

PRESBYTERIAN NETWORK

ISSUE
32/2

SUMMER 2021

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND & WALES



THE CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST COMFORT



**AMAZING
GRACE**



**THE GLORIOUS
SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE**



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Champion of Rome

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you attend the midweek Prayer Meeting? Some years ago, I heard a godly minister say that there are three non-negotiables in the Christian's life: Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and the mid-week prayer meeting.

In M'Cheyne's time less than 200 years ago, we read, 'Thursday evenings were special in the life of St. Peter's, Dundee. Over eight hundred souls gathered weekly to storm the throne of grace.'

Do we do that in the EPCEW? Do we greatly desire to assemble where Christ has promised to be in the midst, and to bring our praise and our prayers to the Lord?

Do we pray for revival? For the salvation of souls? For growth in grace? For victory? It is time to pray.

'Behold how good and pleasant for brothers to dwell together...there the LORD commanded the blessing – life for evermore' (Psalm 133). 'Pray without ceasing' wrote Paul. ◦



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SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

CHELTENHAM - NAUNTON LANE



Saturday 17 April was a very happy occasion for the church when their nearly-three-year vacancy came to an end with the ordination and installation of Rev. Matt Faux as minister. Members and a few friends attended the service. (Numbers were limited due to necessary social distancing; the service was live streamed so that others could watch.)

The meeting was led by the Moderator of Presbytery, Dr Paul Corney. The prescribed questions were put by Dr Falko Drijfhout, Clerk of Presbytery. Rev. David Pfeiffer preached a sermon from 2 Timothy. Rev. Andy Young gave the charge to the new minister and Rev. Chris Kavanagh the charge to the congregation.

Matt Faux, who originally trained as a schoolteacher, had completed a B.A. degree in Theology at Union School of Theology, Bridgend. Matt is married to

Rachel and they have three boys: William, Joshua and Isaac. In July 2020, along with his wife Rachel and family he came to Naunton Lane as a ministerial assistant. He then proceeded successfully to complete Presbytery examinations, following which he was unanimously approved for a call to the ministry.

On 13 January the members of Naunton Lane Church unanimously called Matt to be the minister, and following approval of the call by Presbytery, Matt graciously accepted it. Speaking about the commencement of his ministry at Naunton Lane, Matt said, 'Having been brought up in the local area and been a member of the church in the past, it is a great privilege and honour for me to come back as the minister of Naunton Lane EPC. My family and I are very excited to be back in Cheltenham and I'm looking forward to being the minister of this dear congregation and to seeking to reach out to the local area of Leckhampton with the good news of Jesus Christ.'

 Stephen Johnston





SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

DURHAM



On 15 May, Martin Towers was ordained as an elder of Durham EPC.

BARRY - CHRIST CHURCH

We are looking forward to resuming worship services in August. Drew Goodman and his family returned to Wales in July after a productive home assignment in the US. We are thankful for the faithful service of Russell Young and Richard Holst during a challenging year. We thank the Lord that He has upheld members who have experienced health issues and other trials. At the end of June, Russell retired from the office of elder for health reasons. Russell and his wife Janet have worked tirelessly for many years in Barry. They have contributed much to position our mission congregation for opportunities that lie ahead and will be greatly missed.

 Lauren Goodman

BERLIN

It is hard to reflect on church life at the present time without thinking about Covid. Nonetheless God is bigger than the circumstances we live in. We are thankful that God was merciful to us during the past month. A few members have left us, but not because of disunity or unkindness, and they would have returned to their home countries sooner or later anyway. We can truly say that God has united us as a church. In spite of different political convictions and assessments of the situation, there is above all love for each other and a desire for fellowship among the brothers and sisters.

We are grateful that the regulations are gradually being lifted and we are given more opportunities to meet freely again. It has not been possible so far to have two services on a Sunday, but we hope and pray that we can re-introduce the second service at the end of the summer.

 Johannes Müller

BURY ST EDMUNDS

The Lord's people in Bury St Edmunds are thankful to have been able to continue public worship through this year. Recently, the congregation were glad to welcome a new family from the local USAF base but were sad to say goodbye to two military families who have been posted elsewhere.

We rejoice with the Jolley family as they are coming to the conclusion of the process to



SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

adopt a baby girl who has been placed in their care. As part of this process, Matthew took paternity leave for a few months whilst the adoption of their new baby was finalized. He returned to full-time ministry on July 4.

On May 22, 2021 the church held a Thanksgiving Service for Ian Pape. Matthew spoke on Revelation 7: 9 -17, 'The Heavenly Future'. The service was well attended, within the bounds of the prevailing restrictions.

With the lifting of restrictions there has been more freedom to make contact with people living in the local community, and we look forward to being able to resume regular meetings for children.

 Bill Matthes

CAMBRIDGE

We continue to give thanks to God for His goodness and mercy towards us as a fellowship. Life in Cambridge has a continual cycle of people coming and going, and this summer we are saying farewell to a large number of those who have been a part of our congregation. Do remember us in this, and ask that the Lord might bring new folk among us, to encourage us and help us in the work of the kingdom of God.

We still feel concerned for those of our number who have not returned to church since the easing of restrictions associated with the pandemic. We need wisdom in encouraging such folk.

We look forward to appointing Sam Tunnicliffe in a part-time capacity, with particular responsibility for the student work in the church, as well as other areas of church life. Please do pray for him as he takes up this task in September.

Finally, ever since the beginning of the church in Cambridge over 30 years ago, we have been looking for a building in which to worship and from which to carry on and extend the work of evangelism. This search continues, and at the moment we are exploring the possibility of having almost exclusive use of an existing church building in central Cambridge. Discussions are at an early stage, but do please remember us in this whole matter of finding a more permanent 'home' for the congregation.

 Peter Leverton

CARDIFF - BETHEL

We are grateful that we have been able to continue to hold regular church services during the restrictions and have even recommenced the singing of hymns, albeit wearing masks.

Our elders have worked hard maintaining pulpit supply during our time without a minister and we are grateful for those men who have stepped in to ensure the flock is well fed.

We were first introduced to Andrew Graham, originally from South Africa and now living in Wrexham, North Wales, in February when he was invited to preach at Bethel, choosing a verse from Isaiah 57



SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

'This is Your God' for the morning service and then in the evening from the book of Revelation, 'Preparing for the Second Coming'. A Question and Answer session followed on another evening when a larger church building was kindly offered by Ely Presbyterian Church to accommodate members during the current restrictions.

This led to a unanimous vote to call Andrew Graham to be the next minister of Bethel and on 26 June 2021 his credentials were accepted by Presbytery and a call was made to him to be our minister, which he duly accepted. We thank God for the provision of a new minister at this time and pray that practical issues for Andrew, his wife Sian and children, Lillie, Anwen and Matthew will be resolved quickly.

Throughout this interim period, we have tried to maintain fellowship with each other through various outdoor activities, including a get together at a nearby park and a summer picnic at another venue.

The Women's Studies have continued online and are now following a study of Proverbs; we pray for a measure of wisdom for all of us at this time.

 Patricia Stowell

CARDIFF - IMMANUEL

The ministry in recent weeks has handled Paul's Letter to the Ephesians and the Book of Leviticus. The Lord has encouraged us in several ways: we have begun to hold a pre-service prayer meeting again; we have seen a few new people attending the services. Classes for covenant children meet before the morning service to study and memorize the catechism and texts of Scripture.

On Thursday evenings, a small class, led by Paul Corney, is held for men who want to become established in the fundamentals of the Reformed Faith.

On Mondays and Fridays the church building is open so that neighbours can come and talk to us. So far we have had several really good conversations.

Christian Concern recently broadcast a discussion entitled 'Church Unlocked', covering the topic of the relationship between the church and the state. Our minister was invited to take part in this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgOxa5j51C0>.

 Peter Naylor





SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

HULL

We are thankful that the church is now functioning in a fuller way. We are now meeting in the building for two services on the Lord's Day and midweek for prayer and Bible study. It is a joy and great encouragement to have Rev. Carl Peet and his family with us. Carl is preaching for us most morning services and giving us much-needed consistent ministry as we work through the gospel of Matthew.

Some members and attendees have not returned to the church yet and we are hoping that they will feel confident enough to come back when restrictions are eased.

