexpectedly. Of course I had a deep respect, indeed a great reverence, for the conventional Jesus Christ whom the church worshipped. But I was not at all prepared for the *Unconventional* man revealed in those terse Gospels.

No one could possibly have invented such a person: this was no puppet-hero built out of the imaginations of adorning admirers. "This man Jesus," so briefly described, rang true, sometimes alarmingly true. I began to see now why the religious establishment of those days wanted to get rid of Him at all costs. He was sudden death to pride, pomposity, and pretense.

This man could be moved with compassion and could be very gentle, but I could find no trace of the "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild." He was quite terrifyingly tough not in a Bulldog Drummond-James Bond sort of way, but by the sheer strength of unified and utterly dedicated personality. He once (at least) walked unscathed through a murderous crowd. I have known a few—a very, very few—men who could do that.

But then I find that this sheer strength was still His after hours of unspeakable

agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Those who were sent to arrest Him "fell back to the ground." Previous pious generations attribute this to some supernatural power. I do not believe this for a moment. Jesus was a man of such complete authority that He could remain in command of a situation even when the odds were heavily against Him.

Strength of Human Character

It was this strength of human character which struck me again and again. We are not being told of superman but of someone supremely human. He could work so hard that His followers begged Him to stop. Yet He was fast asleep aboard the little fishing boat while the others did the rowing. He was awake and out praying in solitude while the others were asleep, yet there were times when He was tired. "Jesus, being wearied with His journey, sat down beside a well," records John.

He touched the untouchable leper. He made friends with those who had lost their reputation and self-respect. He denounced in vitriolic words the leaders of so-called religion. He spoke fearlessly to the violently insane. He wept in the presence of human sorrow.

He also wept over Jerusalem because its people



NO WIMP

Phillips



utterly failed to recognize God's Messiah when He taught and preached among them, and also because, with the true prophet's insight, He foresaw the city's hideous destruction.

With even a little imaginative sympathy one could sense the agony of His frustration and near-despair. He admitted that He was terrified as He went into the Garden of Gethsemane, and He sweated there in fear and anguish.

Standing before the Cross

The record of the behaviour of Jesus on the way to the cross and of the Crucifixion itself is almost unbearable, chiefly because it is so intensely *human*. If, as I believe, this was indeed God focused in a human being, we can see for ourselves that here is no play acting; this is the real thing. There are no supernatural advantages for this man. No celestial rescue party delivered Him from the power of evil men, and His agony was not mitigated by any superhuman anaesthetic.

We can only guess what frightful anguish of mind and spirit wrung from Him the terrible words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" But the cry "It is finished!" cannot be one of despair. It does not even mean, "It is all over." It means, "It has been completed"—and the terrifying task of doing God's will to the bitter end

had been fully and finally accomplished.

Here, in the four Gospels, fragmentary as they sometimes are, emerges a real man, whose perfect integrity is compelling. He "spoke with authority," and "the common people heard him gladly," and even at the end of His public career, those who were sent to arrest Him returned empty-handed. "Never man spake like this man," was their comment.

Unexpected Actions

But it would be a profound mistake to think that Jesus was merely an eloquent field preacher who had got on the wrong side of authority. His character was strange and unpredictable. He was meek in the way that only the strong can truly be, yet He called, demanded, and commanded without explanation or apology.

What other man could call some fishermen to leave their skilled jobs or ask somebody else to give up the lucrative, even though despised, work of tax collecting and to follow Him, and succeed? What other man could look straight at a ring of hostile faces and throw out the challenge, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and yet give no impression of arrogance or self-righteousness?

Yet the flashes of light upon this character which the four Gospels reveal are often surprising. Jesus was not

some penniless ascetic like John the Baptist before Him. Luke records that there were many women who "ministered to him of their substance." We may be pretty sure that the house of Mary and Martha was not the only home where He could find rest and refreshment. His cloak, "woven without seam," was hardly the covering of a beggar. There can be no doubt that He was socially popular and although we can discount the jibe that He was "a gluttonous man, and a winebibber," we can fairly infer that He enjoyed God's good gifts of food and drink.

