

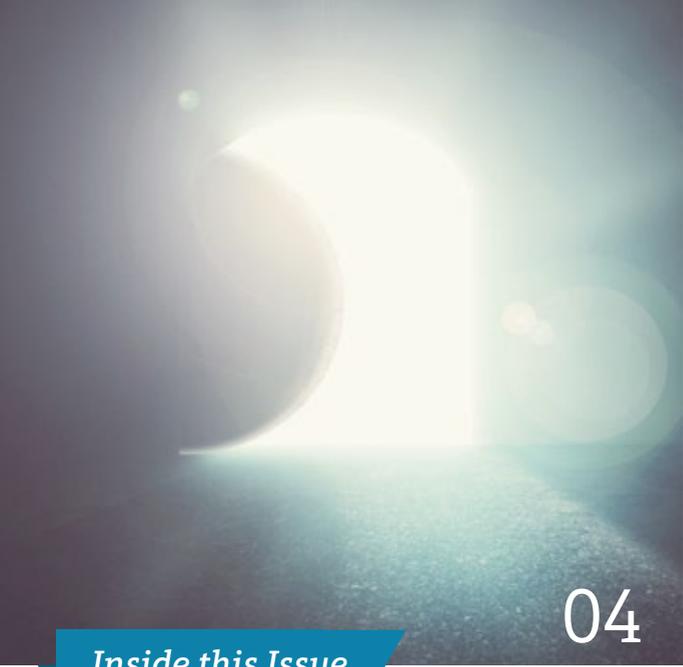
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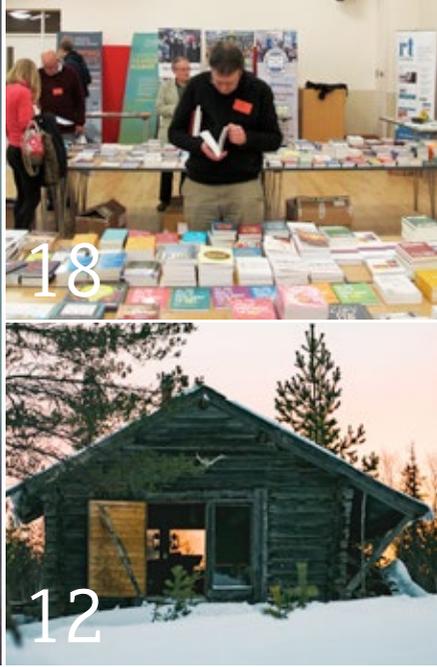
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- ▶ SHACK Theology
- ▶ The Resurrection of Jesus (John 20)
- ▶ William Gadsby and Encouragement for the (Almost) Defeated (part 2)

Preaching the Biblical Gospel

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS
An Exposition of John 20:1-18



04



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- ▶ **Editor**
Kees van Kralingen
- ▶ **Founding Editor**
Erroll Hulse
- ▶ **Associate Editors**
UK Mostyn Roberts
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USA Tom Nettles
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Editorial

Preaching the biblical gospel

KEES VAN KRALINGEN

The last issue of *RT* had as its theme: 'The gospel of Christ revealed'. This is also the gospel that has to be proclaimed in all the world and to all the nations. The articles in this issue build on this theme as they emphasise in different ways that we have to be very careful that what we preach is the biblical gospel. We should only preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and died on the cross of Calvary, but who rose again victoriously. At this time of the year, at Good Friday and Easter, we think even more than usual about the great historical facts on which our faith is founded. This is why we can never cease to benefit from an exposition of the reports of these events in the Gospel. Bob Davey helps us to do this with his expository comments on John 20:1-18.

The apostle Paul warns us twice not to preach another gospel (Gal 1:8,9). Nowadays we can hear all kinds of different messages sold under the label of the gospel. There is the widespread influence of the prosperity gospel. Another one is a kind of therapeutic message that has become increasingly popular in the western world. An example of this is found in the popular *The Shack* written by Wm Paul Young. Mostyn Roberts examines this book and other, more recent writings by this author and exposes the unbiblical theology underlying this book. At the same time, there is an important message for us as Mostyn exhorts us to preach the whole counsel of God: the gospel that produces real love in us: the love of Christ.

An appropriate warning about other possible traps that can hinder us from

preaching the biblical gospel comes from the history of the church, and in this case from the example of William Gadsby. We have already read part of his story written by Oliver Allmand-Smith in the previous issue of *RT*. Gadsby's life is a wonderful example of God's transforming grace. We still love the hymns which Gadsby wrote. He also was a preacher of the gospel, even though his preaching was marred by his hyper-Calvinistic views. Despite this, he was used by God for the salvation of many people. This does not diminish our responsibility to preach the biblical gospel.

Finally, we have another example of gospel preaching in this issue of *RT* from Geoff Thomas. With this article we finish this series of sermons which he preached in Aberystwyth at the time of the annual Evangelical Movement of Wales Conference in 2011. They are all on the text of Deuteronomy 29:29: 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.' In the final sermon in this series, Geoff addresses in particular the question asked by someone: 'Are only a few people going to be saved?' (Luke 13:23). The answer that Jesus gave is nothing else but the gospel which is powerfully presented in this sermon.

May the articles in this issue help us to preach the biblical gospel in our day and age. Most of all, this needs fervent prayer as the apostle Paul reminds us by asking the readers of every one of his letters to pray for the preaching of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thess 1:5). ■



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THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS



AN EXPOSITION OF
JOHN 20:1-18

The first of two articles expounding John 20

To understand the events of the Resurrection Day we have to understand the state of mind of the apostles of Jesus who were in Jerusalem at that time. They were confused and dismayed by the betrayal, trial, death and burial of Jesus. It had all happened so quickly and for them unexpectedly. As a result they were in a state of shock and mourning. Their bright hopes for the future, built up over the last three years with Jesus, were all dashed. There had been good reason for Jesus to have prayed that their faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). We should not be surprised that it would take time for them to come to terms with the fact that Jesus was really alive again. Only in the evening of the Resurrection Day did they all, with the exception of Thomas, become fully convinced (although John believed the evidence of the empty tomb [John 20:8]).

A suggested order of the recorded resurrection appearances of Jesus

In Jerusalem, the first Sunday:

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18).
2. To the women returning from the tomb (Matt 28:9,10).
3. To Simon Peter (1 Cor 15:5; Luke 24:34). This would have been some time in the afternoon.
4. To Cleopas and his companion (Luke 24:13-32; Mark 16:12-13). This was in the afternoon. Please note that 3 and 4 may have been in the reverse order.
5. To the apostles and others in the evening (Luke 24:33-49; John 20:19-24). Thomas was absent.

In Jerusalem, the second Sunday:

6. To the apostles, with Thomas present (John 20:24-29).

In Galilee:

7. To seven apostles at the Sea of Tiberias (John 21:1-23).
8. To the eleven apostles on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16).
9. To five hundred (1 Cor 15:6). This may have been the same time as 8.
10. To James the Lord's brother (1 Cor 15:7). This could also have been in Jerusalem.

Back in Jerusalem:

11. To the eleven apostles on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:4-12).

On the road to Damascus:

12. To Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:1-7; 22:6-11; 26:12-18; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8).

John 20:1-10

20:1 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. ²Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.' ³Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. ⁴So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. ⁵And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. ⁶Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, ⁷and the handkerchief that had been around his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but

folded together in a place by itself. ⁸Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. ⁹For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. ¹⁰Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

The empty tomb

Now the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark. Very early in the morning of Easter Day while it was still dark, a company of women assembled and set out for the tomb with spices to anoint the body of Jesus (Mark 16:1). They knew where to go (Luke 23:55). The Gospels mention that this group contained Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and other unnamed women. John confines himself to the story of Mary Magdalene.

Some time before the women arrived at the tomb, Jesus had risen from the dead. Towards morning there had been a great earthquake at the tomb and an angel came and rolled the stone away from the entrance of the tomb and sat on it (Matt 28:2). The tomb was opened not to let the risen Lord out but to let people in to see the evidence for his resurrection for themselves. The sight of the angel, whose face was as bright as lightning and his clothes as white as snow, caused the guards to 'shake with fear and they became like dead men' (Matt 28:3-4). When they had recovered their senses they went to report what had happened to the authorities as best they could (Matt 28:11-15).

Mary Magdalene saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. When the company of women arrived at the garden where the tomb was, the place was deserted. By now it was past dawn, so it could be seen on approaching the tomb that the stone had been rolled away. All was quiet. No guards or angel were to be seen. At this point in time it seems that Mary Magdalene assumed the worst. To her mind, the only possible explanation why the stone had been rolled away was that the body of Jesus had been taken away somewhere else.

Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved. This so alarmed and distressed her that she did not wait to investigate further. She turned and ran as fast as she could to find the apostles Peter and John to tell them the terrible news.

'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb'. Mary told Peter and John the news as she understood it. She said that some people had come and removed the body of the Lord. Mary showed her deep devotion and honour for Jesus by still calling him 'the Lord'. The tragic events of the last few days could not eradicate all the good of the last three years. Mary herself had been delivered from demon possession by Jesus.

'And we do not know where they have laid him.' The worst of it was that neither she nor any of the other disciples knew now where the body of Jesus was.

So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. Peter and John ran to the tomb to see

for themselves. Mary Magdalene followed on (v11). John outran Peter and arrived at the tomb first. The garden was quiet. No one was there.

(John) looking in, saw (at a glance) the linen cloths lying there. John did not enter the tomb. He looked in and with a glance saw the grave-clothes. Jesus' body was not there. Neither Peter nor John had an expectation of a physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead. When Jesus had taught about his rising from the dead they had believed that Jesus had been teaching figuratively rather than literally.

Peter ... saw (surveyed) ... the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief (headcloth) that had been around his head not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Peter arrived and entered the tomb. He looked carefully at everything. Jesus' body had been wrapped in a linen sheet, a shroud (Matt 27:59) which had been secured with linen strips. The shroud together with the linen strips were lying undisturbed in their place but there was no body! It was as if the body had just vanished. The headcloth was the cloth wrapped around the chin and crown of the head to secure the jaw. This headcloth was now outside the shroud, neatly folded in a place of its own! It was all a puzzle for Peter, a puzzle for which he had no solution.

... and he (John) saw and believed. Some commentators think that the meaning is simply that John believed that the body had been stolen. However what John saw made him believe that Jesus was alive. Perhaps this was the moment when

John came to realise that Jesus had been speaking literally about rising from the dead. Perhaps he told Peter his thoughts. That Jesus was alive was not clear to Peter. He 'went away wondering to himself what had happened' (Luke 24:12).

For as yet they did not know the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

Neither men called to mind the relevant scriptures about the resurrection of Jesus. That happened later that day when Jesus appeared to all the disciples and gave them understanding of the scriptures (Luke 24:44-46).

Then the disciples went away again to their own homes (or lodgings). Peter and John had much to think about. Returning to the places where they were staying, they were soon to receive first-hand reports that Jesus was alive.

The first resurrection appearance - to Mary Magdalene

¹¹But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' ¹⁴Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' She, supposing him to

be the gardener, said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' ¹⁶Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher). ¹⁷Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father but go to my brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God."' ¹⁸Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things to her.

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. Mary Magdalene had followed Peter and John to the tomb. When Peter and John had left, she stayed behind. She poured out her grief in private at the place where her beloved Lord had been buried. It was natural that she would look into the tomb to see the place where Jesus had been laid. Her deep devotion was about to be richly rewarded.

And she saw two angels in white sitting. Mary saw two angels sitting as a guard

of honour where the body of Jesus had laid. The tomb was now a place of life and victory and not of death and defeat. As angels had announced the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-14) it was fitting that angels also announced his resurrection. The angels had been sent by the Lord to comfort Mary in her intense grief. But Mary was too grief-stricken to understand or take it in. She did not even seem to be moved by the sight of angels.

