

Rembrandt, and the good SAMARITAN

Jonathan Black, Bicester

The Dutch artist Rembrandt painted many Bible scenes. His painting of the 'good Samaritan', a parable told by the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 10 verse 33 hangs in the Louvre and is actually called, 'The 'Merciful Samaritan'.

I wonder what you would include if you had to paint a picture of the good Samaritan? Would it be a graphic image of the man who was beaten up and left for dead at the side of a road going from Jerusalem to Jericho? I travelled that road once on a bus and could just imagine the ambush on this deserted winding road framed by craggy rocks, perfect for robbers to hide and pounce.



The Good Samaritan by Rembrandt

Or maybe you would focus on the proud priest who passed by on the other side of the road unwilling to help. The Levite wasn't much better, having a look but again moving on. If it had happened today they would have likely snapped a picture on their mobile phone and 'shared' it with their fellow priests. Rembrandt's canvas, however, brings us to the

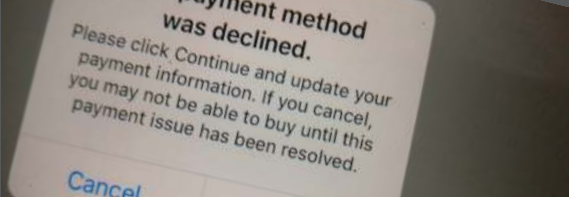
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steps of the inn and shows us how that the good Samaritan, after dressing the man's wounds and performing some very essential first aid, brought him on his own horse to a hotel where he could be cared for. He knew the true meaning of share - sacrifice!

The scene shows the man being lifted off the animal but to the right at the door of the inn did you notice what the good Samaritan is doing? He is paying the inn keeper for the man's care and accommodation.

What is the lesson? We all like to think of ourselves as good Samaritans but Jesus Christ taught that 'there is none good but one, that is God', Matt. 19. 17. We can define the word 'good' by our own standards, laws, ideas and philosophies but someone else is equally entitled to define good by their standards and who is to say what is right? The answer is that only God can define what good is and His standard is perfection. We all fall short. There was only one man who was truly good and that is Jesus Christ who is sinless. The Lord Jesus is truly the good Samaritan.

He came to save us and meet our spiritual needs. Sin has wounded us all and left it's mark. Like that man on the road to Jericho who would have died had it not been for the good Samaritan, we face eternal death if it wasn't for Jesus Christ offering

eternal life. If you asked that beaten up man as he lay in a warm comfortable bed that night in the inn, 'excuse me, sir, what happened?' He might have showed you his wounds and told you, 'I was nearly dead'. You might ask him, 'Well who saved you?' He would have pointed to the good Samaritan and said, 'Him over there. He saved me! I did nothing, deserved nothing, He just came and lifted me onto his horse and I trusted him. He brought me to this house and paid the price in full for I had nothing to pay'.

Dear reader, that is what Jesus Christ did on the cross; He paid the price for our sins, a price we could never pay because anything we offer God is not an acceptable means of payment.

Do you know the good Samaritan, Jesus Christ? We welcome you to the 10th edition of Faith Matters. But remember, your faith matters only because of who your faith is in. It doesn't matter how great your faith or how small. What matters is that your faith is in Jesus Christ. The moment we place our faith **in** Him, He saves because He paid it all.

There was no other good enough
to pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate
of heaven, and let us in.

JB



SEEING

is believing

Frank. A. Proudlock, Leicester

How do you know something is real? For example, how do you know where you are right now, reading this article, at a particular time on a particular day? How do you determine what is true or what is just a figment of your imagination?

Much of what we know to be real is determined by our senses. As humans, we especially rely on vision. Over 40% of our brain processes visual information coming from more than 125 million sensors in our eyes. Our brain uses this information to determine where we are in the world and to recognize objects in our environment, such as someone's face or the text we are reading on this page right now.

But even vision can let us down. What we see is heavily influenced by our expectations. It is the reason we

experience optical illusions. So can we always believe what we see?

The Bible states that there are spiritual and eternal realities that our eyes cannot see. The Apostle Paul put it like this: 'the things which are seen are temporal [or passing away]; but the things which are not seen are eternal', 2 Cor. 4. 18. A key statement on how we can appreciate these unseen realities is given in the Bible in the book of Hebrews, a book written to Christians of Jewish heritage who faced intense persecution for their faith. It says: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen', Heb. 11. 1. So faith is believing in what God has recorded in the Bible and it is a mechanism to know the certainty of truth related to the past, present and future, even when we can't see it.