It struck me again and again that some of the unexpected sayings and actions of Jesus were recorded just because they were unexpected. The routine work (if we might so describe it) is sometimes dismissed in a few words—He "went about doing good" and "healing all manner of sickness and . . . disease among the people." But the other words and works, which no one could have anticipated, and which must have been nearly inexplicable at the time, are treasured and remembered with the utmost fidelity.

Not a Revolutionary

Yet woe betide any man who tries to fit this man into any political or humanitarian slot! Those pacifists who would claim Him as their champion would do well to remember that it was a soldier, a Roman commissioned officer, who most evoked the admiration of Jesus. The

parable of the talents is enough to show that Jesus recognized the fundamental *inequality* of men in ability and possessions. The stories of Jesus abound in such inequalities, in the difference between master and man, hard working and lazy, prudent and improvident.

It is true that He denounced hypocrisy, exploitation, and lack of compassion. But He made no attempt, as probably Judas Iscariot hoped, to make Himself a national champion. The "other-worldly" aspect of His teaching cannot be fairly ignored. "My kingdom," He insisted, "is not of this world." Yet it had already "Come upon men unawares" and was even then "among" or "within" them. The way men treated one another in this world was of paramount importance, but Jesus recognized the obvious unfairness and injustice in the here and now. In the end, justice would be done and be seen to be done, but not in this time-and-space world.

Jesus was no sentimental "dogooder," and He spoke quite unequivocally about rewards and punishments "in the world to come." He declared that a man who harmed one of His "little ones" would be better off dead. Some of the most terrifying words ever written in the New Testament are put into the mouth of Jesus. Yet they are not threats or menaces but warnings given in love.

What I am concerned with

of Jesus, but to set down my witness to the continued shocks which His words and deeds gave me as I approached the Gospels unshielded by the familiar cover of beautiful language. The figure who emerged is quite unlike the Jesus of conventional piety, and even more unlike that imagined hero whom members of various causes claim as their champion.

What we are so often confronted with today is a "processed" Jesus. Every element that we feel is not consonant with our "image" of Him, is removed, and the result is more insipid and unsatisfying than the worst of processed food. □



CHRIST CAN RESTORE PEACE TO THE BEREAVED

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR PATIL - FATHER OF RINKU

Rinku Patil's murder case hit the headlines on March 31, 1990. This case is no exception to Ulhasnagar's notorious history. But something was different in this case.

Edison Samraj, Book Editor of OWPB spoke to the father of Rinku to find out his surprising attitude towards the culprits who were involved in the murder of his daughter in this exclusive interview.

Edison: Mr Patil, where do you come from?

Patil: I hail from Pachora in the Jalgaon district, North Maharashtra.



Mr Patil.

Edison: What is your family background?

Patil: My father is a farmer and we have about 45 guntas of land at Pachora.

Edison: How many children do you have?

Patil: I had three children, the eldest is Ranjana, then Rinku who died and the youngest is Raju.

Edison: What kind of girl was Rinku?

Patil: She was a beautiful girl, very intelligent, and cooperative. She was also good at her studies.

Edison: Which school did she attend?

Patil: She went to Century Rayon High School, in Ulhasnagar.

Edison: We read her story in the newspapers. What actually happened?

Patil: On March 30, 1990, the last day of the examination four young men rushed into the school campus. Of the four two had swords (or long knives), one carried a pistol and the fourth a container of petrol. They attacked the two constables on examination hall guard duty. And then two of the scoundrels rushed into the hall and closed all the doors. The main culprit was Hareesh Patel, who poured petrol on my beloved Rinku and then set her ablaze. The



Rinku Patil

residents of a neighbouring chawl (group of houses) came running and saw what happened. They also heard the shouts of the students, the screams and cries of Rinku as the flame devoured her. Her last words, I am told, were "Patel, why are you after me?" "Mamma, Pappa".

Edison: What did you then do?

Patil: As soon as I heard the news I rushed immediately to the high school. The policemen stopped me from entering inside the school campus, but they told me that my daughter was alive. I didn't believe that

because the people who had gathered there said she was dead. I was very angry, I grabbed the shirt of the policeman to beat him, and the other, ran away. The crowd, wanted to beat the Police Inspector. I wanted to phone, but I was told the telephone wires were cut. This was not true. Later I telephoned the Home Minister, Mr Arun Mehta, the Chief Minister, Mr Sharad Pawar, my relative Mr Babu Patil and Mr Kulkarni an MLA. After informing the Home department and ministers there was immediate action. The police tried to take the body at about six in the evening. I objected. Then Mr Babu Patil told me, "Let the police do their duty, otherwise the real culprits can use this and escape."