 Chris Lawson

NEWCASTLE - ALL SAINTS

The past few months have been a time of significant change for the congregation at All Saints. After 12 years of faithful service, our minister Bill Schweitzer and his family have now returned to America, where Bill will take up a post as chaplain for the US military. Some families and individuals have also had to move away from Newcastle in recent weeks. It was all the more encouraging, therefore, to welcome several people into membership in the month of June, including a woman from Iran and a family from Pakistan. We are also thankful for answered prayer regarding international students, as a number of Chinese students have started worshipping with us. Our young people are looking forward to their summer camp in

August, and we are all enjoying the increased opportunities to fellowship with each other as restrictions lift. Please join us in praying for our elders at this time of transition and important decision-making.

 Peter Winch

OXFORD

We continue to worship online (Zoom & YouTube) for our Sunday morning services. We hope to resume the use of St Luke's Chapel as soon as the lockdown restrictions end. We have been meeting in person for our Sunday evening services at the Friends Meeting house. These have been joyful occasions of worship and fellowship. When the weather has allowed we have met in the beautiful enclosed garden area.

We recently welcomed several new families and individuals into church membership. These brothers and sisters have been a real encouragement to the church. We have also been encouraged by outreach to students. Dr Neil Martin (Ministerial Assistant) leads a Monday evening event in a local coffee shop called The Search. After a 10 minute gospel talk from a passage of Scripture, the 50+ students sit in small groups and discuss the claims of Christ. This is a remarkable opportunity and we pray for the fruit of conversions.

The need for a more permanent location for our services continues to be a matter of urgent prayer.

 Andrew Young


SPOTLIGHT on the Churches


Oxford Garden Church


SALFORD

We are grateful that Rev. Chris Statter has been able to have some time off and is now back, leading us in worship and ministering God's word. We have known our Father's care through those presbyters who have now become our assessor elders: Rev. Michael Cochran, Rev. Dr Stephen Dancer, Dr Falko Drijfhout, Rev. Larry Wilkes, and Mr Jonathan Winch. Rev. Andrew Graham and others have also ministered to us, supporting Chris's phased return to ministry. The distances men have travelled faithfully to feed this little flock are not insignificant, and the Lord knows others' labours of love in prayer too. The session of Bethel PC Cardiff warmly welcomed us to fellowship with them in evening services for a time,

via Zoom, when we did not have capacity for evening services. This fellowship in the gospel was sweet, notwithstanding our joy when we could recommence evening worship in person.

We give thanks for Rev. Dr Kevin Bidwell and Mr Paul Brown, who have now resigned from the Salford session. It was their vision, and initiative in holding exploratory Bible studies in the Greater Manchester area, that led to the starting of the church-planting work here.

Chris continues sermon series in Acts and Hebrews on the Lord's Day mornings and evenings. We ask that the Lord would keep on restoring us, strengthen us and add to our number those who are being saved.

 Rosemary Statter



SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

SHEFFIELD

Our regular two services on the Lord's Day have continued since January, much to the delight of all those attending Hill Top Chapel. It feels as if there will be much rebuilding to do in the next two years. The Covid providence in the last 18 months has had an impact upon people spiritually, mentally, and on their whole well-being. We will need wisdom to build for the future and not simply to perpetuate what we have always done. It is urgent that God's people should offer earnest prayer to the living God for refreshment and an awakening of the church.

In the autumn we await to observe whether some normality will return with university students coming to Sheffield. If that is the case we may expect to receive an influx of students in the church, but there seems to be much uncertainty. One thing we are assured of is that the foundation we have as Christians is far from uncertain. We continue to receive new members, but a small number of people have barely been seen in public worship since March last year.

 Kevin Bidwell

LINCOLN

With the news that Ben Thomas and his family will be returning to the USA permanently at the end of July, this means that we will have to pray for the Lord's help for this church planting work. There is a solid core in Lincoln, but they have had no in-person worship or studies for 17 months.

We look to the Lord to see how best to pastor the saints there through this season and to determine its viability, if a labourer cannot be found soon to carry this burden.

 Kevin Bidwell

SOLIHULL

We continue to meet in the park for Sunday morning worship with some visitors and many passers-by, some of whom stop to listen, and in a URC building in the afternoon. We are still seeking the Lord for a permanent 'home' for our church. The elders are currently investigating the possibility of meeting in a school in Solihull for morning and afternoon services.

We have elected Jonny Umpleby as a new elder and a commission has been appointed by Presbytery to examine him; we look forward to his ordination after that. Some of the men in our church have been through a series of sessions with an elder on diaconate. They and the Session are seeking God's leading as to whether or not any are put forward for the office of Deacon.

One of our members got married recently and we pray that his wife will join us following their honeymoon. We continue to have opportunities to reach out to non-believing family members, friends, colleagues and neighbours. We long to see the Lord work in the hearts of these people to see them saved. There are members of our congregation who have still not returned to worship on Sundays. Pray that the Lord will draw them back to gather with his people to worship him.

 Rachel Morgan



SPOTLIGHT on the Churches

SUNDERLAND

These past few months have been in a tiny way reminiscent of post-war experience. We have numbered the casualties of the past year and a half, and appraised the material, spiritual and psychological damage which accompany them. For our church this has been no exception. Having spent more than half our church's life in some form of lockdown, we look to the Lord as the only source of constancy.

We praise God that we have been able to continue meeting in various venues, returning in April to our original community library. We hosted three evangelistic services over Easter and welcomed a few visitors. We are grateful that we have not lost any of our congregation to illness. New faces have brought encouragement, and familiar faces give comfort week by week.

Nathan is looking forward to conducting his first two wedding ceremonies this summer. This reminds us that God's mercies are new every morning. We pray that He will raise up a new generation to love and serve Him.

 Anna Hilton

TRANÅS

We are very happy to have services again: Sunday mornings at 10 am. The restrictions were eased on June 1. We are allowed to have 50 people together. We are not many - four families - so lots of space for more people to come. Thank you for having us in your prayers.

 Trygve Lundblad

ZÜRICH

Since the end of May, we have moved into a more permanent location that is located in Zürich-Altstetten. It is not as central as we would have liked; however it is spacious, has beautiful scenery, and a lot of people walk past, as it is right at the edge of the city, next to a forest with many paths. We are now able to worship morning and evening. Please pray as we want to distribute invitation flyers and have set up signs outside the church building to make our presence more obvious to those who pass by.

We have also resumed our prayer meetings in homes as the Covid restrictions have further eased. Florian has recently been covering baptism in these meetings, which prompted a positive response from some attending. Every Sunday, we open up our home for people to stay for lunch. This time has been a blessing thus far and helps some people from further away to come to both services.

Please pray particularly for a hunger for the Word of God, protection from the attacks of the evil one and that people would be added. ○

 Florian Weicken



REVIVAL CONFERENCE

What comes to your mind when you think of revival? Do you long for it? Can Christians play their part in bringing revival about? C. H. Spurgeon wrote *'Revival begins by Christians getting right first and then spills over into the world.'*

Revival is the theme of this year's Autumn Conference from Westminster Seminary, hosted in Newcastle's All Saints Presbyterian Church.

Experienced speakers

Iain Murray, Geoff Thomas, Brian Edwards, Maurice Roberts, Jeremy Walker, Warren Peel, Bill Schweitzer and Peter Naylor are speakers. All are experienced pastors; many have taught and written extensively on revival. With topics such as *'A People Saturated with God'*, *'The Welsh Revival of 1904 and its Impact on My Family'*, *'Reformation and Revival: England in the 16th Century'*, and *'Longing for Revival'*, our time together promises to be fascinating as well as edifying.

Why not join us?

A conference is a great way to meet, and fellowship with, others. In previous years the Autumn Conference has drawn EPCEW folk from Bury St Edmunds, Durham, Hexham, Sunderland, Sheffield, Solihull, Oxford, Cambridge, and Cardiff – alongside other Christians from four continents.

Reflecting on last year's conference, Cambridge's Doug McCallum said *'I was hugely blessed. Every talk was of a very high quality - full of Biblical truth, practical wisdom, and an appropriate level of challenge. The fellowship was a real encouragement...I am already looking forward to the conference in 2021.'*

EPCEW member Liam (24), said *'The conference was an exceptional time of Christian fellowship, alongside solid reformed teaching, with a real emphasis on the glory of God. I loved being there and very much look forward to attending next year!'* ○



Register:

Ticket prices are heavily subsidised; for more information visit www.presbyterianseminary.org.uk/conference



Amazing Grace



REV. DR PETER J. NAYLOR

What a breathtaking chapter 2 Kings 13 is! It covers the reigns of two kings of Israel: Jehoahaz (814-798 BC) and his son Joash (798-782 BC). These two did evil in the sight of the Lord. What was their sin?