'Relativity' by M.C. Escher (1953). The artist often experimented with perspective and gravity exploiting our expected view of the world to generate optical illusions and conflicts.

But why should we trust the Bible? What evidence is there that the Bible is true? One reason is that much of what is written in the Bible is the first-hand accounts of people who witnessed real events for themselves.

The Apostle John wrote about this. Describing the time he spent with the Lord Jesus, John said, 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life', 1 John 1. 1. John was really saying that God came into the world in the person of the Lord Jesus. He came

close enough to be heard, seen and even to be touched. We can read those personal accounts in the four Gospels of the Bible.

The amazing message of the Bible is that through the Lord Jesus God has demonstrated that He is tangible and real. But when the Lord Jesus was here He also came close enough to be man-handled, maltreated and nailed to a cross. It was through deliberately going to the cross,

however, that the Lord Jesus is now able to bring us near Him. He laid down His life to

remove the barrier of sin that kept us at a distance from God and out of heaven. He rose again from the dead after three days. After rising again He wanted His disciples to hear, see and touch Him.

He wanted them to really grasp the fact and be certain that He is alive and had come as the Saviour of the world. God still wants us to know and be sure of these facts today. Through putting our personal faith in the Lord Jesus, we can experience forgiveness of sins and be brought into a personal relationship with Him.

SOUND *of* THE PIPES



Stephen Grant, Bridge of Weir

To a Scotsman, the sound of bagpipes can stir the blood, or, in my case as I sit at my desk, cause the blood to boil. I am nowhere near a Highland Games or Rugby match – I am actually in my own house as the strains of various patriotic tunes pierce the wall that separates my home from our neighbour. Yes, my young neighbour plays the bagpipes. Although it can be irritating, it also takes me back a full year or more; and what a year!

You might remember the nights when we stood on our doorsteps and applauded the NHS during the first lockdown of 2020. In our street, our young neighbour played his pipes and we enjoyed his contribution to our local show of appreciation for all the work that was being done on our behalf by the NHS.

Certain sounds and sights often trigger memories, just like those bagpipes being played. It can be a smell, taste or picture and suddenly the gate of memory swings open.

As a Christian I have this experience every Sunday morning as I meet with my local church (not the bagpipes). You may have heard of communion and wondered what it is all about. Every Sunday morning our local church gathers together to focus on two symbols that help us remember the Lord Jesus Christ. We share bread and wine and in so doing remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the Lord Jesus died on the Cross, He gave instructions to His followers to share a loaf of bread together as a symbol of His body given for us, and to share a cup of wine as a symbol of His blood shed. This is something that I have been doing every Sunday for years. Yet, when I sit and take the bread and wine, the thoughts and memories of the Lord Jesus flood my mind and warm my soul. It causes me to worship God as I am reminded of what the Lord Jesus did for me in His death and resurrection.

The reason that the bread and wine are so important to me as a Christian is that it regularly takes me back in my heart to that most important event. The death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is the foundation of my faith and hope for eternity. It was on that Cross so long ago that the Lord Jesus died to pay the price of my sin in order for me to be reconciled to God and saved from my sin. It never gets old, and I hope it never will.

If your memory is triggered by sight, sound or even smell and you are

reminded of the most significant event or person in your life, what or who would that be? It is an interesting question.

If you are not a Christian then it is unlikely to be anything to do with Jesus Christ, the cross or God's salvation from sin. If that is the case, then there is someone and something that you should really get to know and experience. The Lord Jesus Christ died on that cross and rose again from the dead to save anyone who would come to Him, turn from their sin and trust Him as their personal Saviour. If you would do so, you would experience such a transformation in life, and for eternity, that you would always remember that moment; especially when you take the bread and wine as a Christian in obedience to the request of the Lord Jesus to remember Him.

‘the Son of God,
loved me and
gave himself for
me’, Gal. 2. 20



THE HUMAN TOUCH

Leslie Craig, Magherafelt

We live in an increasingly high-tech world. Major supermarkets have self-scan checkouts and banks have automated lodging and dispensing terminals. Many of us buy more goods online than we do over a store counter. Yet there are times when we want the warmth of the human touch in our day-to-day interactions.