'Woman, why are you weeping?' This was a gentle way of saying to Mary that the tomb was now no longer a place for unrestrained sorrow. The angels brought tidings of life and great joy.

'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.' Mary spoke the one thing which weighed upon her mind to the exclusion of everything else. She wept and lamented because she did not know where the body of her Lord was, or who was responsible for taking it away. Her one absorbing idea was to recover the body of Jesus that it may be given an honourable burial.

'... my Lord.' Mary's continuing deep devotion for Jesus shows itself. She had called Jesus 'the Lord' (verse 2) and now she called him 'my Lord'. Mary always remembered with gratitude that she had been wonderfully freed from demon possession by Jesus.

The angels were silent. It was not for them to enlighten Mary any further.

... she turned around. Mary, receiving no reply from the angels, turned away.

and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. On turning away, Mary saw a man whom she took to be the gardener. Not for a moment did it enter Mary's mind that she was seeing the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the dead. Perhaps her eyes were also dimmed with tears.

Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' With these two questions Jesus was giving Mary the opportunity to unburden her heart to him. She took that opportunity.

She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.' Mary naturally supposed the man to be the gardener or caretaker. She was not going to miss any opportunity to discover where Jesus' body has been taken. She asked the man if he had moved Jesus to some other place in the garden. If so, then please would he tell her where, so that she could recover

him. She assumed as a matter of course that the gardener would understand whom she was talking about.

Jesus said to her (in Aramaic) 'Miriam!'

The calling of her name by Jesus, in the familiar way and tone she knew, brought instant recognition. Mary turned to face Jesus fully. This one word had changed Mary from despair to joy. Jesus had called one of his sheep by her name, and she followed him (10:3,4). We should remember that God needs only to speak one word to break into the soul of anyone, however far away from him, and bring that soul to salvation.

She turned and said to him, 'Rabboni!'

One word only was spoken by Mary in reply. The word means 'my Rabbi', 'my teacher'. She had no questions to ask. She had found her Lord and miraculously he was alive! She fell down in worship and clung to his feet. Love had found its reward and there was nothing and no one there to spoil it for her. A true taste of heaven indeed.

'Do not cling to me.' Touching Jesus in itself was not wrong. After all, in a few minutes he was to allow the other women to hold him by the feet (Matt 28:9). He invited the eleven to handle him (Luke 24:39) and a week later he invited Thomas to put his hand into his side (20:27). However, in this instance, Jesus gently taught Mary that her relationship with him had changed. In the past Mary,

together with all the disciples, had been used to the physical presence of Jesus with them. Soon they will have to get used to the absence of his physical presence. He now had a resurrection body, so clinging to him in this physical way was now inappropriate.

'... for I have not yet ascended to my

Father.' Jesus' physical presence with them now was only temporary. He would be with them only forty days. After that, the Father's programme needed to be completed. He had to go to heaven by means of the ascension.

'... but go to my brethren and say to them.' Jesus gave Mary Magdalene a work to do. She, who 'loved much', was given the great privilege

and responsibility to be the first human messenger of the resurrection.

My brethren. There is a family relationship established now. The New Covenant has come and is in operation. This is the first time that Jesus ever called his disciples 'brethren'. Previously Jesus had described his followers as little children, servants, disciples, apostles, friends. Now, in addition, there is to be that of family relationship. Jesus is Son of God by nature, believers are sons of God by adoption. Though Jesus was conqueror over the grave with divine power and glory, the disciples were to regard him now as their elder brother. Such is his condescending love.

THIS ONE WORD HAD CHANGED MARY FROM DESPAIR TO JOY

Jesus was fulfilling Scripture prophecy. In Psalm 22 the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow are vividly portrayed. The first twenty-one verses of the psalm are about the sufferings of the Messiah. The remainder of the psalm is about 'the glory to follow'. The first words of the section dealing with 'the glory to follow' are the words 'I will declare my name to my brethren' (Ps 22:22; also cited in Heb 2:11,12). Calling the disciples 'my brethren' is the firstfruit of his resurrection glory.

Jesus signalled to them that they had nothing to fear from him. The forsaking of him at the time of his arrest was forgiven. He was as approachable as ever he was in the past. His love for them was unchanged.

... and say to them, 'I am

ascending.' Jesus himself still had work to do. 'It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, and is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us' (Rom 8:34). The death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the intercession of Christ in heaven are four great facts that must not be separated. They go together.

'... to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.' With these words Jesus encouraged the disciples by proclaiming that they had now been brought into a new relationship with God. In Christ, God had now become

their Father. However there remained a distinction between his relationship with God and theirs. Jesus is the one and only Son of God eternally in his nature. Believers, on the other hand, are sons of God not by nature but by adoption (1:12).

Mary Magdalene came and told the

disciples. Mary Magdalene, full of wonder, joy, and love, immediately went to deliver the message given to her by Jesus.

So should it be concerning all service done in the name of Jesus. It should be done out of gratitude for salvation and with joy at being loved by such a glorious Saviour. Service for the Lord done in such a way with humility, simplicity, and in full obedience to his will is well-pleasing to him. ■

The death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the intercession of Christ in heaven are four great facts that must not be separated. They go together.

Bob Davey is the pastor of Looe Christian Fellowship, having pastored FIEC churches in South London.

SHACK

Theology

It is ten years now since Wm Paul Young's novel *The Shack* – Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity was published. It made a big splash. Waves continue. Twenty million copies have been sold. I hear Christians saying that they have read it and found it helpful. Typically one will have been lent it by well-meaning friends at a time of sadness. Clearly something resonates with suffering people in our generation.

To help a friend who had read it I recently read *The Shack* myself, together with *The Shack Revisited* by a theologian friend of Young called C Baxter Kruger which explains the perspectives and the theology behind the novel; *Cross Roads*, another novel by Young about a man who is given

a near-death opportunity to put things right in his life; and Young's latest book, a non-fiction work called *Lies we believe about God*. I think it is worth examining again the theology behind what Young is saying. After all, if twenty million copies have been sold and people are lending it to others, it must be having quite an impact. Reading these books also makes one aware that like many books that 'take off', it is resonating with people not because it is saying something new so much as it is expressing what people believe or want to believe. It is the mouthpiece of an age rather than a prophet to the age.

Positives

The Shack is a good read. An 'ordinary guy' and struggling Christian, Mack, loses

his daughter tragically to a child abuser. A note in his mail box from 'Papa' tells him to meet him at 'the shack'. Perplexed, Mack goes. There he meets 'God' in three persons: Papa, who is a black mother figure who bakes pies; a Jewish carpenter (you've guessed it) and a young Asian woman, Sarayu ('wind'), who flits and floats and cannot keep still – the Holy Spirit. No – don't switch off yet. Young writes with pace and engages you with a combination of the utopian picture of the home life of these 'three' and the conversations he has with them and with 'Sophia', a 'personification of Papa's 'wisdom'. Towards the end of the book Papa appears as a man – because by then Mack is ready to engage with God as Father. His own harsh experience of fatherhood has made it necessary to meet God in 'mother' manifestation up to then. The encounter and conversations (more or less theological) and being taken to see his daughter's hidden body help Mack to come to terms with his loss.

One can see why it helps people. A summary cannot express its power as a story. It is moving, therapeutic, enabling the victim of suffering to ask questions, to find an undemanding, loving god – a very human god, it has to be said.

If we do not feel something of the power of this book we will not understand why twenty million copies have been sold and millions testify to finding it helpful. The theology is undeniably unorthodox and indeed heretical. But those of us who find

our orthodoxy quite adequate should ask – why do we appear not to be getting that across? Why is Young (and those like him – he represents a trend) reaching people conventional evangelicalism seems to be missing? The god of Young and Kruger is, as I hope to show, an idol, a false god. Yet why has it been necessary for people to find here the kind of comfort

that generations in the past – and today – have found in the God of the creeds and confessions of the Catholic church? Is Shack theology all a deception of the devil? A contemporary manifestation of spiritual blindness? Do we just blame people and the Father of Lies or do we need to ask – are we failing to get something pretty crucial about God and the Christian faith across to a substantial

swathe of contemporary society? We are of course talking mainly about people in the hinterland of Christianity. 'Regular evangelicals' will be less influenced; atheists are unlikely to be impressed – though who knows? But in the suburbia of evangelicalism and in wider Christendom there is an audience that is sucking up the wrong message and not getting, for whatever reason, the right one.

Negatives

Where do we get our ideas of God from?

This is a fundamental question. Experience? Reason? Tradition? Revelation? Young's god is very much a reaction against something he thinks is a false god. From Kruger's book and *Lies we believe about God* we learn that Young

IT IS THE MOUTHPIECE OF AN AGE RATHER THAN A PROPHET TO THE AGE.

was really hurt in some way by his own missionary, and apparently very angry, father. The heroes of both novels have suffered from abusive dads. Moreover, in Young's world such dads tend to be religious and so along with the rejection of harsh dads comes the rejection of formal and institutional religion.

Young develops his god from this – Papa, Sarayu and Jesus are everything his dad was not. Of course, there is a conventional Christian theology in the background. He makes much of the Trinity, as he sees it. But what is his final authority? Certainly not revelation – in the form of the Bible at any rate. He can only arrive at the kind of God and the nature of the gospel that he does by ignoring large tracts of Scripture. His authority is a combination of experience, reason and a little tradition where it suits him. His argumentation on crucial points of theology is woefully short of reference to Scripture. Generally he is selective.

But should we not get our ideas of God from Jesus? Yes of course. But where do we learn of Jesus? From the Bible. And where does Jesus teach us to go for authoritative knowledge about God and of God? To the Bible. Jesus and the Bible are not to be set in antithesis. If we want to see the Father in the Son we must go to the Bible.

Who is God?

For many this is the crucial question about Young's work. The whole work purports to be a conversation between Mack and different persons of the Trinity. Is it

right even to portray the persons of the Godhead by using the imagination? The work has been compared to *The Pilgrim's Progress* but Bunyan never attempted to portray God himself. The parables of Jesus speak of God as 'vineyard owner', 'father', 'shepherd' or 'king' but that is as far as the personification goes and, after all, Jesus is an authorised interpreter of God. Imaging God in the way Young does is equivalent to making a 'graven image' with words; if we describe God we should be conscientious about keeping as close to the Bible as possible, for that is the only reliable source of our knowledge of God. We dare not let our imaginations range free because they will only serve to produce a god we want, not the God who is there.

Perhaps the cornerstone of Young's idolatry is that in effect he inverts 'God is love' to 'Love is god'.

Young's 'Trinity' engages in a 'circle of love' into which 'he' (?) wants to draw all people. Much is made of the patristic concept of 'perichoresis' referring to the mutual indwelling of the three persons in the one being of God, particularly to the 'dancing' imagery inherent in the word. Gender is up for grabs on the basis that God is beyond gender, ignoring the fact that God reveals himself predominantly as male; the Holy Spirit is 'she'. What is theologically fashionable is adopted without sufficient if any biblical discussion or conversation with church history – except those bits that suit his case.

Perhaps the cornerstone of Young's idolatry is that in effect he inverts 'God is love' to 'Love is god'. Everything is reduced to relationship without religion, to community without institutions. Whereas

we believe also that 'God is light' and that God is 'holy, holy, holy', Young can have no place for any attribute of God that is not at least subsumed by love and possibly dissolved by it. As a result there will be no hell in the conventional and biblical understanding of the word. 'Papa' says to Mack, 'I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it' (*The Shack* p120).