They continued in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the details of which are recorded in 1 Kings 12:25-33. He corrupted the worship of God: he made two golden calves, changed the appointed feasts, and made priests of men who were not authorized by God's law to be priests.

It is a gross offence in God's sight to make any carved image purporting to represent him, breaking the second commandment. Think about the Tabernacle.

What would the worshipper find in the most holy place? No statue. Only the ark of the covenant, on which was the mercy seat, and over it the outstretched wings of the cherubim. So, where in pagan temples you would find an image, in the Lord's house there was an empty space, so to speak. The King eternal, immortal, invisible, whom no man has seen nor can see, who dwells in unapproachable light (as in 1 Tim.

1:17; 6:16) cannot be represented by golden calves or by any graven image whatsoever. No wonder the Lord was provoked to anger (2 Kings 13:3).

Yet the same sin is repeated in many churches today. With shameless boldness, crucifixes have been put up, and manger scenes displayed. As if the eternal Word, made flesh, now risen and exalted above the highest heaven, can be represented by such carvings and pathetic little models. Such blindness; such perversity; such dishonouring of the Lord!

For the 32 or 33 years that these two men reigned in Israel, the people were presented with such carved images, such corruption of worship.

And they suffered greatly as a result. God's judgment fell on Israel. He used Hazael, king of Syria, as his appointed instrument of judgment. Notice the way 2 Kings 13:3 and 7 describe it. 'He made them like the dust at threshing' and this is echoed in Amos 1:3 - 'they threshed Gilead with implements of iron.'

GRACE TRIUMPHING

When we understand the great offence committed against the honour and majesty of God, and we see his anger aroused, and we take that seriously, what the LORD then did with his people and these two kings is astonishing. Indeed, all grace towards hell-deserving sinners is astonishing, is it not? John Newton's hymn, 'Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me' conveys the wonder.

Grace to Jehoahaz

The chastening hand of God moved this man to pray. The Hebrew verb chosen is interesting; it means 'to make himself sick'. He pleaded with God with great earnestness. It was a heartfelt cry for mercy. And the Lord listened! His grace is piling up. And he gave Israel a deliverer. Probably this deliverer was Adad-nirari III, the king of Assyria.

The heart of God is revealed here: 'he saw the oppression of his people'. Their suffering moved the LORD to pity.

Grace to Joash (verses 14-25)

(This is Joash king of Israel, not Joash king of Judah).

The prophet Elisha was now old and sick; he was approaching his death. Joash wept over him. This young king who was offending God nevertheless seems to have valued, perhaps even loved, the ageing prophet of God. We cannot explain this any further. There it is: he wept.

This was the moment when Elisha would prophesy for the last time. It was a prophecy of deliverance.

'Take a bow and some arrows.'

'Put your hand on the bow.'

And Elisha put his hand over the king's hand on the bow – a very significant confirming action: God is in this!

'Open the east window' which faced towards Syria, of course.

'Shoot.' 'The arrow of the LORD's deliverance....' (verse 17).

What a wonderful message. A promise of deliverance.

Why would the Lord deliver his people? The answer is: 'The LORD was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them' (verse 23). His eye was still upon his people. He still felt for them in all their distresses.

But why? The text takes us deeper:

'because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and he would not destroy them or cast them from his presence.'

In that moment, when Joash, and Elisha with him, shot that arrow, the arrow of the Lord's deliverance, we are taken back centuries to the time when the LORD appeared to Abraham – back to Genesis 12, 15, 17 and 22.

When God made promises to Abraham, he fully intended to keep them. Therefore, he framed those promises within a covenant. As Hebrews shows, that covenant was the same as a last will and testament, which no man could ever alter, once it was made. It was an unalterable covenant, an unchangeable covenant, a solemn word, from which the LORD would never turn back. It was an everlasting covenant, which he confirmed with an oath, and he renewed it with Isaac, then Jacob, then Israel. In that solemn everlasting covenant God bound himself to Abraham

and his seed for ever (consider Galatians 3:15-29 and Hebrews 6:13-18).

Our God is a faithful, covenant-keeping God. His people are often unfaithful, but God is never so. Paul wrote to Timothy: 'If we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).

EMBRACING THE PROMISES

So, the Lord gave Joash a promise of deliverance, and with that promise came a call to action, a solemn duty: 'for you must strike the Syrians at Aphek till you have destroyed them' (ends verse 17). Elisha continued: 'Take the arrows. Strike the ground.' This was the king's opportunity to show symbolically that he was ready and eager to carry out the task. But he wasn't; he was half-hearted. Only half-hearted. He struck the ground – but only three times. 'You should have struck it five or six times!' Twice as many times as you did. Why did you stop, Joash? Why were you so unenthusiastic that you only did half a job?

We really need to learn from this. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: 'not lagging in zeal, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord' (Romans 12:11). We have no reason to think that

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Our God is a faithful, covenant-keeping God. His people are often unfaithful, but God is never so.

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We have no reason to think that God will be pleased with half-baked, feeble, reluctant service. Where in Scripture are we encouraged to sluggishness and sloth?

God will be pleased with half-baked, feeble, reluctant service. Where in Scripture are we encouraged to sluggishness and sloth? Quite the opposite: 'I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth' (Revelation 3:15-16). Who would be a Laodicean Christian then? Who would be a cake half-turned, half-baked, mixed with the world? (Hosea 7:8). Who would offer to God what his employer would not accept? (Malachi 1:8).

Elisha's spirit is right: he knew what was required. You should have signalled that you are keen to execute this task and finish it. As the Korean martyrs' families cried out, seeing their fathers and brothers going to be martyred: 'To the end! To the end.' Hold fast and stand up for Christ, even to the death!

There is a little incident that signals God's approval of Elisha (verses 20-21). He died and they buried him. Then they were burying another Israelite who had died, and because a band of Syrians was coming, they hastily put him into Elisha's tomb – and he was restored to life. What is this? At the very least it is telling us that God's word and God's servant are all about life!

GRACE AND FAITH

Faith embraces the promises of God. The believer places his hand on the head of the Lamb and follows him wherever he goes – to the end. There are two great lessons found here in 2 Kings 13. First, it teaches us to know our God. Then it teaches us how to serve him.

First then, our God is a covenant-keeping God. He will never break his covenant promises and his oath. 'Great is thy faithfulness!' Today, we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have been ingrafted into that same covenant – Galatians 3. In Christ, the blessings promised have become ours. The promises are ours, since we are heirs with Christ. This majestic strength in our God's unchanging will and grace must bring him great and everlasting glory. It must give us great assurance of faith. No doubt. And it must draw from our lips and our hearts the song of praise.

Second, our response to his promises must be to pursue them with all our heart. Nothing less than a whole-hearted embrace is honouring to him. Nothing short of whole-souled commitment is enough.

Has God promised to bless the nations through Abraham's seed? Through Christ, and through us? – because that is what we are, Abraham's seed. Then we must receive the great commission and crying out for power by his Spirit, we must by all means seek to present Christ to the world, and call men to him, to his cross, to his throne. Has God promised to bless our children with

us? He certainly has. Then let that encourage fathers and mothers, fathers especially, to labour in teaching and praying for, and setting an example to, their children. Will we neglect Ephesians 6:4? Will we teach them only occasionally, or thoroughly?

Has God promised to sanctify us and conform us to Christ? Then shall we not pursue holiness?

