

Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

1591



The Right Food - page 3
Red in Tooth and Claw? - page 8
Coming, Ready or Not! - page 19

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Glad Tidings

of the Kingdom of God

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Contents

The Right Food.....	3
The Resurrection of Jesus	5
Red in Tooth and Claw?.....	8
Bible Reading Tables.....	10
Prayer in the Gospel of Luke.....	12
When the Gospels were Written	15
The Third Commandment: The Name of God.....	17
Coming, Ready or Not!.....	19

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The Right Food

Our front cover image is very familiar, certainly to British households at this time of year. Autumn is turning to winter, the leaves are golden or brown, and animals are preparing for the long cold season ahead. Some, of course, will hibernate from now until spring.

This means that our gardens and parks are regularly frequented by squirrels foraging for nuts and other food with high fat content, which will see them through winter. In fact, the internet is well stocked with videos of these agile creatures performing all sorts of acrobatics to get food, especially that which is intended for the birds.

To some people, this is a cause of great annoyance; to others it is the source of much amusement. Yet to the animals themselves it is a matter of life and death. They need the nutrition to fuel their autumnal preparations, as well as a store for their winter sleep. Perhaps we can learn some life lessons from these animal antics.

God Feeds His People

The people of Israel experienced firsthand how God provides for those who are His. During their desert exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, He literally fed them in a number of miraculous ways.

He provided 'manna', described as 'bread from heaven', which appeared in the morning. They went out to collect it and could cook it in a number of ways.

When the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost

on the ground... And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat" (Exodus 16:14-15).

To provide meat, on occasion God sent great quantities of quails, again showing His care.

So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp (Exodus 16:13).

Not only this, but God also provided water for them in a number of ways, including straight from a rock, by making bitter waters sweet, and leading them to wells or oases.

Spiritual Food

Apart from physical food, we need spiritual sustenance to help us go about our daily lives in the right way. Also the Bible tells us that, if we are faithful to God, when we die our unconscious state is like a 'hibernation' until Jesus returns to set up God's kingdom. Then he will raise the dead from their 'sleep', something else we need to be prepared for.

The right spiritual food is the word of God, the Bible. We are told that it provides all we need to prepare us to live well before God and to be pleasing to Him:

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The great King David, writing in the Psalms, describes the word of God in terms which make us think of food:

How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).



We would not expect to be healthy if we eat badly or infrequently. The same applies to our spiritual food. We should be taking in the word of God regularly, and spending time ‘digesting’ what it has to say. This will build up our spiritual health and prepare us in the ways mentioned above. The Bible Reading tables in the centre pages of this magazine are a good tool to help us do this: three readings per day which enable us to read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in a year. Now would be a good time to commit to daily Bible reading, whether we follow this plan or another.

The Bread of Life

Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life, given by God to provide spiritual sustenance to those who accept him. Just as bread is life-giving, so association with Jesus gives us hope of eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day... Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life (John 6:35, 44, 47).

In this chapter, Jesus continues to talk about his followers needing to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Of course this is not literal – God has never asked for this sort of worship – but is talking about understanding the work of Jesus, accepting his sacrifice as a means to be reconciled to God, and then sharing bread and wine as baptised believers, in remembrance of this. So we are presented with another opportunity to get the right spiritual nutrition – to be associated with Jesus: his life, his sacrifice and his future kingdom.

Food for Action

My food is to do the will of Him who sent me, to finish His work (John 4:34).

To Jesus, doing his Father’s will is a driving force, the energy in his life: it was his ‘meat and drink’ as we might still say today. This should be the same for his followers. Living a life sustained by spiritual fuel will energise us and make us dynamic in serving God. That’s exciting!

So let’s consider ourselves. Are we getting the right food, properly fuelling ourselves for a positive life today and the prospect of life after death? God has provided the food; it is up to us to take hold of it. No acrobatics required!

Editor

The Resurrection of Jesus

This is the central event of Christianity, and all four gospels record it. On the third day after his death, Jesus' followers visited an empty tomb to be told that he was risen from the dead. The positive proof was given in personal interviews, when they ate with him, spoke with him and could touch him.