You can guess what this does to the doctrine of the atonement. In *Lies Young* tackles two lies he says we believe: that 'The Cross was God's idea' and that 'God requires child sacrifice'. (Whoever believes that one?) The cross he says is 'the iconic manifestation of our blind commitment to darkness ... the ultimate desecration of the goodness and loving intent of God to create ... the ultimate fist raised against God'. And the atonement? 'God submitted to [the cross]. God climbed willingly onto our torture device and met us at the deepest and darkest place of our diabolical imprisonment to our own lies, and by submitting once and for all, God destroyed its power' (pp149-50). What does that even mean? The idea of what we would call penal substitution is contemptuously dismissed as making God a 'cosmic abuser'. Now where have I heard that before?

Young is not worried about flirting with heresies ancient or modern such as modalism ('When we three spoke ourselves into existence as the Son of God we became fully human' p99); patripassianism – the Father has nailmarks in his wrists; 'Open Theism' – God gets what he wants eventually

even if he does not control everything that happens along the way; and process theology – God 'learns' things (even if it is only a recipe!). He does not 'orchestrate' (that is, what we could call decree or purpose, as Peter tells us God foreknew and purposed the cross) evil, but only uses it. God feels and suffers, it appears, as we do – there is no attempt to discuss the profound subjects of God's impassibility or immutability. Young resolves mysteries – divine sovereignty and human responsibility, evil's place in the plan of a good God, a God who suffers yet is not like us – simply by reducing God.

In the end his god is far too human. He is the dad every sinner wants – undemanding, relational, who imposes no expectations on us, includes everybody, does not punish but only cures sin, treats us as victims of evil never as perpetrators. A homely mama/papa who bakes pies, looks beautiful and lives in beautiful surroundings. A god for today.

So who will be saved?

The key issue is that Young believes everyone will be saved. 'I have forgiven all humans for their sins against me, but only some choose relationship', says the now male 'Papa' (p225). 'In Jesus the human race has been gathered into the Holy Spirit's world. Adam's fallen race has been embraced by Jesus' Father and made his children forever' (Kruger, p141). All humans are in Christ. Only some, however, realise it, and are in relationship with him.

One of the 'lies' we apparently believe about God is that 'Not everyone is a child of God' and Young lists over thirty verses in an appendix to that book to 'prove'

that Christ died for all and saved all. Paul's words that 'nothing can separate us from the love of God' (Rom 8:38-39) are applied to everyone without exception. Even the brutal murderer, never caught, of Mack's daughter is 'forgiven' though he has not entered into relationship with God. Forgiveness is something separate it seems from redemption and reconciliation which happen when we turn to God for relationship.

The most serious consequence of the Fall was that Adam and Eve could not 'see' God properly. Our problem is pain rather than guilt – the pain of not being able to relate to God as he truly is. Ultimately there is no problem between God and us that will not be cured by having our eyes opened to the fact that in Christ we are reconciled. It is rather like building the whole of Christianity on the parable of the Prodigal Son and nothing else.

Hell, meanwhile, is 'the pain of resisting our salvation in Jesus while not being able to escape Him who is True Love' (*Lies* p137).

You get the picture. None of this is new theology; sadly it is not biblical theology.

A constant theme is that Christianity is relationship not religion. Young has obviously been hurt by religion, presumably that of his father, and hates it with a very hatred. Institutions are the bane of the faith. Quite what happens when Christians get together or try to express their faith in some corporate and abiding form, we are not told. It is all very 'emergent church'. The deceit we are to believe is that whereas traditional,

formulaic, religious Christianity is oppressive and harmful, Young is giving you the unvarnished truth about God. Yet his books are full of doctrine. He derides the church in the West of today with its roots in the Reformation, the Enlightenment and Platonic dualism but he is filling his readers' heads with equally potent ideas about God – only his are woefully less reliable than those he derides.

One sad impression that grew as I read these books was that there is considerable arrogance behind them. Young is contemptuously dismissive of traditional evangelicalism. Kruger in his book mocks what he calls the 'religious glad-handers' who try to witness to others, share the gospel with them and ask people if they are saved. He and Young appear as the liberators of Western evangelicalism from its Babylonian captivity to rules, institutions and a vision of God that believes he will punish people for sin and gave his Son over to death as a sacrifice for sin.

Helping the helped

So what do we say to people who have found *The Shack* helpful? Firstly, you probably need to read it yourself so you know what you are criticising. Secondly, you need to ask what your friend has found helpful. Thirdly, realise that someone with a good grounding in orthodox evangelicalism is not necessarily going to be derailed in his faith simply by reading the book – though you may need to explore that. Fourthly, try to explain some of the issues I have attempted to flag up here. However the novel itself may help, it is really only a pretty plant whose

roots are poisonous and must not be consumed.

But we do need to ask – why are they helped by this book and not apparently by our preaching and by our literature? It may well be that it is simply because *The Shack* is a well written novel that pulls all the right strings – emotion, suffering, child abuse, a homely heaven and personal restoration. Human-centredness tends to attract.

Perhaps we simply recognise that the world will always produce a god to suit its temper at any given time. We need simply to keep preaching the truth and ignore such literary phenomena.

Chances are though that your friend will have been helped because she has been suffering. The book will have met her at a raw place, allowed her to ask questions, to meet with at least a version of 'God' who listens, is not condemning, does not represent a framework of doctrine or the church as institution.

Here is a God who meets this person as she is at that point. In other words this person has been looking for someone to listen to her – perhaps a God of love – and has not found him. Not that this is all there is to love, even less that it is all there is to God. But at least let us ask ourselves – do we listen? Love is patient, love is kind. Augustine said of the great Ambrose that it was not his preaching that most

There is much in *The Shack* to deprecate and the theology it represents is, as a system, deplorable. But we need to show that the theology of orthodox Reformed theology is better not simply by critiquing the book and its brood, but (1) by preaching the whole counsel of God and (2) by showing that it produces love – that it makes us kind people.

impressed him, but simply that he was kind to him.

Do we need to examine our preaching? Are we preaching about God? If people are getting their vision of God from *The Shack* it reflects a woefully deficient understanding of him. Are we preaching him as the God of love? As triune? If people are not finding a triune God of love in their churches or hearing him from their pulpits, what has gone wrong? The *Reformation Study Bible* note on 1 Corinthians 13 says that 'New Testament Christianity is the human response to

the revelation of the Creator as the God of love. Out of love for those who did not love, the Father gave the Son, the Son gave his life, and the Father and Son together have sent the Spirit, to save sinners from misery and lead them to glory'. Moreover 'The indispensable mark of Christian life is Christian love' (p1663).

There is much in *The Shack* to deprecate and the theology it represents is, as a system, deplorable. But we need to show that the theology of orthodox Reformed theology is better not simply by critiquing the book and its brood, but (1) by preaching the whole counsel of God and (2) by showing that it produces love – that it makes us kind people. ■

Mostyn Roberts is the Pastor of Welwyn Evangelical Church and an Associate Editor of Reformation Today.

The Carey Conference

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

HELD 2-4 JANUARY 2018

The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, UK



📷 Carey Conference 2018 Book Table

As Baptists we believe that the church is a voluntary association of believers, but historically, where did this idea come from? What should it look like in practice? Biblically, what are the major theological truths that underpin this ecclesiology? The 2018 Carey Conference sought to answer such questions.

The Reformation in the 1500s saw the precious rediscovery of the gospel. But the magisterial Reformers were not Baptists and the church and state in England became tightly linked. Yet by the 1630s, a distinctly Baptist church order had begun to emerge. How did such a radical change come about? In two talks,

Matthew Bingham proved himself an excellent guide.

In his first talk, he stressed that the eventual acceptance of believers' baptism flowed from the embrace of a believers' church. He took us back to the 1630s and explored why the Reformers embraced paedobaptism and a national church. In this context, however, there were radical breaches with the national church in the form of Independents and Congregationalists. Their strong emphasis on a visible church membership caused ecclesiological instability. How did infant baptism fit in a church ecclesiology that stressed visible membership only for those who gave clear evidence of faith in Christ? Such a contradiction inevitably led to further changes. Out of this context a more robust, specifically Baptist ecclesiology began to emerge.

Moving from the historical to the present day, Ray Evans gave two talks, the first on leading a believers' church and the second on growing a believers' church. Ray argued that rather than making a false choice between 'trellis' (focusing on structures) or 'vine' (people-focused) work, better instead to embrace a both/and attitude. We want to focus both on people, yet also accepting the need for various structures to enable people to serve. While guarding against the tyranny of micro-management and being aware of the tyranny of time, we want our leadership to facilitate both organised and organic growth.

His second talk focused on growing a believers' church. Our aim should be to make Sundays work for Mondays. We

want to equip people for a whole life of evangelism not just church evangelism. In particular, evangelism is most effective when it is organic. Once again, his talk was full of helpful practical advice on how we can encourage God's people to better share their faith with those they know.

On Wednesday morning, Robert Strivens spoke on independency and interdependency. How can independent congregations avoid isolationism? One suggestion would be a revival of Reformed Baptist associations. In his talk, Robert explored what these associations did and why they existed. These associations are not the same as pastors' fraternals or conferences; nor were they hierarchical in structure. They existed to provide support, doctrinal oversight and mutual encouragement and help. Robert also briefly examined the compelling biblical basis for such associations. He urged all of us to give serious consideration to whether we need to revive such local and regional associations today.

We were also blessed by three sermons, one at the close of each day and one at the end of the conference. In the first, John Benton helpfully expounded Romans 14:1-15:13 as Paul provides instructions to the weak and strong believers. John stressed the absolute centrality of relationships in the life of the local church. Paul urged the strong to be patient with the weak, while he told the weak not to judge the strong.

On Wednesday evening, Luke Jenner spoke on our union with Christ. Expounding Colossians 1:27-29, he reminded us that there are no blessings outside of Christ. Moreover, there is no



📷 **Carey Conference 2018 Q&A session with some of the main speakers**

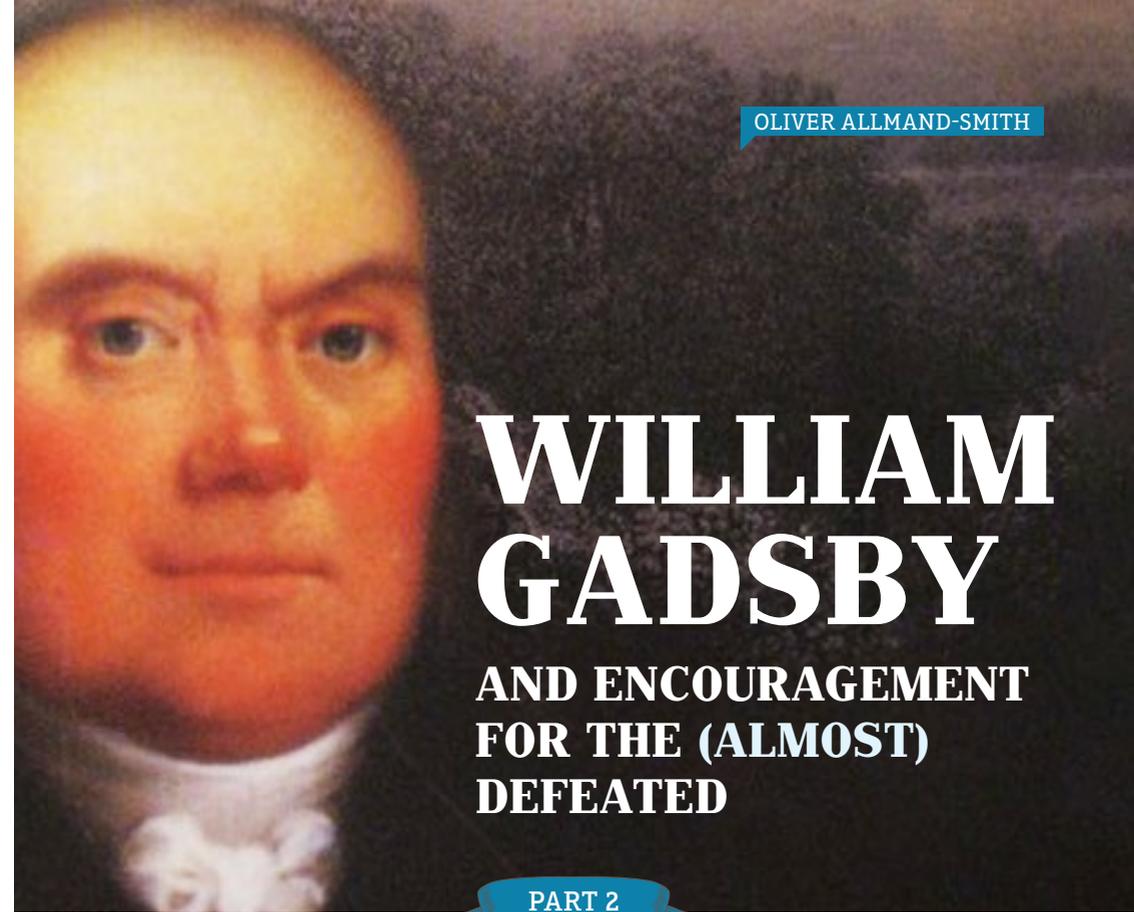
union outside of the church. Luke showed that the majority of references which refer to the believers' union with Christ are corporate in their scope. His application challenged our attitudes towards those in our churches. If our church is united to Christ, then there is no Christian in it who is outside of your calling.