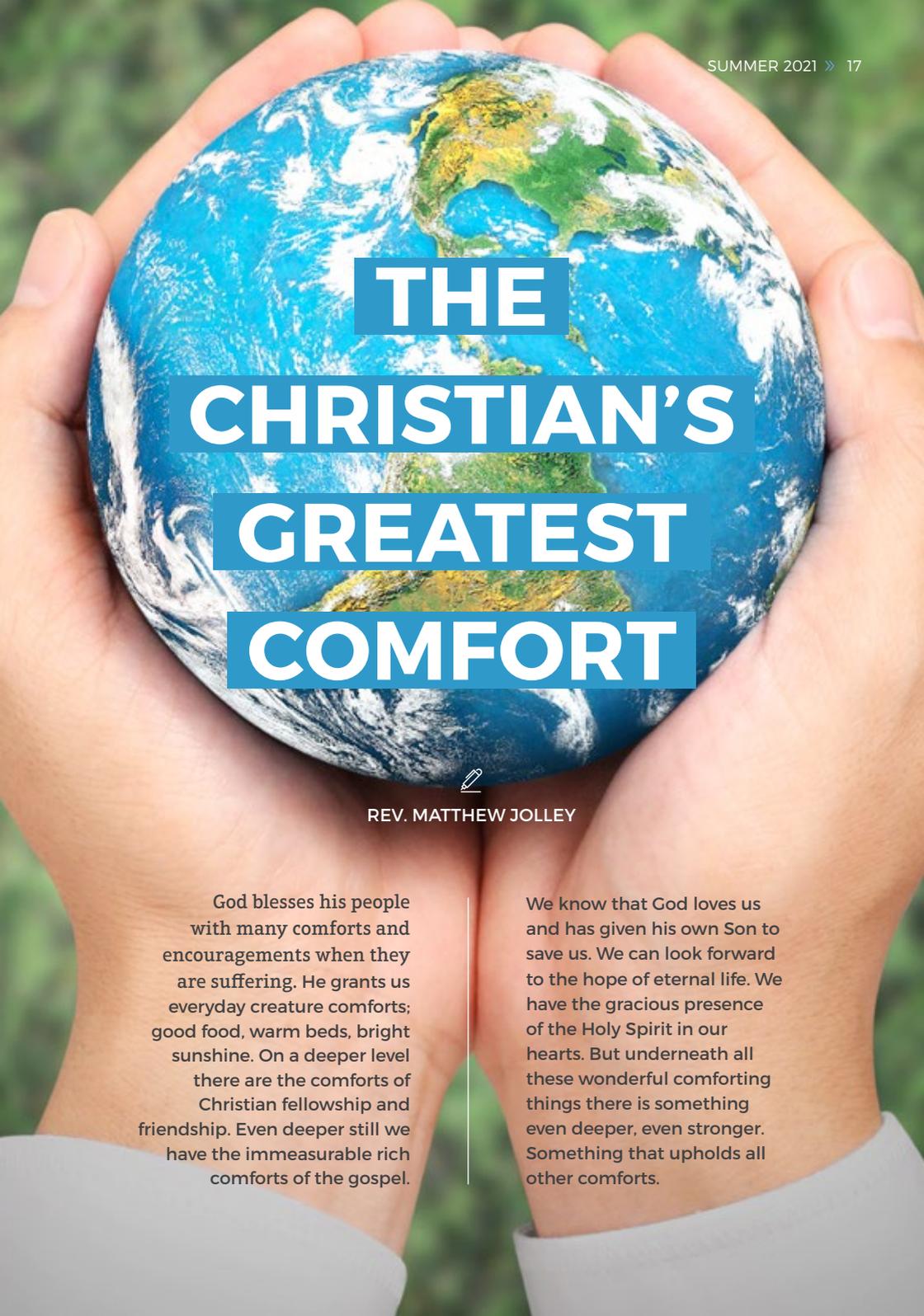


We must receive the great commission and crying out for power by his Spirit, we must by all means seek to present Christ to the world, and call men to him, to his cross, to his throne.

Grasping the determined will of God, expressed in his promises, ought to move us to energetic single-minded service. How can we equip ourselves to give to him our lives? Shall we not become diligent disciples in the school of Christ (the church)? Will we attend intermittently the means of grace, some Sundays missing, sometimes being a oncer, a Sunday-morning-only worshipper? Shall we not seek whatever gifts the Lord might grant us so that whatever opportunity he presents we

may seize it? Shall we love our neighbour vaguely and minimally? Shall we let the car-less take the bus rather than go out of our way? Shall we close our home and just meet in church? Will there be the empty chair of 'hospitality' at our dining table? Such questions could be multiplied, but the point is one and the same. What kind of Christian are you? Am I? Are we 'Ruths' in the harvest, young Davids in battle, Daniels in prayer, and Pauls in ministry- 'in labours more abundant'? (2 Cor. 11:23).

May God's amazing grace, staggering faithfulness, boundless compassion, move us by his Holy Spirit, to be persevering and energetic followers of the Lord Jesus Christ – to the end. ○



THE CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST COMFORT



REV. MATTHEW JOLLEY

God blesses his people with many comforts and encouragements when they are suffering. He grants us everyday creature comforts; good food, warm beds, bright sunshine. On a deeper level there are the comforts of Christian fellowship and friendship. Even deeper still we have the immeasurable rich comforts of the gospel.

We know that God loves us and has given his own Son to save us. We can look forward to the hope of eternal life. We have the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. But underneath all these wonderful comforting things there is something even deeper, even stronger. Something that upholds all other comforts.

Our greatest comfort is the sovereignty of God. God is in control. God is God. He is the King of all creation. He rules over everything, including our trials, our losses and crosses. Even if everything else is stripped away from you, every crutch, every external support, you can always fall back upon the truth, God is sovereign. Our text in the Scriptures comes from the words of Job, the righteous sufferer: 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord' (Job 1:21). Job was a faithful believer, a truly righteous and godly man. God himself commends him, saying 'Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?' (1:8).

Yet, a terrible drama unfolds. The devil appears before God. He accuses Job before God, suggesting Job is only good because God blesses him. If Job lost everything he would quickly turn on God. The Lord rebukes the evil one by allowing him to attack Job. Job loses all his property and wealth. His children are killed. Job himself suffers from a terrible disease that is rotting his body. The story of Job that then unfolds is of several of Job's friends debating why this has happened.

Some of them say it is very simple: Job must be a bad man and God is punishing him. Bad things happen to bad people. Job rejects this, he stands firm in his integrity. The mystery of suffering in this life is that bad things do happen to good people. Suffering happens and so often seems meaningless and unfair.

Crucially, Job does not blame God. As it says in verse 22, 'In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.' But Job does want to understand.

Why has God permitted this? Why does God seem to be fighting him?

The answer is not what we might expect. God's answer: he tells Job to trust him. Even though he cannot understand now in the midst of his suffering, he must trust God, trust that God is still in control, above the storm raging in his life. He calls Job to have hope. In one of the high points of the book Job sees from afar that one day a redeemer will come. He will stand upon the earth and will save Job. He is of course seeing the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the midst of his heavy grief and raw pain, Job says in faith, 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' Everything he has had in life has come from God. God has given him life and wealth, and family. And it is God who has taken these things away from him. He humbly worships God. He acknowledges God is God. What is Job saying? He trusts in the sovereignty of God. That is his comfort.

To understand what we mean by the sovereignty of God, think of three simple words: right, rule, and results. God has the absolute *right* to *rule* over everything. More than this, he always gets the *results* he wants.

God has authority and power over everything and he actually exercises it. He actively rules over everything. He directs, ordains, commands, and brings about his sovereign will. As the creator of everything, he has the right to rule. Infinite in power and wisdom, he always brings about the final result he desires.

The Scriptures frequently describe the Lord sitting on a throne in heaven. Clothed with majesty and splendour, light and fire come from him, surrounded by heavenly beings, who act as his servants. From his throne he rules uncontested over all creation as King. God has absolute sovereignty over everything. He is in

control of time and space and everything in them. He knows the end of history from the beginning, and he brings it about. He is not bound or limited by anything outside himself. He is in control of the greatest things: the movement of the stars in space, the laws of the universe, such as gravity or magnetism. He is in control of the great events that happen on earth, of nations, rulers, wars and powers.

The Bible describes God as in control of all kinds of events; the weather, battles, or building projects. He grants success or failure. He decides all outcomes. He is in control of the smallest things. He designs each snowflake, he directs each sunbeam, he controls the path of each raindrop. God is not an absentee landlord. He is not a spectator to events in the world.

As Nebuchadnezzar testifies in Daniel 4, 'His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; he does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"'

He has made each one of us, ordaining where and when and how we are born, what gifts and skills we have, and weaknesses. He appoints what opportunities,



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gifts, and trials come our way. Even the day of our death is appointed by him. Nothing escapes his rule. He knows us better than we know ourselves. There is no such thing as chance, fate, or destiny. The stars have nothing to do with it. God is in control of you and your life.