Forty days later the apostles saw him taken into heaven and were told by angels that *"This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11).

From that day until now, men and women who believe in the truth of this message have looked for the return of Jesus to the earth.



He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8).

For this reason, God restored his life. Ten days after Jesus went to heaven, Peter said this of him: *Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it (Acts 2:24).*

Jesus' resurrection differs from all others. They were raised, but eventually would die again. Jesus rose, never to die. Paul wrote:

Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him (Romans 6:9).

A Different Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus differed from any other restoration to life. He himself had used the power of God to give life to the dead: to the widow's son at Nain, to the daughter of Jairus and to Lazarus at Bethany. These miracles, recorded in the gospels, were evidence of the truth of his message.

But the resurrection of Jesus was the work of God alone, and it was a consequence of the sinless life that Jesus had lived. He had dedicated his life to serving his Father, and had pleased Him in everything he did. The Apostle Paul recounts this for us:

He has the power of an endless life. He alone can say: *"I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore"* (Revelation 1:18).

The Pattern for Eternal Life

In Jesus we see illustrated the method by which death is overcome. This is obscured by the non-biblical idea of an 'immortal soul' - the teaching that humans already have a life force which survives death in a non-bodily form in some other world. We would search in vain for this in the teaching of Jesus, and indeed all of the books of the Bible. This idea is simply not there.

The Bible teaches that God offers a future life through recreating someone's physical existence by raising them from the dead. Jesus declared: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). In him we see how death is overcome.

He confidently expected to be raised from the dead, and foretold his resurrection on several occasions, although at the time his hearers did not understand. His words took on their full significance after these men and women were given irrefutable evidence that Jesus was alive again.

Teaching About Resurrection

Jesus made it very clear that his mission was to open up to men and women the prospect of eternal life. The verses in this section are all from the Gospel of John, but we find the same message in each gospel.

I am the bread of life (John 6:35).

You are not willing to come to me that you may have life (John 5:40).

Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14).

Did he explain how that life would be given? The answer is as clear as we could wish. Jesus said he would raise from death and give everlasting life to those who believe in him:

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life... Do not marvel at this; for the hour is

coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:24, 28–29).

This is the will of the Father who sent me, that of all He has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day (John 6:39).

In three other verses in this chapter (John 6), Jesus spoke of that resurrection as being at the 'last day', or the time when he returns to the earth:

And this is the will of Him who sent me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day (v40).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me (v44–45).

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood [that is, follows Jesus' commands to associate with his sacrifice] has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day (v54).

On another occasion Jesus made this direct connection between the resurrection and the 'last day'. To Martha, a bereaved sister of Lazarus he said:

"Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in

me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:23-27).

Martha's answer was comprehensive; it was a statement of faith that recognized Jesus as Israel's Messiah (the Christ) and the Son of God whose coming had been foretold. There was also a direct connection made between the Messiahship of Jesus and this last day.

Jesus as Judge

An important point here is that the resurrected Jesus is God's appointed Judge of humankind. This is evident from a number of the scriptures already quoted. At that 'last day' in the future, people will be turned away by him, or accepted by him. Some will be raised to everlasting life, and some to shame; and Jesus himself will determine their destiny.

For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).



For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man (John 5:26-27).

During his life on earth Jesus was holy in everything he did, despite the fact that he shared our human weakness. This means that he is uniquely qualified to be the judge of mankind. His judgment will be perfect, for it will be by divine standards, for he is the Son of God. His judgment will be righteous, for he has laid down his life to save sinners, and those rejected by him will have rejected his help to save them from sin.

Jesus the judge is able to evaluate people's deeds with unerring faithfulness to God's truth. Life proves to us that people are usually extremely poor at judging their fellow humans, being able to assess correctly the complexities of motives in conduct. It requires divine power and discernment to determine people's destiny with justice.

What Jesus has done in the past is the foundation for his future work. The sinless man who died for us is the one fit to judge us.

The apostle Paul, preaching in Athens, made it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is God's guarantee of Jesus' position, and that he will return to judge the world.