With such a clear, strong emphasis on the believers' church, Bill James finished the conference by urging us to remember our duty to be salt and light (Matt 5:13-16). We should aim to have a holistic testimony, not limited only to evangelism, following the example of forefathers like William Carey. There will be hostility but the promise of Jesus is that some will glorify our Father in heaven as a result of our good deeds.

Alongside the talks there was a very practical panel session, while Ruth Shaw led the women's track, drawing lessons from Paul's letter to the Philippians on how Christians can support each other in difficult times.

It was a superb conference. The talks were helpful, edifying and challenging. What an encouragement to remember the rich heritage we have, to think again on our union with Christ, as well as thinking through how our leadership could be and should be better. ■

James Mildred is a member of Grace Church, Yate, UK, and has recently become a Trustee of the Reformation Today Trust.



WILLIAM GADSBY

AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE (ALMOST) DEFEATED

PART 2

(see RT 281 for part 1)

A deprived man who found great riches in Christ Jesus

Was the deprivation of Gadsby's upbringing really against him? Gadsby's own poverty made him rejoice all the more in the riches that were his in Christ Jesus; because he had so little of this world's 'stuff', for want of a better phrase, he was continually preoccupied with the riches that could only be found in Christ Jesus. This is shown over and over again in his hymns, such as No 667 in his hymnal:

*Immortal honours rest on Jesus' head;
My God, my Portion, and my Living Bread;
In him I live, upon him cast my care;
He saves from death, destruction, and despair.*

*He is my Refuge in each deep distress;
The Lord my strength and glorious righteousness;
Through floods and flames he leads me safely on,
And daily makes his sovereign goodness known.*

*My every need he richly will supply;
Nor will his mercy ever let me die;
In him there dwells a treasure all divine,
And matchless grace has made that treasure
mine.*

*O that my soul could love and praise him
more,
His beauties trace, his majesty adore;
Live near his heart, upon his bosom lean;
Obey his voice, and all his will esteem.¹*

What was Christ to Gadsby? Gadsby loved Christ; his riches were in Christ; Christ was his joy; Christ was his treasure; Christ was his hope; Christ was all his glory – he had none of his own.

At the start of his ministry in the church at Manchester, it was this great appreciation of the glory of all that was in Christ Jesus that made him so energetic in the preaching and in the cause of the gospel. John Gadsby (his son) says, 'Besides preaching four times a week to his own people at Manchester, he for years preached four or five other sermons during the week. After preaching at home three times on the Lord's Day, he would walk on the Monday morning to Rochdale, 11 miles from Manchester, to dinner. After dinner, he would walk two or three miles further to preach in the afternoon. Then, return to Rochdale and preach in the evening. On the Tuesday, he would walk to Manchester and preach to his own people at night. On the Wednesday, he would walk to Oldham, Bury, Stockport, Pendlebury and other places, preach at night and on

the Thursday start off to another town preach and return home on the Friday. Another week, he would procure a supply for his own place on Tuesday, and take a tour almost on foot to Blackburn, Preston, Accrington, and Rossendale. A third week, he would go into Yorkshire. Halifax, Bradford, Huddersfield. And in a fourth week, Derbyshire, Cheshire, etc.² Gadsby's almost supernatural energy came because he had found the riches that are in Christ Jesus, and he wanted everyone to share them. He was never distracted by the affairs of his age. He had a love for Christ, a commitment to the gospel, and a deep conviction to preach that gospel to sinners whenever and wherever he could.

For Gadsby, it was always the preaching of the gospel. No doubt there is great blessing and help to be found in Bible studies, small group meetings and DVD presentations of the message of salvation, but have we forgotten that it is 'the foolishness of the message preached' that God has appointed as his chief means of converting souls? Gadsby was so convinced of this that all he wanted to do was to preach. There are many accounts of him standing up to read the Scriptures, and people who had come to hear him for the first time (having heard his reputation) were ready to walk out because he was stammering and spluttering over the reading. However, when he began to preach, suddenly they were gripped: the power of God descended and many were saved. Consequently, Gadsby had a massive impact across the whole region; under his energetic and

Spirit-empowered ministry, new members were added to the church in Manchester through baptism almost every week. The congregation grew from perhaps 100 in 1807, to over 1000 by the end of his ministry, becoming the largest dissenting cause in Manchester.

Regionally, a number of churches were also established through Gadsby's ministry. Forty churches is almost certainly exaggerated, but Ian Shaw helpfully outlines three ways in which Gadsby's influence led to the establishment of different new churches across the region.³

Firstly, churches were established across the region when people came to hear Gadsby preach at St George's Road Chapel. Since they travelled some distance to hear him preach, rather than having them constantly making the lengthy and often difficult journey, he would encourage them to establish a work in their own locality. So George Greenhough and William Withington were sent as supply preachers to a church established in Middleton in 1819 through this means.

A second way in which new chapels were founded came through Gadsby's encouragement of groups of believers in towns or villages where no Baptist chapel existed. In this way, the cause at Charlesworth in Derbyshire was

established. George Mellor and Squire Booth, who had been travelling to Stockport to hear gospel preaching, began holding meetings in Booth's house, subsequently hiring a loom shop. On 2 October 1816 Gadsby preached for them in a barn. The next day, he baptised four candidates and formed them into a

However, we must not make the mistake of attributing his gospel zeal and energy merely to his personality – it was his burning love for Christ and compassion for lost sinners that drove him to such a volume of endeavour.

church. The work developed slowly, but in 1835 a building was commenced, and when it was completed Gadsby preached at the opening in 1837. Such a crowd gathered that he had to preach from a platform on a window ledge, and they took the window out so that he could be heard by those inside and outside the building. Some years later after his death, when Rochdale Road Cemetery in Manchester was developed (which is where Gadsby was initially buried) his tomb and remains were moved to Charlesworth Chapel, and you can see his tombstone there to this day.

Thirdly, causes were also formed by Gadsby as he ministered in towns where the gospel was preached 'in more dilute form' (Gadsby's own phrase, presumably referring to an inadequate gospel ministry that is defective in some way). For example, the congregation in Rochdale, where John Warburton became the pastor, was established in such a way.

However, we must not make the mistake of attributing his gospel zeal and energy

¹ William Gadsby, *Gadsby's Hymns*, Solid Ground Christian Books (2009), no 667.

² B A Ramsbottom, *William Gadsby*, Strict Baptist Trust Publications (2003), p83.

³ Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, Evangelical Press (2013), p53-55.

merely to his personality – it was his burning love for Christ and compassion for lost sinners that drove him to such a volume of endeavour. The deprivations of his upbringing and background magnified the glory of all the riches of Christ in his own mind, and as he saw so many around him suffering the same degree of disadvantage that he knew by keen experience, all he wanted to do was to spend his every breath magnifying Christ before their eyes.

Sometimes in our gospel labours we become weary and perhaps even a little self-pitying, imagining that we have deserved better or we've earned a break. The vision of William Gadsby soon drives such contemplations from our minds! He did not go in for self-pity – there was no time for that when there were still souls to be won for this Christ, who gave hope to the hopeless! What a man, whose deprivation and upbringing caused the glory of Christ to appear to him so marvellous, and drove him to such gospel endeavours that are exhausting even to read!

An uneducated man, whose preaching brought Christ to the people

We've learnt of his grasp of the wonder of grace and we've witnessed his rejoicing in the riches that are in Christ, but now consider how, as an uneducated man, he brought Christ to the ordinary people. It is true that Gadsby's lack of education was a stumbling block to many at first; there's an account Dr Robert Oliver gives in his article in *RT 8* of John Warburton: 'When he got into the chapel, I thought to

myself, "What a poor, gloomy, miserable place this is!" As the people came in, I felt such a hatred rise up in my heart against them as I have never felt against any people before. Nay, so much so that I was just ready to take up my hat and walk out, when Mr Gadsby got into the pulpit. I was struck with surprise to see so poor and mean-looking a fellow, as I thought him, attempt to preach. I despised him in my very soul, and thought he looked like an ignorant fool that had no common sense. The words of his text were, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." He was so long in reading the passage that I dropped my head down and thought I would try to go to sleep. He then made a little pause and I looked up to see what he was about, and he was looking all around the chapel and rolling his eyes in such a way that I thought him really crazy. The first words that he spoke were, "Perhaps you will be ready to say that according to our sentiments, we cannot find a good man on earth. But by the help of God, we will ransack the Bible from Genesis to Revelation to find him." "Oh, how my prejudice was knocked down at a blow."⁴ You probably are wondering why he was knocked down by such words; they are not particularly great, but he says, 'My soul melted like wax before the sun and I exclaimed, "God bless thee. The Lord help thee to find the good man."⁵

The Holy Spirit was upon his preaching, and when people heard Gadsby, they gave all the glory to God as there was nothing about him, humanly speaking, in which

to boast. The accounts of his early days are that he wore the wrong kind of clothes – and they were particularly ragged and dirty – he stood in the wrong kind of way, he looked out at the people with the wrong kind of perspective, and he read the passage in a completely hopeless manner. But when he preached, God spoke to the people. We see this remarkable gift for presenting the glory and beauty of Christ in hymn No 514 in his hymnal:

*Oh, what matchless condescension
The eternal God displays;
Claiming our supreme attention,
To his boundless works and ways.
His own glory
He reveals in gospel days.*

*In the person of the Saviour,
All his majesty is seen!
Love and justice shine for ever;
And without a veil between,
Worms approach him,
And rejoice in his dear name.*

(Many of our hymnals have changed the words here a little – it's that 'unacceptable' view of man in his poverty and shame again as mere 'worms'.)

*Would we view his brightest glory,
Here it shines in Jesus' face;
Sing and tell the pleasing story,
O ye sinners saved by grace;
And with pleasure,
Bid the guilty him embrace.*

*In his highest work, redemption,
See his glory in a blaze;*

*Nor can angels ever mention
Aught that more of God displays;
Grace and justice
Here unite to endless days.*

*True, 'tis sweet and solemn pleasure,
God to view in Christ the Lord;
Here he smiles and smiles for ever;
May my soul his name record;
Praise and bless him,
And his wonders spread abroad.⁶*

Why are we so man-centred in our churches? Why do we not gather on the Lord's Day full of anticipation to worship and glorify Jesus the Christ? Our minds are so often fixed upon ourselves, our feelings, our issues, our fears, our needs, our hang-ups. The crisis of identity in our society is affecting our churches; we are afflicted with pompous, over-inflated self-esteem. Gadsby blows all that away, as if it were so much rubbish – just look to Jesus; can't you see we're nothing? Gadsby's preaching was so relevant, so personal, so Christ-centred and so powerful that there are countless stories of remarkable conversions. Ian Shaw says that one such was, 'a poor woman who was so overwhelmed with the misery of her condition that she had been planning to drown herself in the river next to Gadsby's chapel. For a moment, she thought twice of it, walked inside the chapel, and "was brought to the blessings of salvation."⁷

In his life and ministry, his lack of education was not actually against him at all; rather making him uniquely accessible to the working man and in

⁴ Robert Oliver in *Reformation Today* No8 p31&32. ⁵ Ibid.