Edison: What was the real cause?

Patil: Rinku didn't want to marry Haresh Patel, but he was very desperate to marry her, and because of frustration, he might have committed this gruesome crime. He was living near us.

Edison: What was the reaction of the immediate family members?

Patil: At that moment, we were all shocked and my wife fainted several times, we just couldn't think or do anything. Ulhasnagar was closed for three days. Ulhasnagar is known for its crime rate.

Edison: How did you spend the time after this incident?

Patil: Reporters from all over Maharashtra and other parts of India came for interviews, our relatives also came to sympathize with us. Many unknown people came and offered

their condolences and assistance in this dark hour of tragedy.

Edison: What did you do to overcome the tragic loss of your beloved daughter?

Patil: During the first week, there was a large crowd of people coming and going in. During the second week the actual culprits were caught, then the crowd started to thin. My wife fainted quite often and the doctor was in attendance. According to Hindu rites on the 30th day, milk was offered at the place of the site. Rinku was buried, because only married persons are cremated. We were not allowed to come out of the house for five whole days. Later, after a month we went to temples at Nasik, Pandharpur, Kashi, and Lonavla in search of peace. (Shanthi).

Edison: What did you do at these places of Pilgrimage?

Patil: At Nasik, we bathed in the river Chandrabaga, the pujari performed rituals for the peace of Rinku, and offered burnt offerings (Whatever things Rinku liked—in small quantities he poured in the offerings—like milk, honey and sugar). My wife insisted we visit Pandharpur, to get peace of mind. Whatever she told me I did. We just took part. She put a garland and performed puja to the god Vitoba. At Shirdi, also puja was offered to get peace for Rinku and all of us. At Lonavla, Swami Vidhyanand conducts classes, and I attended his classes. He is a studious person, he has knowledge of human problems. In his discourse he

told us that life consists of 50% sorrow and 50% happiness. He urged us not to worry. He appealed to us to forget the past. But I did not find peace.

Edison: What else did you do to find peace?

Patil: We gave up and stopped going from place to place. Then one day we had a visitor.

Patil: Who was he?

Patil: He was Pastor Deepak Thribhuvan, who works with prison inmates.



Pastor Deepak Thribhuvan

Edison: And how did Pr Thribhuvan know about you?

Patil: Pr Thribhuvan's father-in-law stays near our house in Ulhasnagar, and it was through him, I came in contact with Pr Deepak. He came over and prayed for us. The pastor had come on his own after his father-in-law told him of our sad experience.

Edison: Was the visit of Deepak Thribhuvan helpful?

Patil: When he came to our house, he consoled us, prayed and asked God's blessings for all the members

of the house. I felt better, he spent the whole day with us. After a few days we were invited to Pune by Pastor Deepak Thribhuvan. He gave us Bible studies, even during this stage my wife occasionally fainted but after the prayer there was a change, I was encouraged, and I personally started reading the Bible.

Edison: What portions of the Bible did Pastor Deepak Thribhuvan read to you?

Patil: He read to us from the book of Isaiah 61:1-3, which is also found in the New Testament book of Luke, chapter three.

Edison: What portions of Scriptures have you read on your own?

Patil: I have read the portions suggested by the pastor, and also other portions. But, I can say, my reading the Bible gave me peace, and guidance. I read the Scriptures to my family members and they listen eagerly with rapt attention.

Edison: Now Mr Patil, what is your attitude to those who have committed this crime?

Patil: Though we have lost the life of our beloved daughter, our Heavenly Father will take care of us. But I wanted those involved in my daughter's death to be forgiven.

Edison: How did this change of attitude come about?

Patil: Actually, I wanted to take revenge but Pr Vinodh of Bombay advised me and told me to forgive the culprits because Christ forgave us. Because Christ forgives, my at-

titude also changed towards the criminals. God is our judge. He will do what is right.

Edison: How do you feel when you think of your daughter?