[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

John Carter

Red in Tooth and Claw?

The lady said, “How can you say there is a God when He allows a small deer to be hunted to death by a leopard? Is it right for a fox to rip apart chickens?”

If you are of a sensitive nature, this may not be quite to your taste, but please do read on because this is a frequent and important discussion.

A Professional’s View

As a young student in animal health I visited a slaughterhouse on the side of a hill. It was my first visit. A beautiful Jersey cow entered, was shot and bled. I felt sickened.

Thirty years later, wiser, and acting as a professional, I watched a lorry load of pigs brought into the factory. Six were taken into a pen, and one was stunned and its throat cut. There was no reaction or fear shown by the other animals.

Why is that? Animals have no fear of death. They do not know what it is. When danger faces them adrenaline is

forced around the body prompting them to flee. An animal rarely grows old in the wild, because disease affects it, or it can be taken by a predator, either of which prevents the difficulties associated with old age.

This was demonstrated on a film I saw recently. A lion was stalking a gazelle, but the animal escaped and a few moments later was cropping the grass quite contentedly.

Animal Instinct

Animals are not cruel, they only kill to live. If they did not, then the countries of the world would be overwhelmed by masses of different species. Humans have free will but animals have set instincts given them by the wise Creator.

On another occasion I met a very aggrieved farmer, armed with a shotgun. A fox had killed 99 of his chickens, and he vowed, “It will not get the hundredth.” He settled down at

night but fell asleep and the fox had the hundredth! The fox took the one it wanted, but the farmer went home very aggrieved. The fox went back to his lair satisfied, because he was programmed to chase and catch prey – and had found the perfect scenario surrounded by scores of clucking chickens.

Finally, we have to see that animal suffering tends to be very short-lived, and although the thought of predators killing them affects our feelings, we have to see that there is no other way.



God's Principles for Nature

From the beginning God allowed man to supervise His animal kingdom and said:

Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Mankind has failed dismally to properly manage the earth, and many species are dying out. They are frequently killed, not by other animals but by the human greed of those who eradicate them, or take away their habitat, for profit. We hear all too often that many species are close to extinction.

Yet over all this, the amazing Creator is ultimately in command, and He has said:

For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are Mine (Psalm 50:10-11).

He expects us to treat our animals with consideration as He says:

A righteous man regards the life of his animal (Proverbs 12:10).

Setting it Right

Peace in nature will finally come with the establishment of God's kingdom, at Jesus Christ's return. The prophet Isaiah, looking forward, has an exciting verse which says:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion



and the fating together; and a little child shall lead them (Isaiah 11:6).

What a delightful phrase – a little child shall lead them. It is a lovely picture of an age where there is harmony everywhere. In addition, you who fear snakes will find comfort as Isaiah adds:

The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea (v8-9).

What a truly superb climax to the divine plan of the ages. Man has failed to have a caring dominion, so God's Son will take over the rule of the world with that grand result.

I cannot wait to see it; how about you, do you want to be there?

Ken Clark

Prayer in the Gospel of Luke

It can be very rewarding for us to identify themes which run throughout the Bible as a whole, and within the individual books contained in it. One of the key themes which stands out in the Gospel of Luke is that of prayer.

Frequently we read of Jesus praying to his Heavenly Father and there is even a parable about prayer which is recorded in none of the other Gospels (see Luke 18:1–8). Fascinatingly, Luke presents Jesus as praying during the times when significant events were happening in his life, such as his baptism and transfiguration.

This all contributes to our understanding of how important the theme of prayer is in Luke's Gospel and we can look out for it whenever we read this wonderful book.

Praying at Great Events

Jesus' baptism was an enormously important event in his life. What imme-

diately followed it was recorded by Matthew, who saw:

...the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:16–17).

This is recorded with an additional detail in the Gospel of Luke – the type of detail which can be very easy for us to miss:

*Jesus also was baptized; and **while he prayed**, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:21–22).*

Very early on in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is presented to us as a man of prayer and this theme flourishes as we continue to read through the rest of the Gospel.