⁶ William Gadsby, *Gadsby's Hymns*, Solid Ground Christian Books (2009). No. 514.

⁷ Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, Evangelical Press (2013), p49.

God's providence causing him all the more to magnify Christ Jesus. Robert Halley, Principal of New College, London and a very well educated man, spoke of Gadsby as follows: 'He seemed a preacher made on purpose for the working classes. The common people heard him gladly. His popularity with the factory people of Manchester was extraordinary as he was not a Lancashire man.'⁸

A man-in-error that God still used for the conversion and sanctification of many

It is true that Gadsby denied the free offer of the gospel, or the rightness of any personal appeal to the individual sinner to repent and believe, because he was afraid that the individual might seek to do it in his own natural strength. Yet his hymns and preaching are full of 'invitation' to needy sinners to come to the warm embrace of the Saviour. Although he does avoid the use of certain words, his sermons, when looked at doctrinally, are appeals addressed to sinners that they should come, repent, and be saved.

The 'invitation' is crystal clear in some of his hymns, for example, in No 587 Gadsby the 'so-called' hyper-Calvinist says this:

*Come, whosoever will,
Nor vainly strive to mend;
Sinners are freely welcome still
To Christ, the sinner's Friend.*

*The gospel-table's spread
And richly furnished too,*

*With wine and milk, and living bread,
And dainties not a few.*

*The guilty, vile, and base,
The wretched and forlorn,
Are welcome to the feast of grace,
Though goodness they have none.*

*No goodness he expects;
He came to save the poor;
Poor helpless souls he ne'er neglects,
Nor sends them from his door.*

*His tender, loving heart
The vilest will embrace;
And freely to them will impart
The riches of his grace.⁹*

Although accused of antinomianism, those in Gadsby's congregation became renowned for their genuine godliness and growth in likeness to Christ. Gadsby was universally recognised as a man of remarkable integrity himself and he fostered that same godliness in his people. It is recorded that after being accused of antinomianism, (which if you looked purely at his doctrine and his statements, perhaps he was in the strictest sense) he asked the accuser, 'Can you point to ungodliness in my life?' The man said, 'No.' 'Is my congregation marked by lawlessness and ungodliness?' The man said, 'No. On the contrary, it is known throughout the region as a godly congregation.' Gadsby then humorously asked the man, 'Well, is my evil doctrine causing you to sin?' The man stumbled a little and said, 'Well, no because I don't believe it.' So he said, 'You tell me what harm I'm doing then.'

How many people were saved through Gadsby's ministry? How many were transformed? We cannot tell, but it must run to the multiple thousands. God used this man in a significant way to be his instrument in bringing about his purposes in spite of his faulty doctrine.

A man of Christ-like compassion for the deprived

The extreme poverty of the congregation, and indeed the city in which he ministered, seemed to be against Gadsby. However, in reality this turned out to be a wonderful backdrop, a remarkable context in which the admirable and Christ-like compassion of this man was put on display.

Gadsby was constantly moved by the terrible poverty that confronted him every day in Manchester. He would regularly part with sums of money he could ill afford to be without, in order to alleviate the sufferings of those around him. Ian Shaw says, 'Gadsby's compassion was intensely practical. He sheltered the family of unemployed James Humes in his own home in 1832. The first Sunday of 1840 was set aside as a special day for collections for the poor, and Gadsby's text that day was "The faithful God" (Deut 7:9). However, the poverty of many members made this increasingly difficult. In 1839, because of the economic downturn, there were ninety on the chapel's regular poor list to fifty of whom

flannel and blankets had been distributed. Gadsby was generous to those in need, whatever their religious background, whether Catholic or Protestant, Jew or Christian, Arminian or Calvinist. One poor Irish woman greeted the news of Gadsby's death saying, 'Bless his soul. I hope he's at rest. Once he kept me from starving when my own priest would not give me a farthing.'¹⁰

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He also became politically active in an attempt to change the laws of the day, in order to alleviate the plight of the poor. He was no radical in his politics, never supporting any insubordination or law-breaking, but he spoke out repeatedly and earnestly on behalf of the people whose suffering was so palpable and intense. In the summer of 1819, eleven people were killed and hundreds were injured in Manchester when a crowd of protesters in St Peter's Field

was charged by panicked guardsmen on horseback. They were merely objecting to poor working conditions and rampant political oppression, which was all too real. Although Gadsby was not involved in the protest, he supported their cause and signed a petition affirming his opposition to the actions of the officials.

Gadsby was an enthusiastic supporter of the Anti-Corn-Law movement and repeatedly spoke out against the laws, both in public and in his preaching. He

⁸ Robert Oliver in RT No8 p35, quoting R. Halley, *Lancashire: Its Puritanism and Nonconformity* Vol II p484.

⁹ William Gadsby, *Gadsby's Hymns*, Solid Ground Christian Books (2009). no. 587.

¹⁰ Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, Evangelical Press (2013), p114.

argued his case from the Scriptures: the Corn Laws he declared, 'were directly opposed to the Word of God'. God's Corn Law was found in Genesis 1:29. 'Behold, I have given humanity every green herb, bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you, it shall be for meat.'¹¹ The current laws in Britain therefore violated God's law. Quoting Proverbs 11:26, 'He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him,' and then Proverbs 14:31, 'He that oppresses the poor reproacheth his Maker,' Gadsby declared the Corn Law 'as standing opposed to every principle of religion and morality, and as insulting to God and man.'¹²

He used to lead political meetings, and the other leaders on the platform who were designated to speak next would say, 'Well, after Mr. Gadsby has spoken, what more can be added?'

Gadsby believed that 'the actions of wealthy landlords were denying the right of the labouring poor to the vital resource of bread. The Anti-Corn-Law movement was strongly supported from the Rochdale Road Church, and even in the Sunday school which Gadsby established.'¹³ Owing to the oppressive negative impact of the Corn Laws on the poor, it became a religious as well as a political issue. 'Gadsby freely used biblical reference in public meetings to make his point, and was willing to preach midweek sermons in the cause, including one on Tuesday 13 April 1841, based on Psalm 104:14-15: "He

causeth the grass to grow for the cattle and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth." He denounced government leaders for persisting with Corn Laws, which were leading to the starvation of the people.'¹⁴

Since Gadsby was preaching to such a poor congregation, one might imagine that he would show some deference when a wealthy person turned up to a service, hoping to receive a contribution that could do much good – but Gadsby was of a different sort! He just fired his arrows straight at him. 'You're part of the problem. Get yourself sorted out,' was basically his message. These are just a couple of the many examples of Gadsby's labours amongst the poor.

Of course, nothing could turn him aside from his greatest priority, the preaching of the gospel of free grace in Christ Jesus, which alone could really meet the needs of the poor. When William Gadsby broke his leg in September 1840, the *Manchester Times* extraordinarily recorded this: 'Accident to the Reverend W Gadsby. We regret to state that last week, while Mr Gadsby was walking in his garden, he fell and broke the larger bone of his right leg just above the ankle. Any cessation of the activity of such a man is a public calamity. His preaching, although marked by some eccentricities, is of a high order, combining all the fervour of a deep devotion with the exercise of vigorous and acute and original intellect, and his active practical benevolence, manifesting itself not only in the relief of the distressed

around him, but by his ardent desire to promote good legislation and thus to advance the happiness of the whole human family, have endeared him alike to the sincere Christian, the philanthropist, and the reformer of political abuses.'¹⁵

When it came to Gadsby's funeral, the streets of Manchester were lined. It was a typical Lancashire February day with snow on the ground, yet thousands gathered. There were six mourning coaches and thirty other coaches followed, making thirty-six in a funeral procession of unprecedented proportions for such a 'deprived' man. One of Gadsby's protégés, John Kershaw, pastor of the Rochdale Road church, preached the sermon. Later he wrote: 'As I write, I have in the eye of my mind the open vault with more than 3,000 persons surrounding it, on a snowy morning. I cannot forget the feelings of my mind as I stood at the head of the grave and saw his body descending into it. The thought that I should see his face no more in the flesh, no more hear his voice exalting a precious Christ in the salvation of his chosen people, to the joy of my heart, that I should no more have him to tell my troubles unto and to advise within the affairs of Zion greatly distressed me. When I began to address the vast assembly, many of whom were in tears, I felt that the power of the Spirit of God was upon me and the word spoken, applying it to the souls of the people, from the solemn attention that was paid and the grief manifested at the loss of so

great a man which had that day fallen in Israel.'¹⁶ Gadsby's tombstone, now at Charlesworth Chapel, reads as follows:

*Here lies the body of a sinner base,
who had no hope but in electing grace.
The love, blood, life, and righteousness of
God
was his sweet theme, and this, he spread
abroad.'*¹⁷

What encouragement may be found in the life of this remarkable man, encouragement even for the (almost) defeated. We have so much to learn from this un-learned man, but as we seek to conclude there are three lessons that I have found especially personal and valuable:

Let's be careful what we do with the legacy of our heroes

I was brought up to believe that creeds and confessions were unbiblical, that the entire church in the country was apostate, and that Baptists were frankly beyond the pale. When I was baptised in my student days I was treated as a pariah. This happened in a family where the Bible was read every day, the Reformers were honoured, the sovereignty of God in salvation was believed and spiritual things were taken seriously.

How could that happen?

The answer lies in the way that the most influential member of our household handled the legacy of his greatest hero

¹¹ Ibid, p100-101. ¹² Ibid, p100-101. ¹³ Ibid, p101. ¹⁴ Ibid, p101.

¹⁵ B A Ramsbottom, *William Gadsby*, Strict Baptist Trust Publications (2003), p242.

¹⁶ Ibid, p282.

¹⁷ Ian Shaw, *William Gadsby*, Evangelical Press (2013), p133.

– Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Appropriate honour and respect for a gifted and highly influential man of God turned into something close to ‘worship’. Dr Lloyd-Jones became our ‘Apostle’ through book and tape; although we did sometimes go to church, more often we listened to Lloyd-Jones on tape. Thus, we didn’t hear God’s Word being preached by a faithful pastor in our local church who knew us and watched over our souls for Christ’s sake – rather we listened to ‘the Apostle of the 20th century’ because he was the only man really worth hearing. We came to believe that everything had to be measured against the word of one man, since he alone had the mind of Christ for our generation.

Would Dr Lloyd-Jones have approved of this approach, gathering around a tape recording machine on a Sunday morning instead of attending the local church? I feel certain he would not. Yet it was all done in his name and it was all based on his legacy. As a result, great harm was done in the spiritual lives of many people. I distinctly remember as a young man the havoc that was caused in different churches and amongst a number of Christian people through this distorted and damaging approach.

Many churches in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century embraced a barren hyper-

Calvinism that stunted growth and killed evangelism. They took William Gadsby as their father in the faith. They sang his hymns, used his catechism, and honoured his memory, but they failed to follow his practical example. As we have seen, Gadsby was in error arguing against the duty of repentance

Perhaps it is time for us to question whether or not it is biblical to have ‘heroes’ at all. Scripture directs us to consider the example of godly leaders, but only as they are faithful preachers of the Word of God who live out the gospel in practice (Heb 13:7)

and faith, and the free offer of the gospel, but in practice he preached with zeal and earnest concern leading to the conversion of thousands. We might say it was John Gadsby’s fault (whether or not that was the case is for others to determine), but much harm was undoubtedly done in the generations following William Gadsby by those who abused his legacy, moving the implications of his doctrinal errors into an anti-gospel inactivity that Gadsby himself would never have approved.