God is sovereign over salvation. Before it is our choice, it is his choice. He has ordained to save his elect and to punish the wicked. God reserves to himself the right to offer salvation and grace to whomever he wishes. We have no right to be saved. It is his right to give grace and mercy to whomever he wishes. If any of us is saved from our sins, it is only by his sovereign grace from first to last.

God's sovereignty is absolute over everything, but it is also mysterious. God exercises his right and his rule in ways beyond our understanding. He is God and we are not. He maps out and controls impossibly complicated chains of cause and effect that we cannot get to the bottom of. What about evil, the devil, and sin? What about free will? What about the choices we make everyday? Does this make us puppets on a string? Not at all! The Westminster Confession helpfully summarizes the Bible's teaching: 'Neither is God the author of sin, nor, is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away but rather established.'

God is in control of everything but not in any way that means he does evil. Neither does he destroy our wills and real choices. He uses means and secondary causes. All these things are wrapped up in, are part of and under, his sovereign will. God is at work in them and through them, but he never does anything evil or undermines his creation. The Confession is not trying to explain such questions away philosophically; it is merely summing up what the Bible teaches. Christians tend to get into trouble when they try to explain more than this in ways that go beyond what Scripture says. There is mystery as our limited finite minds try to understand the infinite and eternal mind of God. He is God and we are not. We can no more comprehend all his ways than we can catch the sea in a bucket. Mystery does not mean that there is no answer. Mystery means we are in the presence of answers too big for us to grasp.

For us as for Job, around us there may seem to be a dark raging storm. God speaks to us out of the whirlwind, from above it, saying, 'Trust me, believe in me, especially when you do not understand.'

We must never separate God's sovereign rule from everything else the Bible reveals about him. He is gracious, slow to anger, quick to forgive, longsuffering, abounding in mercy and faithfulness. So loving, he has given his own eternal Son to suffer and die for us. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of all. The hand that controls the future, so to speak, belongs to the same God whose incarnate human

hand was pierced for us on the cross. Even when human beings are at their absolute worst, doing shockingly evil things, God is still in control and doing good. The supreme example of course is the death of our Lord Jesus on the cross. He was put to death by sinful men, a terrible sin, but God used it to save and redeem us all, according to his predetermined plan.

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There is mystery as our limited finite minds try to understand the infinite and eternal mind of God. He is God and we are not. Mystery means we are in the presence of answers too big for us to grasp.

So how is the sovereignty of God our greatest comfort in suffering? Let me give you three words: purpose, proportion, and power.

Your suffering has a purpose. It is not meaningless, or pointless. God is at work in it for your good. What good purpose does God have in his children's suffering? There is a double purpose; to show his glory and to make us glorious. Remember the devil's accusation; Job only loves God because God is nice to him. So really it is God's glory at stake in Job's trial. Job was given over to suffering in order to vindicate God; to show that God is worth trusting and loving even when everything seems to

be against you.

Any parent would be willing to suffer, even die, for their children because they are so precious. So how much more precious and wonderful is God's glory and worth suffering for? When God calls a Christian to suffer, he is calling them to testify by their faith that God is glorious and good. Strange though it might sound, it is a position of honour in the service of God, appointed to be a witness for him, by trusting him in the midst of suffering.

His purpose is also to make us glorious. He uses suffering to free us from sin's grip on our lives. As a loving father disciplines his precious child, so God uses suffering in his children's lives to break us free from sin. Suffering chips away at our selfishness. It exposes our weakness and humbles us. It teaches us to depend more on God. My own father suffered greatly in his life from a horrible illness. He was disabled, he died too young, he lived in constant pain. But he was the most godly, generous, Christ-like man I have ever known. I will never forget how he once said to me that he dreaded to think what kind of man he would have been if he had not been afflicted.

But much more than just stopping us sinning, God's good purpose is to make us like Jesus. Even the Son of God had to suffer in this world. If we want to follow him we must walk the same rocky path, carrying a cross like his.

Out of suffering we are able to minister to others. We develop compassion, sympathy and sincere love, empathy for fellow sufferers, wisdom to help them. God has a good purpose for our suffering.

The second word is proportion. God has measured out our suffering. He controls how long and how deep our suffering is. Every stroke, every blow God sends you, is restrained. It is controlled, it is necessary, and he will send nothing else. Like a recipe in the kitchen when different quantities have to be measured out exactly, so the Lord measures out the right amounts of

difficulty and mixes them in at the right time. Never one tiny part more than is absolutely necessary for your good. Only what is needed. It will not last one second more than your Father knows is best. You are not in the hands of a cruel or capricious God but the loving hands of the heavenly Father who cares for you.

Your suffering is not a wild horse out of control, running wild with you desperately clinging to the back. It is controlled by a firm hand on the reins, steering it and guiding it until it carries you safely home.

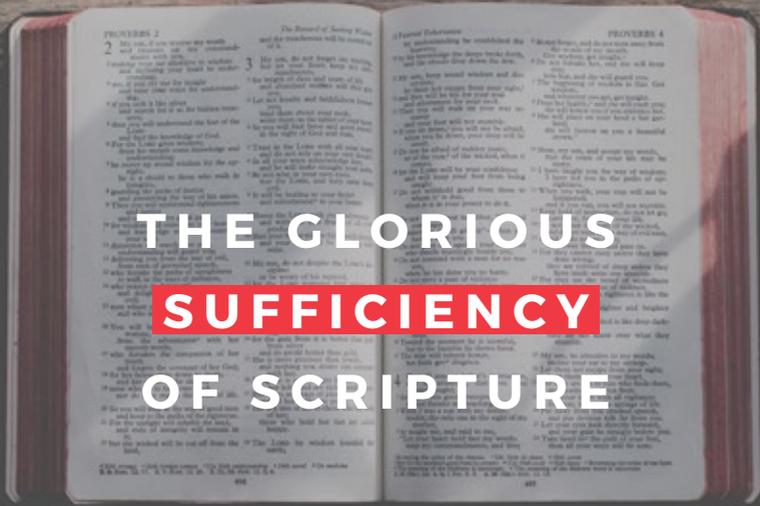
The third word is power. Because God is sovereign it means his power can keep you. In Christ you are absolutely safe and secure forever. Nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. Nothing and no one can pluck you out of his hands. You stand on the immovable Rock of Ages. When you have no strength of your own, when it seems impossible to go on, never fear nor despair. God has decreed it shall pass, you will be upheld, you will triumph. His sovereign power can sustain you in impossible situations.

Think of Daniel's three friends thrown into the fiery furnace. The Son of God appeared in the fire with them. They emerged again without a single mark. The Lord's absolute power can preserve you in the fire and you will emerge in his kingdom.

God is in control even in our suffering. As Christians our great comfort in suffering is the sovereignty of God. Underneath us are the everlasting arms. ○

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THE GLORIOUS SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

 REV. DAVID PFEIFFER

Do you ever think to yourself, 'I wish I lived during Bible times'? Do you ever wish, like Abraham, you heard God speak? Better still, do you wish you had been one of Jesus' disciples while he was here on earth? That would have been so much better than what we have now, wouldn't it?

It is true that the apostles and those who were with Christ had a unique experience. The Apostle John speaks of that which they had seen, heard and handled (1 John 1:1-2). They witnessed signs and wonders which confirmed the identity, mission and message of Christ.

But we would be completely wrong-headed to think that their situation and experience was better than ours. The Bible makes it clear that we are the ones who are better off. Jesus said to his disciples

that it was to their advantage that he went away, because he would send his Holy Spirit (John 16:7). We are the ones on whom the ends of the ages have come (1 Corinthians 10:11), who have received the promised one (Hebrews 11:39-40).

It is tempting to clamour for audible voices, for clear and specific direction from God for particular situations and circumstances. Wouldn't it be so much better? Gideon had his fleece; David had his ephod; Paul received a vision of the man from Macedonia calling him to help them. Shouldn't we expect the same? Of course, God could do this, no question! But this is not the way he works in our lives today.

Why? Consider who Gideon, David and Paul were. Though they were ordinary men, they had a unique place in redemptive

history. Gideon did not act as a private man, but as a leader of God's people to overthrow the Midianites. David was the Lord's anointed, the one to whom he would make great promises for the benefit of the whole of mankind (2 Samuel 7). Paul was God's chosen ambassador to declare the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles.