Another very important event in the life of Christ was his 'transfiguration' (which means to have one's form changed), which Mark describes thus:

Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and he was transfigured before them. His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus (Mark 9:2–4).





Again, an additional detail is provided in the record of Luke:

*He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain **to pray. As he prayed**, the appearance of his face was altered, and his robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with him, who were Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28–30).*

Perhaps we don't instantly associate the transfiguration with prayer but we learn from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus was praying at the precise time he was transfigured.

Praying Every Day

Jesus did not only pray during the particularly significant events in his life however, as we will now see.

He was frequently surrounded by crowds of people eagerly desiring his attention.

Great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities (Luke 5:15).

However, Jesus needed time alone with his Father.

So he himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed (Luke 5:16 – see also Luke 9:18).

If prayerful solitude was so important for the Son of God, it would certainly be beneficial to us as well.

After an episode where he was in confrontation with the Jewish leaders and went on to heal a man with a withered hand, we read that Jesus “went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). We can conclude that this extraordinary episode of prayer was driven by two things.

- ❖ After the healing of the man with the withered hand, the Scribes and Pharisees “were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus” (Luke 6:11).
- ❖ After praying all night to God, Jesus “called his disciples to himself; and from them he chose twelve whom he also named apostles” (Luke 6:13).

In the midst of the plots of his enemies and the momentous task of choosing the twelve, prayer was the dominant activity of our Lord's life. It would provide him with comfort and confidence in his Father's power, as well as preparation for the task ahead.

As we might expect by now, the Gospel of Luke also includes specific instructions about how to pray to God. Appropriately, the ‘Lord's Prayer’ is recorded immediately after Jesus had finished “praying in a certain place” (Luke 11:1–4).

Praying in Crisis

Luke's Gospel also records Jesus praying in the midst of some of the most painful moments of his life and

these are recorded particularly in the twenty-second chapter. Jesus addressed his disciples and Peter in particular when he said:

*“You are those who have continued with me in my trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one upon me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But **I have prayed for you**, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.” (Luke 22:28–32).*

Luke is the only Gospel which records the detail of Jesus praying for Peter at this time (compare Matthew 26:31–35, Mark 14:27–31 and John 13:36–38).

Jesus’ distress in the Garden of Gethsemane involved both his personal prayers to God and his direct instruction for his disciples to do the same:

*He went to the Mount of Olives, as he was accustomed, and his disciples also followed him. When he came to the place, he said to them, “**Pray** that you may not enter into temptation.” And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s throw, and **he knelt down and prayed**, saying, “Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from me; nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.” Then an angel appeared to him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony, **he prayed more earnestly**. Then his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*



*When he rose up from **prayer**, and had come to his disciples, he found them sleeping from sorrow. Then he said to them, “Why do you sleep? **Rise and pray**, lest you enter into temptation” (Luke 22:38–46).*

Despite knowing that his excruciating death was imminent, and being in indescribable personal distress, Jesus had great concern for the spiritual well-being of his disciples. Prayer would have helped his disciples in their battle with temptation and human weakness, and it can help us with our battles today.

Despite experiencing the physical and emotional torture of the crucifixion and everything which preceded it, Jesus had heartfelt compassion towards those who were in the process of ignorantly murdering him. It is prayers like the one Jesus made on the cross which mark him out as unique – who can fail to be moved to the very core by the words of his prayer?

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do (Luke 23:34).

Stephen Blake

The Reliability of the Gospels - 7

When they were Written

The reliability of the Gospels is a vital issue for real Christianity. If the Gospels are reliable records of Jesus Christ, we can trust what they say about him. If they are not, then there are serious problems for those who attempt to follow his teaching. Crucial to the question of the reliability of the Gospels is the date at which they were written.

If the Gospels were written in the second century AD, then there is a possibility that the information they carry has been altered by a chain of transmission and that some elements are simply invented. But if they were written in the lifetime of eyewitnesses there would be no possibility of false information being incorporated into them, because the witnesses would detect this and expose it.