When I was in my teens, I had a serious, life-threatening illness. Before it was diagnosed, I was put into a single room in the hospital in case I would infect someone else with this unknown disease. For days I was not allowed to be touched by anyone other than medical staff who were wearing protective clothing. Decades later I had to self-isolate during the Coronavirus pandemic in case someone else would inadvertently infect me.

While human touch brings the warmth and comfort of contact, it can also bring crosscontamination and infectious diseases.

The Touch of Death

Where was God when COVID-19 first infected humans in 2019? Where was He when the Boxing Day Tsunami hit in 2004? Surely the presence of such great suffering in our world presents the greatest challenge to the existence of an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful Creator. The answer is quite simple, but it is not easy. God is not the author of human suffering, but He is the ultimate answer to it. And in providing the answer to human pain, God has suffered infinitely more than any of His creatures could. Humans are the source of their troubles. It is obvious where the fault lies for the vast majority of human suffering. Hatred fuels devastating wars, selfish desire exploits others for personal gain, and oppression disadvantages those who are vulnerable and defenceless. However,

‘To answer the justice of God for our crimes, Jesus became accountable for our sin’.

not all human suffering can be explained by these causes. The Bible explains that we live in a broken world that has been radically changed by the rebellion of the first humans. The effects of Adam’s sin not only put our physical world at risk of devastation but it also permanently affected the human race itself. The hand that reached out to take of the forbidden fruit also reaches down to touch us. We have been contaminated by Adam’s actions; we are sinful and broken because we have his DNA in our beings.

The Touch of Life

Our Creator is not some distant, uncaring deity. He not only cares, but He came down to save us. God became fully human in Jesus Christ. He knows what it is to be poor, hungry, misrepresented and despised. He walked the dusty roads of Palestine and saw the suffering of humans through human eyes. And He did not turn away. Lepers were the social outcasts of Bible times. Their disease was so contagious that by law they had to self-isolate from friends and family. They would cry out “Unclean! Unclean!” as a warning to any who would venture near. A man

who was completely covered with leprosy dared to approach Jesus one day. He shouted out, ‘If you are willing, I know that you can heal me’. Imagine his shock when Jesus not only stopped but then made His way over to him. Jesus did the unthinkable and touched him. With a reassuring smile, Jesus said, ‘I am willing, be healed’. Instead of the contagion passing to Jesus, healing passed to the man. The leper was immediately healed. The Bible says that Jesus went on from there to become our substitute on the cross at Calvary. To answer the justice of God for our crimes, Jesus became accountable for our sins. God in wrath treated Jesus as if He was sin itself. As a sinless saviour, He could take the place of sinful humans and yet not be contaminated Himself. He paid sin’s penalty by His suffering and death and was raised the third day to satisfy the justice of God on our behalf. Sin has contaminated us all, but the touch of Jesus Christ still heals the soul and clears the guilty. Reach out to Him by faith, and He will be closer to you than any mere human friend. ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved’, Acts 16. 31 NKJV.





What Purpose?

Jeremy Holifield, Deri

‘to what purpose is this waste?’ Matt. 26. 8

It is mostly a comforting exercise to consider what we have been saved from.

When we read in scripture that we have been delivered from ‘this present evil world’, Gal. 1. 4, or ‘the wrath to come’, 1 Thess. 1. 10, we are filled with a sense of relief and bow in praise of our Deliverer.

I say ‘mostly’ because there is another aspect to our salvation that, whilst being a relief, also presents a challenge to us. This is bound up in Peter’s comment that we have

been redeemed from our ‘vain conversation’, 1 Pet. 1. 18, a more literal translation of which would be ‘futile way of life’.

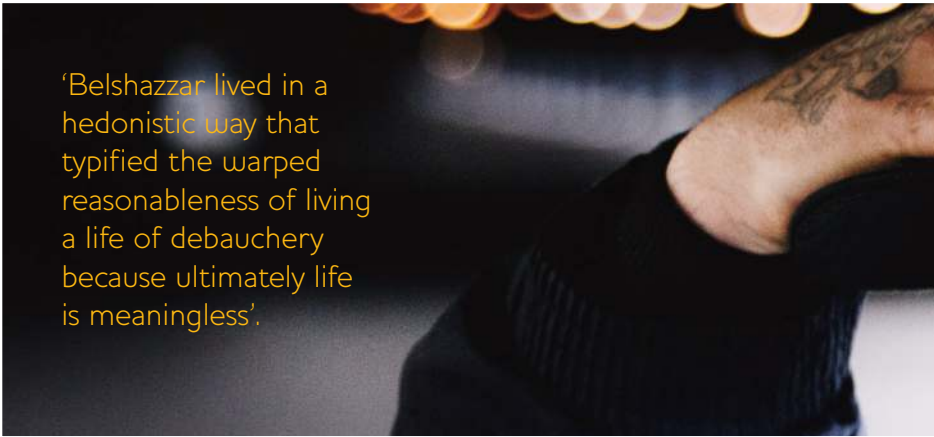
That describes our pre-conversion existence as being ultimately of no enduring purpose.