Patil: In whatever activities I engage, I get the assurance that one day I'll meet my daughter Rinku somewhere. Although, I haven't studied the Bible very much, I still have the hope of assurance in Jesus Christ and His saving power.

Edison: Mr Patil, is your understanding of hope a result of Christian acquaintance?

Patil: Yes, but not merely in Christian acquaintance but the reading of the Bible gives me faint hope, I think if I study deeply, my hope will be more clear. I and my wife acknowledge that there is more than hope, in the Word of God (Bible).

Edison: Is anyone helping you understand the Bible better?

Patil: Pr Vinodh of Bombay is continuing to be a source of great help. He is teaching me about the love of God. And he is one of them I get spiritual help from.

Edison: Do you have one last word?

Patil: I can only say this now, I have peace of mind when I earnestly pray. Though people are praying for us, I also personally do pray. Having the courage to forgive and forget, by accepting *Jesus as my Saviour is the real essence of being a real human being.*

GEMS

Nature arms each man with some faculty which enables him to do easily some feat that is impossible to any other man.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

It's better, my friend, to wear out than to rush out.

—Charles Hauke

A good thing about silence is that it can't be repeated.

When you're drinking the water, don't forget who dug the well.

—Old Chinese Proverb

Though familiarity may not breed contempt, it takes the edge off admiration.

—William Hazlitt

The only way to enjoy anything in this life is to earn it first.

—Ginger Rogers

Truth, like surgery, may hurt, but it cures.

—Han Suyin

The key to everything is patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg, not smashing it.

—Arnold Glasgow

Nagging is constructive criticism too frequently repeated.

—Percy Cudipp

A problem is on the way to beating us down when we search for alibis and seek ways to place every problem we have on someone else.

—Tom Haggai

Advice is what a man asks for when he wants you to agree with him.

THE LOVE OF GOD

by Yesudian John Willmott

Somewhere the story is told that one sunshine day a glorious angel stole out of heaven and came down to earth on ministries of love. Just as the sun went down, he plumed his silvery wings and said, "Now my day's service is ended and I must hasten back to heaven, but before I go, I must gather some mementos from the earth."

Looking over into a beautiful garden, he saw how lovely and fragrant the blossoms were. So he plucked the rarest roses and arranged them into a gorgeous bouquet.

Looking across the valley, he saw a brilliant rainbow and decided to take a little of that.

Then drawing near a little cottage, he saw a bright-eyed rosy cheeked babe smiling up into its mother's face. Yes, he must take that baby's smile also. But on a closer look he saw the mother's love pouring out toward her babe like a mighty, gushing river. The young mother's love seemed to be more beautiful than all the others. Hence he would take that too. Thus he gathered his souvenirs for the day.

With these four treasures, he winged his way up to the pearly gates and paused outside to examine his trophies. He looked at the roses and they had withered; he looked at the rainbow and it had dissolved; he looked at the baby's smile and it had vanished. But

when he looked at the mother's love, there it was in all its pristine beauty and matchless loveliness.

He threw aside the withered flowers the dissolved rainbow, the baby's vanished smile, and winging his way inside the pearly portals, he called the hosts of heaven and told them that the only thing he had found that held its fragrance all the way to heaven was the young mother's love.

The world's greatest stories have tried to paint the surpassing beauty of a mother and her babe, but have failed. Only a mother can bestow her love upon her ten children, and yet each child receive all her love.

There is a love beyond that of a woman. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." John 15:13. There is absolutely none greater than this. This is the very utmost limit of human love. There is a love even greater than this. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

Let us look at God's love in three dimensions. The first is God's love for the world. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

God created this world

and he bestows His love upon all his creatures. He loves everyone whether he is good or bad. Without any favour or distinction, God sends the rain upon the good as well as the bad and He causeth the sun to shine upon all. The great God of the universe is good God who loves all alike.

Secondly, God loves those who love Him and who have acknowledged Him as the God of their lives. They belong to Him and He belongs to them. God especially loves this assembly of His people and gave Himself for them. Ephesians 5:26, 27.