Remember that the eyewitnesses were not only the disciples of Jesus. Great crowds came to hear Jesus' teaching and to see him heal; and among these were scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees, people who would delight in finding errors in the Gospel records.

Types of Evidence

The first evidence about the date of the Gospels is external, and comes from the accuracy of the descriptions when compared with archaeology. In 66 AD a war broke out between Jewish rebels and the Romans. This reached a blood-soaked climax in 70 AD when Jerusalem was stormed and razed to the ground. The Gospels' accurate descriptions of places in Jerusalem, or

of customs, was only possible because the Gospels were written before, or soon after, the Jewish war.

But there are details within the New Testament which show an early date of writing. By comparing the letters of Paul in the New Testament with the account in the Acts of the Apostles one can calculate the date of these letters, often to within a month or two. The same comparison provides a date for Acts.

Luke

Acts 28:30 tells us that Paul lived in Rome for two years – this takes us to the very early spring of 62 AD. The book then ends with no significant event. There can be only one reason to finish the book at this point without any specific event to end on; that is that this is the time at which Acts was completed. This means that Acts was completed in early 62 AD. Acts 1:1 refers to the other of Luke's books, the Gospel, as having already been completed. This means that Luke must also have been completed before 62 AD, probably at least one year previously.

The date of Luke can be confirmed by a look at 1 Timothy. Here we read:

For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer is worthy of his wages" (1 Timothy 5:18).

The second saying, "The labourer is worthy of his wages" is a direct quotation from Luke 10:7. As 2 Timothy was

written in late 62 AD, we can conclude that the Gospel of Luke must have been written before this.

John

The Gospel of John contains many accurate descriptions of customs and places from before 70 AD. One is a description of the Pool of Bethesda:

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches (John 5:2).

The point here is that this is in the present tense. The pool of Bethesda was still standing when John's Gospel was written. This means that John's Gospel was written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Matthew

Matthew provides a similar text:

That field has been called the Field of Blood to this day (Matthew 27:8).

When Matthew's Gospel was written people knew the names of fields near Jerusalem. In 70 AD the field boundaries would be obliterated and the survivors of the population were deported as slaves and sold throughout the Roman Empire. The memory of the names of plots of land would have been soon forgotten. Matthew's Gospel was also written before 70 AD.

Mark

There are several passages in Paul's letters which possibly allude to Mark's Gospel. One example is where Paul is writing about marriage to believers:

Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband (1 Corinthians 7:10).

Jesus spoke about divorce on several different occasions, but only Mark's Gospel contains a saying about a wife leaving her husband (Mark 10:12). Other references to the words of Jesus seem to allude to sayings recorded in the Gospel of Mark. This implies that the Gospel of Mark was available to the Corinthians when the letter was written.

1 Corinthians was written between Passover and Pentecost in 55 AD. Mark seems to have a strong association with the Apostle Peter, who was probably the main source for the accounts in the Gospel. Tracking the movements of Peter and Mark, it is unlikely that the Gospel of Mark was written much before 50 AD. This gives a date for Mark's Gospel between 50 and 55 AD.

Conclusion

The Gospels were all written well within 40 years of the events they describe. Not only were the Apostles alive to write them, but the opponents of Jesus were alive as well. The fact of an early date, coupled with the existence of many witnesses tells us that the Gospels are reliable. Hostile witnesses would have loved to have been able to say that the Gospels were inaccurate but they could never do so. There are no attacks on inaccuracies in the Gospels in early writings.

A full review of New Testament dates can be found in the 'Date of Writing' section at www.biblethink.org.uk.

John Thorpe

The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 3

The Third Commandment: The Name of God

The third commandment was:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

This told the Israelites to treat the name of their God as a holy thing, not to be treated lightly. Nothing should be spoken by them that could bring God's name into disrepute, or damage His reputation.

We feel the same about someone we love deeply. We become angry if someone makes a joke about them, or says they did something we know is untrue. We jump up with indignation and protest, and defend them against the bad accusation. This commandment therefore follows on from the first one. If we love God with all our heart, we will not say bad things about Him. We will be upset if other people mock Him or use His name lightly in a joke or swearing.