These were not everyday occurrences either. It would be a wrong reading of the Bible to think that the miraculous and spectacular incidents were ordinary run-of-the-mill events. What we have in the Bible is a selective history. Consider, for example, the fact that between chapters 16 and 17 of Genesis in the Abraham story there are 13 years! Herman Bavinck, in speaking of the historical books of the Bible, says that they describe 'the progress of the kingdom of God. Whatever has little or no relevance to that is but briefly mentioned and ignored altogether.' (*The Wonderful Works of God*, page 74).

God's word is not a private revelation to individuals, it is a covenantal word to his people. Yes, it often comes to individuals, but those individuals are representatives of God's people. They receive the word not just for themselves but for the good of the kingdom of God on earths.

THE GLORIOUS SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

As noted above, it is to our advantage that Jesus has ascended to heaven, because now he has poured out his Spirit at Pentecost (John 16:7). In the context of John 13-17, Jesus' upper room discourse with his disciples before he went to the cross and ascended to heaven, we see that one of the major works of the Spirit is to enable the apostles to preach the word and ultimately to write Scripture.

Consider these verses: 'But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you' (John 14:26). 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you' (John 16:13-14).

Jesus is promising his disciples that after he has ascended the Holy Spirit will lead them into *all truth*. He will come alongside them, having been sent from the Son and the Father (John 15:26), and communicate all the truth necessary for the ongoing sanctification of the church (John 17:17).

In other words, we are in a better place now, because we have a completed canon of Scripture. The Apostle Paul describes the church as a temple built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:19-22). God is the great master builder; the foundation does not need to be re-laid.

Paul teaches the sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16:17: 'All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.'

In the context, Paul is giving his last will and testament to Timothy and through him to the church. Everything Timothy needs as a man of God, as a minister of the gospel, is contained in the Scriptures. It is therefore first directed to ministers of the word. But because ministers of the word are gifts to the church to equip the whole church for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12), it necessarily follows that the Scriptures are sufficient for us for every good work.

SUFFICIENCY ILLUSTRATED

This point is highlighted beautifully and dramatically in the incident on the Emmaus Road in Luke 24:13-35. In this passage Jesus meets two disciples whose eyes are kept from recognizing him (verse 16). He draws out from them what they are discussing, namely the crucifixion of Jesus, the dashing of their hopes, and the strange phenomenon of the empty tomb. Luke has cleverly reiterated the facts of the story.

But more to our point, Jesus then rebukes them for being foolish and slow of heart to believe all that is contained in the old covenant Scriptures (v. 25). He then opens up the Scriptures to them to show that they all find their fulfilment in him.

Jesus ends up staying with these two disciples to spend the evening with them. As he breaks bread, they suddenly recognize him. He then vanishes from sight and they realize who he is. They memorably exclaim: 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?' The Lord Jesus is teaching an important lesson here. *Before he reveals himself to his disciples by sight, he opens up the Scriptures concerning himself.* He is teaching his disciples that we live by faith in the word of God, not by sight. They should have known that Jesus would be raised – the Bible clearly taught it! The Scriptures are sufficient.

This is confirmed by what follows. Jesus appears again to his disciples in Luke 24:36-53. He reveals his hands and his feet. He eats with them. He is confirming his physical reality, that he is no ghost. But then what does he do? He opens up the Scriptures, and their minds to understand them. This is the basis of his commissioning

them to be witnesses to the ends of the earth. How are they to do this while he is in heaven? They are to open up the Scriptures which reveal him. This is exactly what we see them doing in the book of Acts. Paul's approach to spreading the truth is to reason from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2-3).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Note that the Lord Jesus opens their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:45). When we speak of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, we do not mean that we do not need the Holy Spirit – God forbid! Without the Holy Spirit opening our minds, we are dead to the Bible. Though he is always speaking objectively in the Scriptures, the Spirit must work in us subjectively. Without the Spirit working in us, we are blind men and women.

Here we must distinguish between *revelation* and *illumination*. The Spirit now works to illumine our minds as to the meaning and application of the completed Scriptures rather than give fresh infallible revelation. We must not confuse the two. At the same time, we must not close our minds to the Spirit's work; as Richard Gaffin (Perspectives on Pentecost, page 120) puts it: 'Often, too, what is seen as prophecy is actually a spontaneous, Spirit-worked application of Scripture, a more or less sudden grasp of the bearing that biblical teaching has on a particular situation or problem. All Christians need to be open to these more spontaneous workings of the Spirit.'

THE MEANING OF SUFFICIENCY

Does this mean that the only book we need to read is the Bible? That we should

discard all others? Of course not! If you want to be a dentist, you will not find all you need to be a dentist in the Bible! If you want to be a car mechanic, the same applies!

The sufficiency of Scripture is a specific kind of sufficiency. Though the whole Bible is true and contains the most important truth, it does not contain all truth. Rather, it is complete and sufficient for the purpose for which it was given. As we have seen above, its purpose is to teach, to convict, to correct, to train in righteousness and equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It reveals God's glory to us, makes us wise for salvation through Jesus Christ and teaches us how we ought to live.

THE IMPLICATION OF SUFFICIENCY

What is the implication of the sufficiency of Scripture? The obvious implication is that we should mine the truth of the Scriptures. This is how our Lord Jesus proceeded. Jesus' knowledge of the Scriptures was breathtaking. At the age of 12 in the temple all who heard him were astonished at his understanding (Luke 2:47). He confounded the Sadducees masterfully from Exodus 3 (Matthew 22:23-33). On the cross, in excruciating pain and suffering, he saw everything through the grid of Scripture.

Isaiah 50:4 explains it: 'The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens me; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught.' Christ devoted himself to the Scriptures. Do you?

In the early chapters of Luke, we see that the Spirit is actively at work through the ordinary means of grace. Jesus is born

into a godly family, part of the believing remnant of Israel. He is circumcised the eighth day and met by Simeon, a man full of the Holy Spirit. His parents fulfil everything according to God's law. When he is old enough, he goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. He grows in wisdom day by day (Luke 2:40, 52).

What the Spirit first produced in Christ he is now producing in us. The same resources are ours in Christ. Through the ordinary means of grace – the word of God, the sacraments and prayer – and by the power of the Spirit we are being moulded into his image.

MORE TO COME

I began by asking whether you ever wish you were one of Jesus' apostles. I have argued that we are far better off. God spoke in times past in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken by his Son, God's last and best word to us (Hebrews 1:1-2). But there is a sense in which that yearning is right, even if it can be misdirected. For we are looking forward to something more than the Scriptures. We are looking forward to something more than living by faith. We are looking forward to living by sight.

One day Jesus Christ will return and the morning star will rise in our hearts (2 Peter 1:19). Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2). What a day that will be! Are you looking forward to it?

In the meantime, we have the word of God, which is our lamp in a dark place, to which we are to pay close attention (2 Peter 1:19). Let us be keen students of it, stirred by the prospect of his glorious return. ◦



JOHN 1:51



REV. DR PETER J. NAYLOR

And He said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man' (John 1:51).

What did our Lord mean? As J. C. Ryle noted, 'commentators differ exceedingly.'

Our Lord is clearly alluding to Jacob's dream (Genesis 28:12-17). A ladder was set up from heaven down to earth (not from earth to heaven). It was not a ladder for Jacob to climb up but a symbol of God's coming to him. Afterwards Jacob says, 'The LORD is in this place'. 'This is none other

than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.' But now, to Nathanael, instead of the ladder, our Lord speaks of himself, the Son of Man and angels ascending and descending upon him. In him, God has come to man.

But when will they see these greater things? Some think that it refers to the second coming of Christ at the end of the age. However, notice the word 'hereafter'. In Greek the phrase is ἀπ' ἄρτι (*ap' arti*) which means 'from now', from the present time.¹ What was happening at that time? Nathanael and the other men there were

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becoming Jesus' disciples. From that time onwards, they would spend three years with him, observing him, his life and the many signs and wonders that he would do, and hearing his teaching.

Immediately after this, the Gospel of John takes us to Cana and the wedding, where the water is made wine. There 'he manifested his glory' in an act that displayed his creative power and also his identity as the Bridegroom. That was the beginning of signs. These signs witnessed to the true identity of Christ as God the Son. And seeing him they saw the Father.

As the disciple whom Jesus loved writes his Gospel, he is continually showing us that in Christ God was present and making himself known.