This is sadly true. The vast majority who have lived and died have left only fading memories in the minds

of a diminishing number of loved ones. Very few leave an imprint in history that survives meaningfully for any length of time. In the final reckoning, all will be consumed by the purging of the Divine flame when this earth is consumed, 2 Pet. 3. 10.

The Christian, however, has been liberated from such a life of pointlessness. We have the opportunity to live lives of real usefulness, to achieve

because ultimately life is meaningless. There stepped into his presence an octogenarian who, a very long time before as a youth, had embraced the opposite mindset. The word of God records of the teenager Daniel that he 'purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself', Dan. 1. 8. That strength of purpose clearly became the characteristic of his long life. It enabled him to rebuke Belshazzar with the words 'the God in whose hand thy breath is, and



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that which will be of eternal consequence.

Belshazzar lived in a hedonistic way that typified the warped reasonableness of living a life of debauchery

whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified', Dan. 5. 23. Daniel grasped the secret of living a meaningful life. It is to glorify God in the way that we live.

David had understood this principle as can be seen from his words, which are fulfilled in the life of Christ, 'I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart', Ps. 40. 10. rather he had displayed it by the way he had lived his life.

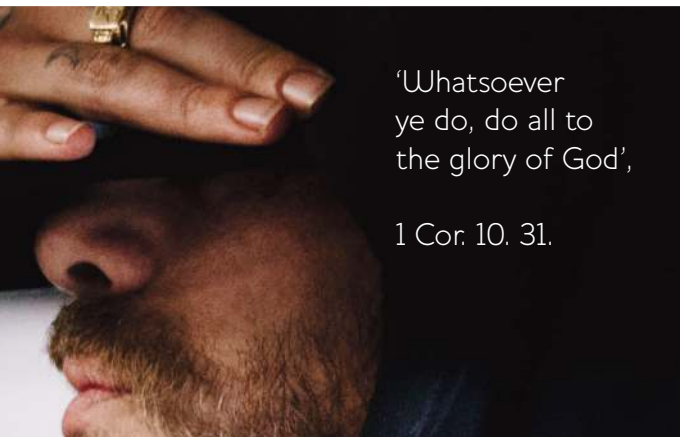
Paul also saw this as our ultimate responsibility. He wrote to Christians in Corinth to say they were 'bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's', 1 Cor. 6. 20.

In a world that is increasingly focussed on the moment, whether that be to escape the realism of life's difficulties by befuddling the senses with intoxicating substances or craving ecstatic experiences to lift us out of the normality of day-to-day life, the Christian can adopt a purpose that has consequence beyond time.

Towards the end of his days, Paul wrote to his friend Timothy and encouraged him to reflect upon the apostle's 'doctrine, manner of life,

purpose', 2. Tim. 3. 10. That drive could be summed up in his exhortation to the church in Corinth; 'whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God', 1. Cor. 10. 31.

Let us determine



'Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God',

1 Cor. 10. 31.

No one would deny that David, Daniel and Paul were all purpose-driven men and that they certainly didn't live pointless lives.

not to waste our lives by living pointlessly but to devote them to glorifying our God in the way we occupy ourselves and behave. May it never be questioned of the way we live our lives, 'to what purpose is this waste?' Matt. 26. 8.

'Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic or the Lord.'
C.S. Lewis

What think ye of Christ?

This copy of *faithmatters* comes to you with the compliments of:

We hope you have enjoyed reading this pamphlet and that you will follow up the suggestion that you should read the Bible for yourself. We are not asking that you join a church, nor become 'religious' or turn over a new leaf, but that you find the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Friend. He can forgive your sins and assure you of peace in your life and a place in heaven.

If you do not have a Bible or New Testament of your own then do purchase one. They are available quite cheaply in most bookshops like Waterstones, or W. H. Smith, and in different versions to suit your reading taste.

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