Blasphemy

One particular situation where this might occur in Bible times was when men used God's name to try to convince someone they were really telling the truth, but when in fact they were lying. For example, they might say "I swear by God that I will come to see you on Wednesday", and then failed to come on Wednesday. God always keeps His promises.

People who make promises in God's name and who then fail to keep them will not be trusted in the future. But, more importantly, they injure God's reputation, for He always keeps His promises.

That, in fact, is what the Bible means by the word 'blasphemy'. To blaspheme is to injure the reputation of someone.

That is how Caiaphas the High Priest managed to have Jesus put to death. He asked Jesus, on oath, i.e. by God, if he was the Son of God. When he said 'I am', they said he was guilty of blasphemy, and condemned him to death for breaking the third commandment. He had taken the name of God in vain, they said. (Of course, if anyone else had said 'I am' it would have been blasphemy, but in Jesus' case it was absolutely true.)

Also we should not swear an oath to confirm what we are saying. Jesus is clear about that:

I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by



the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King (Matthew 5:34–35).

Swearing

Another situation we come across a lot in the West is the use of God’s name in swearing, or as an exclamation. This again is treating the divine name with disrespect, which is completely unacceptable.

It is interesting that the Jews, to avoid breaking the Third Commandment, used to avoid speaking the name of God at all in conversation. For example, instead of saying ‘the Kingdom of God’ they would say ‘the Kingdom of Heaven’. But that was only a change of description – it meant the same thing.

We can add to the name of God the name of Jesus His Son, who is also described as Lord and King. To misuse his name is as bad as wrongly using the name of God.

God also has highly exalted him [Jesus] and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth (Philippians 2:9–10).

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Due Respect

How does this command apply to the Christian? Well, as Christians we too should treat the name of God with full reverence. He is our heavenly Father, whom we love, but He is also a great King.

We must always speak about our God in a manner of reverence and respect. We should not swear when things go wrong, or use His name to express surprise or anger. If we have to work with people who do swear in this way, we could politely but firmly ask them not to do so in our hearing.

Paul insists our mouths should be free from coarse language:

...neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks (Ephesians 5:4).

Now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth (Colossians 3:8).

So the third commandment supports the first and the second – they are all about the greatness of God and our attitude to Him.

We worship Him only, because He is the only true God. It therefore follows that we do not make rival gods and worship them, or let other things take His place; and as we saw here, we speak about Him in terms of respect.

David M. Pearce

Coming, Ready or Not!

Rob was playing hide and seek with his children. He could hear them giggling and, unbeknown to them, knew exactly where they were hiding. They went silent for a while and then started whispering “What’s he doing now?” Rob waited a little longer and then called out “Coming, ready or not!” The children shrieked with excitement.

God’s Warnings

Throughout history God has warned people about important events, often involving judgement, for which they should prepare. Notable examples are the Flood in the days of Noah, and the captivities of the nation of Israel.

Although He gave the people plenty of notice, He seldom said exactly when the particular event would happen. It is a tragic reflection of human nature that only a small minority of people ever took notice of these prophetic warnings. Consequently, the results were catastrophic for the many people who ignored them.

The Return of Jesus

Jesus has promised to come back to the earth, this time as righteous judge:

[God] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:31).

An event like this is completely outside of our natural experience and may be difficult to imagine. But so

were other cataclysmic events in history. Jesus compared his coming to the Flood of Noah’s day:

As the days of Noah were so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be (Matthew 24:37–39).

The apostle Peter warned that sceptics would mock this promise:

Scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Even Jesus himself did not then know the time of his return (see Matthew 24:36) and he warned that he would come when least expected (Matthew 25:1–13) even to those who believed him and were waiting for him.

Are We Ready?

Our world is most certainly not ready for this event, though it may happen very soon. God has warned us to prepare for the coming of Jesus.

Whatever we or others may think, Jesus is coming back – whether we are ready or not. If we are ready, then we, like the children in our story, will shout with unimaginable joy.

Anna Hart

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