More than ever we live in an age obsessed with the cult of personality: whole religious movements can be forged and promoted by one man, a ‘Christian celebrity’! The danger of elevating our ‘heroes’ to a status that will potentially destroy their legacy and damage generations to come is greater than ever. Perhaps it is time for us to question whether or not it is biblical to have ‘heroes’ at all. Scripture directs us to consider the example of godly leaders, but only as they are faithful preachers of the Word of God who live out the gospel in practice (Heb 13:7) and those who exalt the cross of Christ in their ministry

(Phil 3:17&18). Surely, at the last, there is only one true hero in Scripture, the Lord Jesus Christ himself (1 Cor 2:2), and he alone is to be exalted at the expense of all others (John 3:30).

We need to be careful what we do with the legacy of our ‘heroes’.

Compassion covers a multitude of faults – or does it?

It would be naïve and dishonest to the legacy of Gadsby to say that ‘love is all you need’. However, at the same time, his life shows us that compassion covers a multitude of faults, or to put it differently, without compassion the impact our doctrinal errors (and we all have them, but fail to see them by definition) will be unmitigated and wreak the maximum havoc upon ourselves and others. An uncompassionate William Gadsby, with his doctrinal errors, deprived upbringing, lack of education, poor listening skills and strong opinions would be akin to a wrecking ball! But since everything he did was ‘baptised’ in real heart-compassion, the outcome was very different indeed.

The outstanding feature of Gadsby was his compassion. The compassion he manifested towards poor lost sinners was palpable; his sermons were full of earnest and heart-felt entreaties towards those like himself – lost and wretched worms in need of a loving Saviour. He could not do enough for those who were oppressed and in need. Despite all his faults – all that stubbornness, all that obstinacy – he was used by the Lord in that remarkable ministry of Christ-like compassion to which God had called him.

For surely it is compassion more than anything else that marked the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ amongst the tax collectors, prostitutes, disabled, needy, blind, sick, poor and deprived outcasts of his day (Matt 14:14). Of course, he was not guilty of any errors that needed to be covered by compassion, for he pleased the Father in all things, but it was such compassion nonetheless that marked his ministry. See his tenderness with the woman who had the issue of blood; his patience with the woman caught in adultery; his appreciation of the woman who bathed his feet with precious oil; his moving concern for his own mother even in the hour of his suffering; and towards the multitudes he was moved with compassion for they were like sheep without a shepherd. He touched the lepers, restored sight to the blind, defended the sinners, championed the cause of the needy and wept at the suffering of his fellow men in the face of death.

How would our lives and our ministries be transformed if we had more of this compassion?

Yet we must surely confess that such compassion is sadly lacking in all of us. Why? Is it because compassion requires selflessness and we are self-obsessed? Compassion moves to action and we are too lazy? Compassion drains our emotional tank, and we are already empty? Compassion demands time, and we are just too busy? Compassion is supremely Christ-like, and we are far too ungodly?

What if our theology is entirely sound, yet we lack compassion? Doesn't that make us the most dangerous mis-representers of the heart of Christ? Won't that disable our ministries?

To have good theology and to lack compassion is to be dishonest and dangerous representatives of the compassionate Christ that we claim to preach (Matt 9:35-38).

Yet surely true compassion must drive us to a right theology of gospel ministry, and here Gadsby is seriously at fault. His compassion ought to have caused him to reconsider his error in opposing the free offer of the gospel; yet it seems that he was content to 'circumvent' the implications of his theology for himself, while handing to his followers that same theology without the compassion, thus leading them into the barren hyper-Calvinism that has done so much harm to the cause of Christ. Gadsby must take his share of the blame for this, and it ought to cause us to examine ourselves – what errors can be found in our own ministries that could be magnified in the next generation, leading to the crumbling of our churches after we have gone? This is one reason, amongst many, why we must avoid Gadsby's hyper-independency and work together as churches to expose errors and establish the truth.

WE MUST AVOID GADSBY'S HYPER-INDEPENDENCY AND WORK TOGETHER AS CHURCHES TO EXPOSE ERRORS AND ESTABLISH THE TRUTH.

Compassion covers a multitude of faults – or does it?

When things are stacked against us God does his greatest works

This is the most important legacy of Gadsby: encouragement for the (almost) defeated. Gadsby had much stacked against him, yet he was so used by God in

the work of the kingdom and for the glory of Christ that every one of us would desire nothing more than to be like him! His sins were against him; his poverty was against him; his lack of education was against him; his doctrinal errors were against him; and the deprivation of his people was against him. Yet God not only worked mightily through him in spite of all that was against him – rather he worked mightily through him by means of all that was against him. In other words, because things were stacked heavily

against him, God was able to work great things; or to put it negatively, without all those things against him, God would never have been for him in such dramatic fashion. This is the way of the cross.

What did the Lord Jesus suffer on Calvary's tree? How much was against him? The physical sufferings that were evident to all; the emotional pain of being abandoned by all his disciples; the anguish of betrayal by Judas and denial

by Peter; the darkness of death (for the one who is life) and a tomb (for the one whose dwelling is heaven); and above all the hellish torment of his own Father's rod of anger. Surely in his humanity he was (almost) defeated. And yet he triumphed through it all and purchased deliverance and freedom and joy and reconciliation for a multitude greater than could be numbered.

It was when everything was stacked against him that he accomplished full redemption.

As for Christ, so for us: 'Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me' (Mark 8:34). Not that we are called to purchase redemption for ourselves through suffering, since that is neither possible (for unlike Christ we merit God's judgment upon our own sins) nor necessary (for Christ has already made propitiation for our sins once for all); rather we follow in the way of affliction because when most is against us God is ready to do his greatest work through us for his own glory (Phil 3:7-11; Col 1:24-29).

It is precisely when we are (almost) defeated that God is ready to do his greatest work in us and through us, not despite all that is against us, but because of it. Our sufferings are not redemptive, but they are

effective in the hands of our God for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes in this age. So if you are (almost) defeated, be encouraged in Gadsby's Christ – God is preparing to do something that will leave a legacy of good for his glory. He will sanctify your sufferings and make heavenly dynamite out of all your deprivations (2 Cor 1:8-11; 12:7-10)!

IT IS PRECISELY WHEN WE ARE (ALMOST) DEFEATED THAT GOD IS READY TO DO HIS GREATEST WORK IN US AND THROUGH US.

We might feel that everything is against us right now, even to the point of hopeless despair. But is this not the very context of the cross? The Saviour had everything stacked against him, yet he won the greatest victory of all. He conquered sin and death, and since we are in him, so can we!

May the Spirit of Christ that dwelt in William Gadsby live in our hearts, and may God receive all the glory as the (almost) defeated are encouraged to persevere to great fruitfulness in the kingdom. Amen. ■

Oliver Allmand-Smith is Pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Ramsbottom, UK, and is one of the trustees of the Reformation Today Trust.

Learning from Lord Mackay

Life and Work in Two Kingdoms

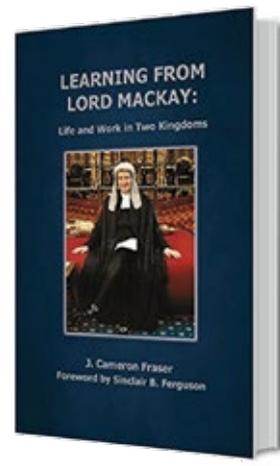
Author: J Cameron Fraser,
Publisher: SoS-Books: Lethbridge,
Alberta, Canada, 2017 (128 pages)
ISBN: 978-0-9959953-1-4 (paperback)
also available in hardback and as an e-book

The author's transparent warm respect for James Mackay, the longest serving Lord Chancellor of Great Britain in the twentieth century (1987-1997) provides an invaluable perspective on the difficulties that believers face in public life. This short book manages to shed light on the legal and political system in the UK and to a lesser extent on that of the USA. The immensely helpful Foreword, written by Sinclair Ferguson, immediately points to the Christian faith and character of the man who humbly served his generation in high office for the benefit of those who needed justice. At times this meant going against the party line. On other occasions he disappointed his fellow believers who failed to see that politics is the 'art of the possible'.

James Mackay, born to humble, godly parents in 1927, was nurtured within the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. His father was an elder in his church where James made a profession of faith as a young man. Readers of the book might love

to know more details of the factors that led to his spiritual development but the author manages to show how the Christian character of his almost incredibly brilliant subject shone out in his father-like concern for the fallen and underprivileged. He used his immense ability to further the cause of the needy and argue against the moral slide of the nation. Despite his position as a judge he was respected in that he was willing to discuss matters with minor servants of the court. As a family man, his home was known as being a place of hospitality and he had a great respect for his wife. James' commitment to his church as a member and elder was prominent in the book and he was unbendable in his determination to 'keep the Sabbath'. He was however, independently-minded and his commitment to show respect to two Roman Catholic friends by attending their funerals resulted in James Mackay being disciplined by his church for countenancing the mass. Despite this setback he persevered in his Christian service.

FREDERICK HODGSON



The book brought out an interesting contrast between the principles adopted in the USA and the UK for the appointment of judges in high office. The Americans tend to choose the judiciary on the basis of the established, known viewpoints of the candidates, whereas in the UK judges are appointed on their ability to understand the fine details of a case and then make a fair, informed decision. Mackay held to the British method and always tried to be loyal to his fellow judges. It would be interesting to read more about the outcome of the two approaches.

The author engages in a fascinating and instructive contrast between the 'sphere sovereignty' principles originating with Kuyper and the more widely accepted two kingdom model taught by Calvin and subsequently modified by the development of secularism. He was unable to specifically locate Mackay's self-conscious position within these two schemes although he concluded that the godly Mackay in practice was drawn to the two kingdom model. ■

New Books

The following books have been published recently and are recommended for your attention:

- John Crofts, *Graciousness - Tempering Truth with Love* (Reformation Heritage Books), 152 pages, ISBN 978-1-60178-586-2.
- J P Moreland, Stephen C Meyer, Christopher Shaw, Ann K Gauger, Wayne Grudem (eds.), *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 1008 pages, ISBN 978-1-4335-5286-1 (This appears to be a very significant book on this subject; I hope to have it reviewed in a future issue of RT).
- Earl M Blackburn, *How Can I Honor Christ in Fighting Cancer?* (Reformation Heritage Books), ISBN 978-1-60178-564-0
- David Murray, Shona Murray, *Refresh: Embracing a Grace-Paced Life in a World of Endless Demands* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017), 208 pages, ISBN 978-1-4335-5522-0
- William VanDoodewaard, *1 & 2 Peter - Feed my Sheep* (EP Books, 2017) 176 pages, ISBN 978-1-78397-191-6 (Welwyn Commentary series).
- Lee Gatiss, *Cornerstones of Salvation* (EP Books, 2017) 234 pages, ISBN 978-1-78397-195-4
- Faith Cook, *Fine Gold from Yorkshire* (EP Books, 2017) 160 pages, ISBN 978-1-78397-194-7

Please note that we are unable to supply these books; please contact your local bookshop.



The Secret Things and the Revealed Things

'Are only a few people going to be saved?'

Luke 13:23

Deuteronomy 29:29 'The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may follow all the words of this law.'

There are secret things that belong to God; he has chosen not to reveal some things to us and I want to consider one other such matter. It came to the surface when someone asked Jesus, 'Are only a few people going to be saved?' (Luke 13:23). How many people are going to be saved? Now there are men of the old school like John Calvin, Martin Luther, Thomas Boston, and Samuel Davies who would all answer that

question by saying, 'Yes, very, very few are going to be saved.' They would point to scriptures that talk of a narrow way going to heaven and only a few finding it. They would quote Jesus' other words describing the church as a 'little flock', that again he compares it to some salt and to a light, just a small presence, a tiny minority, a remnant. Those are men who would never say to us that Christ will have the majority. And when we look around us at the spiritual state of Wales and Europe today then we must nod our heads and say, 'Yes, that seems correct to us. Just a few people saved and the vast majority apathetic or even hostile to Christianity.'