There should be no difficulty in accepting that Jesus spoke of himself as the ladder and the gate of heaven. Is this not what he says later? 'I am the door' (John 10:7) and 'I am the way' (14:6). And there is no reason to stumble over the idea that he is the house of God: he 'tabernacled among us,' and he is 'this temple' (1:14; 2:19-21). Consider the force of his words to the woman at the well that the hour has now come when true worship will not be on that mountain or in Jerusalem but in Spirit and in Truth – in him (4:21-24).

Furthermore, this understanding of Christ as *The Ladder* fits the wider teaching of John's Gospel. He is 'the Word', who speaks from the Father. He does not speak his own words or do his own works, only the words and works that the Father has given him to do. When men see him, they see the Father. 'I am in the Father and the Father in me' (14:10). He is the Son who makes the Father known.

What then is Jesus saying to Nathanael and the others? You are impressed because I saw you under the fig tree? Now, becoming my disciples, you will see much greater things. You will see that God is in this place, in me. You will see the heaven opened and the way to God in me. He is referring to his deity but also to the position that he occupies and the work that he has come to do. The disciples will see his glory. 'And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). ◦

¹ Several translations, e.g. ESV, NIV, omit this phrase because they follow a minority of manuscripts (P66, P75, X and B. C. against the majority and A). Even Tischendorf regarded the minority as defective, but changed his mind in order to commend his favourite, X.



Robert Bellarmine

CHAMPION OF ROME



KEVIN MCGRANE

The Jesuit cardinal Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), the 400th anniversary of whose death is noticed this year, was the greatest polemical theologian, controversialist, and defender of the Papacy that the Church of Rome ever produced. Whereas the Council of Trent (1545-1563) dogmatically defined the doctrine of the Church of Rome in a series of decrees and anathemas, it fell to Bellarmine to provide all the theological underpinnings and, by controversy, to counter every argument of Protestantism, whether Lutheran, Calvinist or whatever. He did so principally by his lectures to young Jesuits training to be the foot soldiers of the Counter-Reformation, and by his

printed *Controversies*. Bellarmine also produced a catechism that was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church as its official teaching until the First Vatican Council in 1870, which relied heavily on Bellarmine's arguments in favour of Papal infallibility.¹ He was declared by Rome a Doctor of the Church in 1931, the prerequisite to which was his canonization as a saint the previous year.

The Protestant Reformers had studied the Scriptures in their original languages, and deeply familiarized themselves with church history and the writings of the Church Fathers, but there was little comparable

expertise within the Church of Rome: few Roman apologists until Bellarmine could argue convincingly from history, or from the Fathers, or from the original languages, leaving the Church of Rome at a significant disadvantage in controversy. A milestone in modern history was the production of the *Historia Ecclesiae Christi* by Lutheran scholars at Magdeburg (1559-74), thirteen volumes covering a century each, often known as the *Magdeburg Centuries*. Painstakingly and meticulously researched using primary sources from all over Europe, the *Magdeburg Centuries* demonstrated the continuity in all ages of the Church and her doctrine in each article of faith. This made it relatively easy for Protestants to expose and counter the errors in the traditional narrative of the Roman church with its mediaeval legends, inventions, hagiographies, and forgeries.²

Roberto Francesco Romolo Bellarmino was born on October 4, 1542, in the town of Montepulciano in Tuscany, then within the Papal States. He was the third of five sons, and had seven sisters. His maternal uncle, Cardinal Marcello Cervini, hailed from the town, and became Pope Marcellus II when Robert was 12. In 1557 Spanish Jesuits set up a school in the town, which attracted Robert away from the local grammar school. He quickly came under their spell to join the order, contrary to the will of his father, who wished him to qualify in medicine. In an extraordinary circumvention of the requirement for a 2-year novitiate, Robert was fast-tracked into taking vows at the age of seventeen. Within days he was fitted with his cassock and dispatched to the Jesuits' Roman College in Rome. He became *Il Maestro Roberto* at 21, and thereafter taught at Florence, then at Mondovi in Piedmont, and at Padua, all the while honing his skills in preaching.

In 1569 Bellarmine was sent to Louvain in the Low Countries, where he distinguished himself by regular preaching and public lectures in Latin, his auditors exceeding 2000 persons at a time.³ Louvain was a Roman Catholic stronghold in a region much influenced by Protestantism, and his Jesuit superiors knew that there he could in relative safety cut his teeth in controversy. The main dispute when he arrived was an intramural affair at the University, where Michael de Bay (Latin 'Baius'), who had attended the Council of Trent as a theologian delegate, taught that Roman theology had become too reliant on mediaeval scholasticism and the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Baius records that he 'endeavoured to bring theology back to Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers', which sounded suspiciously like the trail that the Reformers had blazed. Unsurprisingly, Baius' views were condemned by a Papal Bull and yet rumbled on.⁴ The Jesuits, disliking any sympathy at the University for what they considered crypto-Protestantism, set up their own college in Louvain in 1570 and installed the recently ordained Bellarmine as its first professor, where he dutifully lectured and wrote against the views of Baius, while avoiding mention of his name. His star in controversy being in the ascendant, but now ailing in health and troubled by regional wars, Bellarmine was recalled to Rome in 1576 to take up the chair of Controversial Theology at the Roman College, where he had once trained. He served successively as lecturer, then as Spiritual Father of the college (1588), and at length its Rector (1592).

Bellarmino saw that his special task was by every means to disrupt the Reformation especially in England and Germany, and throughout his long life he strained every nerve in writing, in person, and by

his considerable influences to achieve that end. The zeal of the Jesuits, who for generations infested kingdoms to subvert them to popery, was due in large part to the labours and legacy of Robert Bellarmine. 'I was appointed to teach them controversial theology', he said, 'to arm these new soldiers of the Church for the war with the powers of darkness which they should have to wage when they returned home.' Bellarmine began by teaching his students that 'the sum and substance of Christianity itself' was Papal primacy, and that Satan 'goes to work with a certain method of attack on the Church', assaulting each of the articles of the Creed in turn. Having successively failed to overthrow the Church from the first to the eighth article,

[Satan] turned with savage fury on the ninth and tenth articles: 'I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins.' From the year AD 1000, those two articles have been the main object of heretical attack... the heresies of this age are practically concerned with the ninth and tenth articles of the Creed.

These idiosyncratic premises assured that Bellarmine and his students would frame every argument of the Reformers *ipso facto* as heresy, and an anticipated satanic attack on the Church, its unity, the Papacy, the doctrine of justification, and hence salvation itself.

At the Roman College he also wrote his

famous *Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei, adversus huius temporis haereticos* ('Disputations on the controversies of the Christian faith against the heretics of these times', often known simply as the *Controversies*). The enterprise comprised two million words that took him over a decade to complete,⁵ endeavouring to close off every single argument of Protestantism, for, he said, 'had I not

produced all the arguments I could discover on their side, the heretics would say that the ones I omitted were unanswerable.' John Eadie, writing in 1857, remarks that

These volumes exhaust the controversy on all points as it was known in those days... For many years afterwards [Bellarmine] was uniformly taken by protestant advocates as the champion of the papacy, and a vindication of Protestantism regularly took the shape of an answer to Bellarmine.⁶

To this work Bellarmine added his treatise of fifteen 'notes' (i.e. marks) of the true church,⁷ which was answered

in a series of tracts by fifteen eminent English ecclesiastics, including no less than one archbishop and six bishops, each addressing one of the notes.

When in 1589 Henry IV of France, then notionally a Calvinist, succeeded Henry III, Bellarmine was dispatched to France with the papal Legate to strengthen the anti-Protestant League and by all means to prevent the installation of this excommunicated supporter of the Huguenots. 'I have nothing to do with

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politics', protested Bellarmine, 'but I want to see a King of France that will establish the decrees of the Council of Trent', which meant in practice willing Philip II of Spain to take the throne instead and impose the Spanish Inquisition. Bellarmine soon found himself trapped in Paris besieged by Henry IV, and endured ghastly deprecations, surviving, he says, 'on a sort of dog-broth' and once 'a splendid present' from the Spanish Ambassador, 'a haunch of his own charger.' The poor were reduced to consuming axle grease or worse, and tens of thousands of them died. Eventually the siege was raised, and when news of the death of Pope Sixtus V reached him, Bellarmine returned to Rome.