In the lives of those who turn from sin and turn to Him for salvation, He lavishes His love without measure. His great heart of love forgives and bestows mercy and pardon. This offer of mercy is available to everyone. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28. This rest, peace and salvation is free to all who will receive it. There is a family of God on earth whose members love God and serve Him and God loves them and lavishes His love upon them.

Finally God's love is for the individual. His love is for you and me. "God loved me and gave Himself for me." Galatians 2:20. In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus told three stories to illustrate the

importance and value He places on one individual. One person lost was enough to justify His risky search. He went in search of the lost sinner, climbed steep hills, and finally got to the very edge of the precipice at the risk of His own life. He rescued the lost lamb and joyfully carried it on his shoulders and brought it to the fold.

God loves you. He desires to save you. The entire heaven is waiting to celebrate over one sinner who is saved. God of the universe is the God of the individual. He loves you. Will you love Him?

There is a moving story of

a young man who denied the existence of God and rejected any thought of God's love. The cross, the symbol of God's love, was a taboo in his life. He spent His life in riotous living. Every night multiplied the sins of every day. He was running away from God but he did not realize that God was running after him. One night when he reached the club where he decided to satisfy himself with anything which his heart desired, he first wanted to have a swim in the pool. He went to the edge of the diving board. He was about to jump in. He saw the shadow of a cross which was actually the shadow of his

own outstretched form on that moonlight night. He stopped. He looked down and discovered that there was no water in the pool. He cried, "Oh love that will not let me go. Oh, the cross which I despised has been the symbol of my salvation." He yielded his life completely to God right there by the side of that swimming pool in that night club.

Dear reader, wherever you are and whatever your circumstances may be, the truth is that God loves you. He longs for your salvation, Oh, the matchless love of God! Would you receive that God into your life and then receive

A BEAUTIFUL PALACE

The Bible is like unto a magnificent palace constructed of precious stones comprising sixtysix stately chambers. Each one of these chambers is different from its fellow and is perfect in its individual beauty. While together they form an epic incomparable, majestic, glorious and sublime.

In the book of Genesis, we enter the grand vestibule where we are immediately introduced to the records of the mighty works of God's creation. This vestibule gives access to the Law Courts, passing through which we come to the palace gallery of the historical books. Here we find hung upon the walls, scenes of battles, heroic deeds and portraits of valiant men of God. Beyond the picture gallery, we find the philosopher's chamber the book of Job, passing through which we enter the music room the book of Psalms. And there we linger thrilled by the greatest harmonies that ever fell on human ears. Then we come to the business office the book of Proverbs in the very centre of which stands the motto 'Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to every people'. And then into the research department Ecclesiastes. Thence into the conservatory the Song of Solomon where he greets us with the fragrant aroma of choicest fruits and flowers and the sweet singing birds. We then reach the observatory where the prophets with their powerful telescopes are looking for the appearing of the Sun of righteousness. Crossing the courtyard we come to the audience chamber of the King—the Gospels where we find four life size portraits of the King himself revealing the perfection of His infinite beauty. Next we enter the work room of the Holy Spirit the Epistles where we can see Peter and Paul, James, John and Jude busy at their tables under the personal direction of the Spirit of Truth. Finally we enter the Throne Room the book of Revelation where we are enrapt by the mighty volume of praises which are addressed to the enthroned King and which fills the vast chambers while in the adjacent galaxy and Judgement Hall are portrayed solemn scenes of judgement and wondrous scenes of glory associated with the coming manifestation of the Son of God as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The coming King is at the door!

SONG OF PRAISE

by D K Sankeethamony

Our Bible serves not only as the Word of God but it excels as a great piece of literature. We can classify the literary treasures within the Bible as Prayers, Songs, History, Good News that brought people closer to God, Letters, Sermons, and Stories about people in relationship with God. People who were inspired by God have contributed their literary treasures to the Word of God because they were helped by God to present His thoughts.

The book of Psalms plays an important role in Biblical literature. The Psalms consists of 150 Psalms or holy songs which are precious rubies. The shortest Psalm, Psalm 117, reminds me of the old Tamil literature, "Thirukkural" which is made of couplets (literary forms). Thiruvalluvar, who composed "Thirukkural" has so filled his couplets with meaning that scholars compare its richness of meaning to the seven seas occupying a mustard seed. The Hebrew poet who wrote Psalm 117 has written in a similar manner with contents as vast as the oceans of the world. Even old Sanskrit Hindu literature is full of this type of literary form known as *Sutras* (*Dharma Sutra*, *Manu Sutra*, *Kama Sutra*, etc.).