Then there are others who have given a very different answer. Men like Jonathan Edwards, B B Warfield, Marcellus Kik, and Lorraine Boettner claim that the direction of the Scripture is in the way of greater optimism. We are told that 'where sin abounds, grace does much more abound' (Rom 5:20) – even arithmetically. We are given a great vision of the church triumphant that it is a multitude which no man can number, called out of every nation and kindred and tongue. God made a great promise to Abraham that his seed would be as vast as the sands by the seashore, and I must say that I would deem it very strange in the light of that kind of language if the serpent's seed were more numerous than the woman's seed.

So we are told that an anonymous person once raised his hand one day and put this question to the Son of God: 'Are only a few people going to be saved?' (v23). Let's read the passage in Luke 13:23-30 to find the answer. 'He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you

see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last."

Jesus' answer

How did Jesus answer this person? He doesn't say, 'What an interesting subject; some believe many and others believe a few.' He says, 'You, and everyone listening, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to"' (v24). You ensure that you yourself belong to the people of God. Jesus' great message is that whether this community is a large village or a small town don't worry about the

size when the gate to heaven lies open. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, the gate is open. Whether you are an atheist or a Muslim, the gate is open. Whether you are an infamous sinner or a moral man, the gate is open. Make sure you are through the gate. Whether you are in the majority or in the minority you are certainly invited to be one of those who has passed through the gate. We don't know whether the majority are going to be saved or not but we do know that whosoever will may come to Jesus Christ and be saved, and that we are all sincerely commanded to come to Christ, and begged to come to Christ, and pleaded with to come and join the people of God.

Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, the gate is open. Whether you are an atheist or a Muslim, the gate is open. Whether you are an infamous sinner or a moral man, the gate is open. Make sure you are through the gate.

A message of good news

At the heart of the Christian faith there lies not a set of principles, and not a list of commandments and laws or some kind of moral code, but there lies at the very centre of Christianity a message, a message of good news, a positive affirmation, a statement of certain great facts. Someone has been born, and the person born has a unique identity. His name is Jesus, he is the promised Messiah, his coming first made known to the world when man fell in Eden. He is the Lord from heaven, and this is his singular work, to be the Saviour. That was the great message first preached by the angel to shepherds, 'To you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.' And whenever the gospel church finds one person whose life is not right with God – just one person – then we can say to him, 'I've got a Saviour for you.' If I can find one needy soul then I can say to him, 'I know someone who can help you.' If I can find just one ... some single soul somewhere who has no contact with the living and true God then I can say to him, 'I know a Saviour who can reconcile you to God.' I tell you if any of us Christians are brought by the providence of God into the orbit of one life who that day knows he is on the road to a lost eternity, who is under the wrath of a sin-hating God, and liable to perish, then we have all the authority of heaven to say to that person, 'I have a Saviour here for you.'

How hard it is for us to find people who admit that they are sinners, people who will acknowledge that all is not

well between themselves and God. I sometimes feel that my whole calling is so futile, and that all my message is vain, and absurd, and anomalous, because it depends on my finding men and women who acknowledge that they are sinners. There is no place for a man like me in a world without sinners. Often I wish that

God would make sinners, that he would strip the veil from the eyes of men and women and show them the state of their hearts so that they could see their need. My own personal life cannot stand the truth. There is not a good word to be said for it. You think that I am guilty of false modesty. You don't know me. I often sigh and groan and cannot answer my best friend when she says, 'What's wrong?' The memories are all too painful. If there is anyone else here like

me, with a bruised conscience, and a broken heart, and some fear of God, and an awareness that in themselves they are not ready to die and meet God, even if there were only one such person here now (and there are many more than one), then I can say to them, 'I have a Saviour for you. His blood can make the foulest clean.' I tell you, it's a great thing to be a sinner, because a sinner who comes to the narrow gate causes all of heaven to look down with delight. 'Look!' cries one angel to the rest, 'there is a sinner!' 'A sinner?', replies the vast host of angels focussing on him with astonishment and joy! And there is a boy, a girl, a man, a woman who knows he is a sinner! No angel bats an eyelid at just another person who's righteous, but a sinner ... approaching the narrow gate ... causes joy in heaven. He makes God

No angel bats an eyelid at just another person who's righteous, but a sinner ... approaching the narrow gate ... causes joy in heaven.

glad. It is such a great pity that we can't be sinners, that we don't feel any need to pass through a narrow gate, but if I might find one somewhere, who in the secrecy of that person's heart is listening to his conscience and is saying what a man said long ago as he looked down to the earth, 'God be merciful to me a sinner,' then I have a Saviour for you. I am saying that you are a very, very privileged and fortunate person if you are a sinner, because here with us at this moment is the Saviour of sinners. And he is saying to you, 'You come to me.' You tell God that you are appalled, and your life is indefensible. You want it covered in the name of Jesus, the sinner's friend.

A narrow door

You come to him through this narrow door. One of the reasons that it is a narrow door is because it's not wide enough for your sins as well as yourself to pass through. It's like a turnstile. It is only wide enough for you to get through. You must leave behind your unbelief. You must leave behind your love of money. You must leave behind your lusts. You must leave behind your pride. You must leave behind your idols whatever they might be. You must leave behind your popularity in the world. You must leave behind your prayerlessness. You must leave behind your Sabbath-breaking. You must count the cost as you approach this door. Written above it are the words, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,' and then under them, 'Repent, for the kingdom of God is here.' There is a turning from and a turning to, from sin and to the Saviour. No salvation without coming to Christ; no salvation without turning your back on your sins. It is like a surgeon who scrubs for surgery. That activity makes

sense as a preparation for a lifesaving procedure. Surgery without it can be fatal, but scrubbing and scrubbing without the prospect of surgery is pointless and costly, even pathological. Both procedures are necessary for the surgeon, as both separation from sin and unto Christ are necessary for salvation.

'Make every effort'

So the way of salvation is through the narrow door and Jesus does not suggest it is easy-peasy. Certainly it is simple to grasp, but it's not a breeze. See how he describes it; 'Make every effort,' he says (v24). In other words, you asked Jesus into your heart when you were seven. Good. But it hasn't made a lot of difference to you, and so as a teenager you make another effort. You ask him again. Good. Say to him, 'Show me myself and show me my Saviour,' and you don't stop saying such words until you know that God has answered you and you are through the narrow door. As a student you might pray them again, and as a young adult. It is a quest for assurance. Or perhaps you have come very near in the past. You have come all the way up to the door, but at the last moment you have thought what it would cost you in terms of relationships with your family and with your friends, and you have finally turned back. 'Make every effort!' You have come again to that open door, and then you have thought what it will mean for your Sundays, and for your ambitions with your work and again you have turned back. 'Make every effort!' Don't give up. What will it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul? There are sins that you love, and it will be such a sacrifice to end them. 'Make every effort!' You are addicted to alcohol

and to nicotine and to drugs and you know that there is no way that you can go through that narrow door bringing those addictions with you. 'Make every effort!' You have made some effort, but that is not enough. You must make every possible effort you can. Cry mightily to God.

Many will try to enter and won't be able

Then Jesus warns us of leaving it until it is too late. He says, 'Many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to' (v24). There were many who were touched by the life and testimony of Noah and his sons, that steady persistent commitment to building that ark, year after year. They were moved for a few days to join Noah, but then the cost was too great. Then one day the heavens opened and the fountains of the deep poured out their floods and the waters rose. Then, when they got wet and cold, and out of their depth, and when they had to swim, it was then they tried to enter the ark, but they couldn't. The opportunity was gone. God had shut the door and they were not able to enter. They had had 120 years of Noah building the ark and preaching the righteousness of God to them and they mocked him, and then ignored him. Then when the day of judgment came they tried to enter the ark to escape but they weren't able to do so. The Red Sea opened for the children of Israel to cross safely but when Pharaoh and his host tried to cross, then the sea came crashing in on them and they weren't able to escape. It was all too little, too late.

WHAT A
FEARFUL
STATE, TO
COME TO THE
NARROW GATE
TOO LATE!

Many people say, 'One day . . .' after they have first drunk deeply of all the sinful pleasures of the world, after they have had their fill of sex, and luxury, and drinking, and drugs, and keeping God out of their lives it will be then that they'll decide to give that fag end of their life to God, as though they are doing him a favour in letting him have the ruins of a wasted life,

but the narrow door will not always be open. 'They will try to enter but will not be able to.' They will hammer away until their knuckles are bleeding. They will shout until they are hoarse, like the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, but God is under no obligation to show his grace to anyone. The exercise of mercy is optional with God. He hardened Pharaoh's heart as well as softened it. What a fearful state, to come to the narrow

gate too late! Will this be the portion of a few? Jesus says here, 'I tell you, many will try to enter and won't be able.'

Who is he? This is the King of Glory, the Lord of hosts; this mighty Colossus is the owner of the house. The door belongs to him. Should a group of ruffians and criminals and drunks at midnight on a Saturday come and start knocking on your front door, are you under any obligation to let them in? If fifty teenagers armed with drugs and bottles of vodka want to hold a rave in your house late one night, are you going to open the door and let them in?

What does Jesus say? 'Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and

pleading, "Sir, open the door for us." But he will answer, "I don't know you or where you come from" (v25). Even if you were the friends of his teenage children he wouldn't let you in, but you are not friends; you are strangers to him. 'I don't know you. I don't know where you are from.' Have you come to the house of God on the Lord's Day and listened to his Word week by week? No. Have you been singing hymns to him along with a congregation of God's people each Sunday? No. Have you been praying to him, 'Lead me not into temptation and deliver me from evil'? No. Have you been asking him for wisdom in how you should live day by day? No. You have never come to him. You have never spoken to him. Then when you cry, 'Sir, open the door for us,' then he will answer immediately, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' There will come an instant answer from the one whose door you want open and whose house you are trying to enter; 'Don't waste your time here. The door is not opening. It will never open to you. Never . . . never . . . never.'

They will yet protest: 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.' The Lord will not quarrel with them. He will not protest and say, 'Oh no I didn't.' He had done that. Among them were those Pharisees who had been invited by a man to his home for a meal to meet a special guest, Jesus of Nazareth, and they had come out of curiosity. They had had a meal one evening with Christ, eating and drinking with him, listening

to him teaching, and he kindly answered their questions, but there was seething resentment in their hearts. They did nothing to prevent their leaders plotting his murder, or to stop the Sanhedrin bribing witnesses to lie and accuse him of blasphemy and to condemn Jesus to death. They were silent when they had

the privilege of speaking up. They never committed themselves to him; they reluctantly knocked on the door too late.

Others heard him teaching in their streets. He was standing by the well in Sychar speaking to the Samaritans as they came to hear him, while others gathered in the road outside a house where he was teaching with the windows and doors open. They stood quietly and were deeply moved. They said to one another, 'Where did Joseph's son get learning like

that? What eloquence! What authority! He could make you believe that black was white.' They were moved and impressed, but then they walked away and they carried on the same as they always had. It's not enough to be stirred and moved by the preaching of Jesus. It is not enough to have had fellowship with him at the table if you have never made every effort to enter through the narrow door. Why did he come to your house and talk and eat with you and answer your questions? It was that you might enter through the narrow door. Why does he stir you by his preaching? It is that you enter in through the narrow door.

Why did he come to your house and talk and eat with you and answer your questions? It was that you might enter through the narrow door. Why does he stir you by his preaching? It is that you enter in through the narrow door.