While in Rome, Bellarmine was constantly consulted on theological matters and pressed to serve on many committees. In 1597 Pope Clement VIII appointed him as his personal theologian, Examiner of Bishops and Consultor of the Holy Office (the Inquisition). In 1599 Clement chose him as Cardinal 'because the church of God does not possess his equal in learning.' Bellarmine disliked the role because it imposed expectations on lifestyle and required a large household and retinue to fulfil official duties, hospitality, and pompous ceremonies, which greatly interfered with his highly ascetic personal practices. Worse still, it brought the danger of being elected pope, which he dreaded: his late uncle Marcellus II had warned that it was scarcely possible to be saved once installed in that seat.

In 1603 Pope Clement conferred on Bellarmine the Archbishopric of Capua, where he took up residence for three years until the death of Clement, and then returned to Rome for the election of his successor. In this and the two subsequent conclaves he attended during his lifetime, Bellarmine attracted the largest share of votes in the first rounds, but to his great relief he could never succeed because

he was judged to possess virtues incompatible with the office of pope. As Cardinal Borgia and others admitted, 'Bellarmine deserves to be elected for his goodness, but his great rectitude and integrity of character are against him', as were that 'he professes to act according to his convictions' and 'would scruple to accept a bribe.'

Bellarmino's zeal to ruin the Reformation and restore popery entailed wherever possible to persecute, arrest and execute Protestants, and to embolden Roman Catholics to intrigue and rebel against Protestant rulers, and encourage assassins to slay them.

Whilst this had been the practical policy of the Roman church before Bellarmine, it was he who gave the institution its weighty theological justifications. The Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and its aftermath brought the matter again into focus, eliciting sharp controversy between King James I and Bellarmine. In the wake of that attempt at mass murder the English Parliament had imposed an oath of allegiance requiring abjuration of 'the doctrine and position that princes which be excommunicated or deprived by

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the Pope may be deposed or murdered by their subjects, or any other whatsoever.' Both Pope Paul V and Bellarmine strenuously resisted its imposition on Roman Catholics because it opposed the doctrine of 'indirect power' that they and their predecessors had long taught and assiduously practised, 'stigmatizing as a usurpation the right that the church had claimed and exercised throughout the whole medieval period.'⁸ After all, Pope Pius V had excommunicated the previous royal incumbent Queen Elizabeth, relieved all her subjects of obedience to her, and assured any would-be assassin that he would be doing God's service, and would receive full absolution and a holy benediction from the Pope for sending her out of the world. Therefore, for Roman Catholics to swear such an oath and thereby relinquish the duty laid on them by the papacy to annihilate Protestant princes would, argued Bellarmine, be a violation of conscience, an execrable sin, and a denial of the Catholic faith.

Outside the annals of church history and theology, Bellarmine is remembered in secular history principally for his role as Inquisitor in relation to scientists: his leading the Roman Inquisition's trial, condemnation and burning of Giordano Bruno in 1600 for formal heresy (who only incidentally advanced the hypothesis that the universe and was of infinite extent and had no centre); and especially the interdicting of Galileo Galilei, who taught the more traditional Copernican view that the sun was at the centre of a finite universe.

Galileo first visited Rome in 1587 and struck up a lifelong friendship with Jesuit mathematician and astronomer Christopher Clavius,⁹ which he renewed in 1611 when visiting the Roman College.

During that stay, Galileo had a private audience with the pope, and banquets were held in his honour at which Bellarmine and his Jesuit colleagues were invited to view the heavens through his telescope. But Galileo would not refrain from mocking those who on theological grounds opposed his views on the rotation of the earth and heliocentrism, and his disparagement appeared to bring the Scriptures into question. He was given friendly advice that Copernicanism had been extensively investigated and discussed with Cardinal Bellarmine of the Roman Inquisition, with the conclusion that 'If you treat of the system of Copernicus and set forth proofs without bringing in the Scriptures, the interpretation of which is the business of qualified theologians, then you should not be opposed in any way whatsoever.' Galileo brazenly ignored the advice, and the Grand Duke of Tuscany's ambassador in Rome warned that the Inquisition was growing restive about Galileo's obduracy and his determination to visit the city again. After a few months in Rome, matters came to a head in 1616, with the Tuscan ambassador complaining that

Galileo sets more store by his own opinion than by the advice of his friends...using so much violence in his attempts to force others into holding [his opinions]... he gets hotly excited about these views of his, and has an extremely passionate temper, with little patience and prudence to keep it in control. It is this irritability that makes the skies of Rome very dangerous for him.

The upshot was that Galileo was compelled to appear before Inquisitor Bellarmine, who notified him that his opinion that the sun was an immovable body at the centre

of the universe could not be defended or held,¹⁰ though he also certified that Galileo had not been required to recant or abjure 'in any place whatsoever, any opinion or doctrine held by him; neither has any penance...been imposed upon him.'

Towards the end of his life Bellarmine focused less on controversy and more on devotional writings. His last work appeared in 1619, *The Art of Dying Well*, and naturally raised expectations of its author, which were not disappointed in the hagiographic accounts of his Jesuit biographers, who had an eye to propelling him to sainthood. Many matters considered pious and saintly to Roman Catholic readers cannot but dismay Protestants, including the circus of ecclesiastics at his deathbed, who for relics brought innumerable caps, crucifixes, and rosaries that he might touch them, and reduced his clothing to tatters by snipping off swatches and pillaging his wardrobe; who dyed cloths in his blood after his

passing, which was 'so greedily taken, as that no drop remained', and, but for a guard, 'the very body itself had been taken away and divided for pious spoil.'¹¹ They record that Bellarmine died in great peace on September 17, 1621, confident that he had never committed a single serious sin during his entire life, and comforted by thoughts of the immense blows he had struck to Protestantism all his days, which he had secured would long continue after his decease through his writings:

Having a little Cross of silver in his hand, he kissed it very often, and...blessed himself divers times wherewith...He showed this zeal to the holy Crucifix to shew his zeal against the heretics of these times...that the world might see how exact he was in adhering unto that Faith in all and every branch and member which in his works he had so learnedly defended, and procured in this his last sickness...to have left registered in print after his departure.¹² ○

¹ Even those who opposed that doctrine at the Council acknowledged his pre-eminence over three hundred years. For example, Von Hefele wrote in 1883 that the *Controversies* were still 'the most complete defence of the Catholic Faith...that has appeared down to this present day.'

² The Church of Rome eventually produced an official answer to the Magdeburg Centuries with the *Annales Ecclesiastici* by Caesar Baronius, 12 volumes (1588-1607). However, what material of this series appeared before Bellarmine had completed his *Controversies* (1581-93) covered only up to the mid-fourth century.

³ In one sermon he advises his hearers that if 'the last day has come' and 'our doctrine of the Eucharist turns out to be false and absurd', they may readily counter the reproach of Christ for worshipping the communion elements: 'we may safely answer: "Yea, if we were wrong in this, it was you who deceived us."'

⁴ Baienism was the direct precursor to Jansenism.

⁵ The material originally appeared successively in three volumes (1581, 1582, 1593), but editions from 1596 bound them into the now standard set of four volumes with additional material.

⁶ Those who wrote against the *Controversies* in their

entirety include Andrew Willet, Amandus Polanus, William Ames, David Pareus, and Johann Gerhard. Those who tackled portions of them are very numerous, and include Franciscus Junius, William Whitaker, Matthew Sutcliffe, Johannes Piscator, George Downname, Zacharius Ursinus, Johann Alsted, Samuel Rutherford, John Davenant, Lancelot Andrewes, Thomas Tenison, Pierre Du Moulin, and Thomas Morton. Bellarmine himself considered William Whitaker his most learned and able opponent.

Surprisingly, the *Controversies* have never been translated into English in their entirety, and most of the translated portions are recent.

⁷ John Henry Newman would come to add his own 'notes' in the nineteenth century based on his theory of the development of doctrine.

⁸ J.C. Murray, *Bellarmino on the Indirect Power* (1948).

⁹ Clavius was the architect of the Gregorian calendar introduced in 1582. The second largest crater on the visible side of the moon is named after him.

¹⁰ Such a view is, as we now know, scientifically untenable.

¹¹ E. Coffin SJ, *A True Relation of the Last Sickness and Death of Cardinal Bellarmine* (1622).

¹² *Ibid*



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heaven upon earth.

D Martyn Lloyd-Jones