In the commentary that was written by Martin Luther for this small Psalm, he said that "this song might have been the source of inspiration for writing of the book *Acts of the Apostles*. The *SDA Bible*

Commentary, vol 3, p888 describes Psalm 117 as "the shortest of the Psalms, nevertheless, lofty in its theme." Ellen White writes: "Before leaving the upper chamber, the Saviour led His disciples in a song of praise. His voice was heard, not in the strains of some mournful lament, but in the joyful notes of the Passover hallel. . . . Psalm 117." DA 672. In this small couplet, the poet answers the question concerning what is the greatest in the world! "For great is his (God's) steadfast love toward us." (Psalm 117:2 RSV) The poet realizes that through the love of God this world was formed, was created and is to be redeemed. He reminds the people of their past history and gives evidence that the love of God is the foundation. One theologian, when he summarized the contents of the Holy Word, said "All is of grace and grace is for all."

It seems to be marvellous when the author tells us that the steadfast love—the love of God is great above the heavens (Psalm 57:10); this shall not depart from you (Isaiah 54:10); this fills the earth (Psalm 119:64); and this never ceases (Lamentations 3:22).

What is meant by the love of God? Let us see what are some of the definitions and connotations given by Mrs. White in her writings:

In *Desire of Ages*, p 505 it says: "The love of God in the heart is the only spring of love toward our neighbour." Writes

the pen of God's servant, Ellen White: "All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean, when compared with the infinite exhaustless love of God." 5T, p 740.

I read in *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p 91, a tremendous sentence which gives the definition of the love of God: "The love of God is something more than a mere negation; it is a positive and active principle, a living spring, ever flowing to bless others."

The Psalmist tells us that Christian literature and Christian songs are based on *agape*. This song which sounds like an agapeistic song can also be considered a worship song. This song would have been sung many times at worship services. The second verse testifies to the fact that it reminded the congregation of their history and success.

"Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!" (verse 1). A Hebrew word used in this song is: "hallel" which means "to praise." This song's last word is "Hallelujah," which means, "Praise the Lord."

It may be interesting to inquire what "Praise" is; and what are the proper forms and features of human praise as offered to God. What praise does God reasonably demand? And what praise is



Your Bible Questions Answered

Dear Reader,
If you have a Bible question
you would like help with, send

The Editor
OUR TMES
P O Box 35

man, at his best, able to offer? Boasting about self is offensive; boasting about someone else may be more noble. And praise is that noble and ennobling thing—boasting about God.

The people of Israel were chosen by *Yahweh—the Lord*. *God had chosen them with the hope that they would spread the loving acts of God to the non-Jew and non-Palestinians.*

As making confessions and witnessing are part of worship in Judaism, Islam and Christianity, they have become part of social life too. However, as far as Christianity is concerned preaching the gospel to others takes a prominent place. As Adventists we must give to the world the happiness and joy we receive.

This song helps us to realize that the worship in the church and the lifestyle reflected in its members should be in harmony with the witness it gives. Also, this song makes it clear that worship, work and witness should work together and be interlaced with one another.

The Psalmist, no doubt, refers to the character of God's dealing with Israel, but he implies that they do but present

a model of God's dealings with all nations—including Southern Asian countries, Arab kingdoms and he calls upon those nations to examine and see what God's dealings have been with *them*, so that they might find cause for praise. The early Jews realized monotheism as a special possession of their nation. The later prophets and psalmists realized monotheism as a trust, concerning which the Jews were to witness to all nations around them. What we still do is what the psalmist here calls upon us to do—to present monotheism to the Indian masses which has a strongly established spiritualism, and a pretty hard-possessed materialism, too, that could finally amalgamate to form pantheism. What is pantheism? It solemnly proclaims that matter itself is from eternity; matter is incorruptible; matter is absolutely divine. In the Psalmist's view God is rather a person with both the capacity and desire to have a meaningful relationship with His people around the world.

This message is good news for everyone, everywhere. It is our privilege to share this joyful message.

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