Jesus hasn't finished speaking to you. He will say one more thing to you; 'Away from me, all you evildoers!' I suppose the most difficult thing I have to do is to persuade you that you are not fair-minded, that you are not a neutral, uncommitted person. You have heard the Sermon on the Mount and rejected the preacher. You have heard his invitations to come to him for rest and you have shrugged. You have heard him tell you that you must be born again and you've said you don't want to be born again. You have seen him raise Lazarus from the dead but you've said, 'He was probably not dead.' You have seen him give sight to the man born blind, and cleanse the leper, and raise up the paralysed man carried into his presence by four friends, and you've shrugged your shoulders. 'They were all psychosomatic illnesses.'

You have read the words of the men who witnessed him speak and the winds and waves obeyed him; you have noticed the change in their lives and how they went everywhere testifying of these things; you have seen the spread of the church like wild fire throughout the world, and yet you have responded, 'So what?' You have heard many sermons about Christ, and talked to many Christians, some of them very often, but you will not bow to Jesus Christ. You are saying, 'I will not have this man rule over me. He is not telling me how to live my life,' and so you are not neutral and undecided. You are very definitely biased against the loveliest and the best of men, the incarnate God. He that is not for Jesus Christ is against him.

In my experience of myself and of others many of the great difficulties that we propose to other people as being problems of guidance are in fact problems of fundamental conflict with the law of God

So do you see how Jesus describes you? That you are an 'evildoer', though you have never killed a person; you have never stolen something from another. You have not committed adultery or told lies, but you are an evildoer because you have been told much about Jesus Christ, you have been offered life and salvation

through him and you have chosen your own self instead of him to be your God. You are an evildoer, and God will treat you as an evildoer, very justly and very fairly. He will put you in hell. What is hell? It is what Jesus says here, 'Away from me!' You have lived your life saying to him, 'Away from me! Don't interfere in how I'm living my life. I want nothing to do with you. Away from me, pale Galilean!' So one day he in turn will say to you, 'Away from me. You did not want me, though I would have had you

shelter under my wings, but now I don't want you.' Am I making this all up? Isn't this before us here plainly in the Bible, in the New Testament in Luke's Gospel, his record of the words of the man who preached the Sermon on the Mount and taught his disciples at the Last Supper in the Upper Room? Doesn't he say here, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!'

You might try to be a poser and a smart aleck. You might say, 'Well, I don't want to be with Jesus. I never have and I never will. It will be OK being with people who live just like me.' Then I will disillusion you very quickly. Jesus said this, 'There will be weeping there, and gnashing of

teeth' (v28). Isn't it the Lord Christ who is speaking? Am I putting words in his mouth? He is describing no holiday camp for elderly agnostics. This is the place that is totally exposed to the character of God, but it lacks any mediator. This is God without atonement, God without the Lamb, the God before whom the seraphim hide their eyes at being exposed to uncreated holiness, the God who is a consuming fire, the God who is angry with the wicked every day. And you are there, never ever to be anywhere else, not after a million years, always gnashing your teeth in rage against God. You have rejected God's Son. You have rejected his grace, and now what you have is weeping, endless weeping and frustration, opposing this God whom you hate. You did not want him through your life and certainly you don't want him in the place of woe, but you cannot escape from him. There is no escape. There is no deliverance. The place you have chosen is eternal.

Being in the Kingdom or not?

Others you admired and loved will not be there. The great leaders of the kingdom of God, the men of faith who worshipped and served God, they will not be where you are going to be. They will be in the kingdom of God with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. All the prophets who spoke to the world 'Thus saith the LORD,' and told mankind of the message of God, who he is and what he has done, his invitations and promises to pardon and forgive, they will also be in the kingdom of God,

THERE WILL BE PEOPLE THERE FROM EVERY PART OF THE GLOBE, FROM THE NORTH, SOUTH, EAST AND WEST.

but not you. You will not be allowed in. You will be thrown out, says Jesus. 'Take them away,' the Lord will say. There will be people there from every part of the globe, from the north, south, east and west. There will be rich and poor; there will be those who once had been the most primitive head-hunters and cannibals, there will also be those who were once

the most sophisticated scientists; there will be illiterates and professors; artists, refuse collectors, miners and musicians, farmers and financiers from every part of history and from all over the world. They will be there, fascinated by everything in the new heavens and earth, and each of them will be there because of Jesus' love for them, Jesus living for them, Jesus dying for them, Jesus rising for their justification.

And all who are not there are absent because they didn't want Jesus' love, or Jesus' life, or Jesus' death, or Jesus' resurrection. It all hangs on your relationship to Christ. It doesn't hang on where you come from, north, south, east, or west. That is utterly immaterial. There are no favoured zones, and no holy lands, there is just God's holy Son Jesus and the question is do you have him, and by him have you gone through the narrow door? Everyone who has taken him has a place at the great banquet God is preparing.

There is a feast in the kingdom of God. There is the celebration of God's Son who is now highly exalted, given a name above every name, and his work of redemption will one day be completed and he will

be holding a vast feast and everyone he loved and lived and died for, everyone who left their sins behind them and entered through the narrow door, will enter a huge banqueting hall, and there will be an uncountable number of men and women sitting to eat at this banquet. It is for all who have made Christ their prophet, priest and king. Many of the Jews who were the first in privilege rejected him and they are now the last, while we Gentiles who have been the last to hear of him are now first in our desire to serve him and take his message to the ends of the earth.

Applications

I have explained to you word by word what Jesus has said. If you have been offended, then you are offended with what the Son of God once said, not with me. But we have not finished. Now I must speak even more directly to you.

1. I am commanding all of you to take this passage very seriously. No one can ever take from you the providence of God and today his providence has meant that you and these words of Jesus Christ have come together. I believe that it is because God loves you that he has caused you to hear and understand them. You have been confronted with them not that you might be made curious or have your fancy tickled by them or that you speculate whether many or few are going to be saved, but that you should take them as words from the living God, and so words to be taken very seriously. More than that, I'm commanding you to do what they say. With whatever authority God has vested in me as a preacher of his gospel, then I

am urging you on behalf of my Master to enter into the presence of the Saviour. It is a movement of your heart and soul energised by the Holy Spirit as he takes these inspired words and stirs you to obey them. With whatever authority I have, I say, I urge, I command you to take these words very seriously. But more ...

2. I am pleading with all of you to enter through the narrow door. I am beseeching you in the name of Jesus Christ not to stop outside for a moment longer. The door is ajar, and you are confronted with the most blessed opportunity of coming to know God through his Son Jesus Christ, of having all your sins forgiven, past, present and future, of becoming a child of God yourself, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ of a glorious, lasting inheritance and I am pleading with you to take this step. I have spoken to you very solemnly about the possibility of losing this blessing and one day of the door being closed and never being open to you again, of Jesus Christ not wanting you, not knowing you, telling you to go away, that you are an evildoer, and consigning you to a place of woe for ever. Take such warnings seriously. Think of these words I beseech you and enter through the narrow door now. I plead with you. I am stretching out my hands to you and gesture to you to come to the Saviour who speaks these words to you. But more ...

3. I am offering all of you this deliverance from judgment and this privilege of God's blessing resting on you for the rest of your days. As I understand the mind and heart of God today he is sincerely offering to every one of you his Son to become your

teacher to tell you how you should live for the rest of your life, to become your great high priest to live to atone for your sins and to intercede for you and thus save you to the uttermost. I am offering you this Jesus to be your Lord and King protecting and guarding and guiding you from this moment on until you see his face and are changed into his likeness. I am offering this Christ to you now. But more ...

4. I am asking you why you should delay. What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for the tingle factor? Are you delaying until the hairs on your neck stand on end? Are you waiting for religious goose-pimples and so are laying down the conditions to God in which you will agree to obey him? Are you demanding the tingle factor first? He doesn't give you this option. The reason you are to obey him is that he commands you to do so, and nothing else. Enter through the narrow door. That is what he says. Are you going to defy your God yet again? It is extraordinary that you should even hear the gospel and that God should sincerely offer his Son to become your Saviour. You don't deserve that. Millions have never heard it. It is even more extraordinary that that is not enough to you and that you want his free salvation to be tailor-made for you, that it has to be accompanied by emotions or you will not receive it. Why should he not ignore you and put you in hell? But more ...

5. I am exhorting you to enter through the narrow door. I am exhorting you

to do it. Why should you die? God will take no pleasure one day in closing that door and locking it and telling you to go away. He will do it as sadly as any parent says to a child that he has rejected their offers of reconciliation for too long, that he has caused such grief and trouble to all the family that

It is a movement of your heart and soul enabled by the Holy Spirit as he takes his Word and leads you through the door.

they don't want his influence disturbing them any longer. But that time has not yet come to you. That line has not yet been crossed. This is a day when the door still stands open. The devil is whispering to you this moment that you've missed it, that God has closed the door and it is too late. No. No! The door is open. You are here and a great and effectual door is open before you. Enter through it while you may. It has been opened

by God for you personally to come to the Lord now. This is the accepted time for you to enter through it. Come and enter through it. Come now. It is a movement of your heart and soul enabled by the Holy Spirit as he takes his Word and leads you through the door. That is why you are here, to enter through the door. This is the day of salvation. Jesus ready stands to take you, full of mercy, love and power. He is able; he is willing; doubt no more. If you tarry till you're better you will never come at all; not the righteous but sinners Jesus came to call. The door is open. Enter while you may. ■

Dr Geoff Thomas served Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth for over 50 years until his retirement in 2016.



African Pastors' Conference News

The table gives an overview of recent conferences held in November 2017 and the number of books distributed.

The total distributed since the start of APC in 2006 now stands at 115,098. This was the first time for APC conferences in Ghana. ■

COUNTRY	LOCATION	DELEGATES	BOOKS Sold & Free
South Africa	Estcourt	68	322
South Africa	Durban	18	293
South Africa	Empangeni	47	451
South Africa	Mseleni	37	192
Ghana	Accra	63	249
Ghana	Bawjiase	69	195
Ghana	Kasoa	53	152
South Africa	Welkom	33	237
South Africa	Estcourt (follow-up)	68	248
South Africa	Hillcrest	85	653
South Africa	Newcastle	72	389
South Africa	Eldorado Park	24	162



Grace Baptist Partnership

The work of Grace Baptist Partnership is to grow leaders, plant churches, and reach the nations with the gospel of Christ. They have a website, please see: www.gracebaptistpartnership.org.uk

Barry King is the general secretary. Barry is pastor of Dunstable Baptist Church in Bedfordshire alongside his wider leadership role with Grace Baptist Partnership. GBP now publishes a free monthly newsletter with news of



churches and church plants. A copy can be requested through the website which is warmly recommended for your attention. ■



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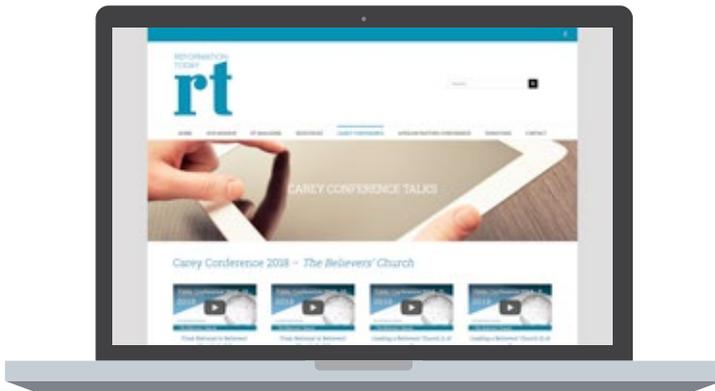
Further details about individual APC conferences are available from Phil Roberts (phil@tentmaker.org.uk) or Frederick Hodgson (frederick.hodgson@gmail.com)

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- ▶ The Resurrection of Jesus (John 20) (Part 2)
- ▶ Who should represent us?