

HOME

Stephen Baker,
Northern England

Do you enjoy the warm feeling of being in your home? That assumes, of course, that you have a home, you enjoy being at home, and your home is in a fit state to live in. However, home life can be a nightmare for many people. It is often a place of confrontation, where you are on edge as you are not sure what will happen next. For others, home just doesn't exist. It's a dream, something that, so far, just hasn't happened for them – couch surfing, shared accommodation or, at worst, they have ended up living on the street.



I've been privileged to travel extensively in the last 10 to 15 years. When I visited North America, there seemed to be an abundance of wealth. Uganda is a beautiful country, but there is significant poverty. Yet, at the same

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time, the people are really happy. For the average person in Pakistan, life is just so hard, and it's incredible to see what some people call home – tents, etc. But on the other hand, those of us who live in comfortable, safe, dry homes should be extremely grateful and appreciative.

Overall, it is amazing to see people's resilience, love of life, appreciation of kindness, and strong sense of family and belonging. What have they got to live for? I suggest that for many, they have their sights set on another world.

The Bible says that no matter what type of home life we have in this world, there is the prospect of a better home in the next. In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ is recorded as telling His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. In that conversation, He indicated that He was going back to heaven, His Father's house, and that He would look forward to welcoming them to live there with Him. I have a feeling that the preparation He was talking about did not involve 'bricks and mortar' but that, by His death, burial, and resurrection, He was making life in heaven available to all. He was

going to die for sin and suffer, the just for the unjust (us), to bring us to God.

Many of my readers will not be convinced that the Bible is relevant to them. But, as a Christian, I am convinced that the Bible is more than just an interesting book or a book of ancient or historical value. Instead, I believe that the Bible is a unique book, vital for every human being to understand why they are in the world and why they need a relationship with God.

As I finish, let me take you back to the words of the Lord Jesus.

As well as promising that He was going back to heaven (the inference being that He had come from heaven to this planet in the first place), He was making it clear that He is the only way for every human being to get to know God (His Father) and to be in a fit condition to occupy heaven on the other side of death. So, Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'.

For anyone who wants to read what Jesus said for themselves, read the Gospel of John, chapter 14.



if...

Tom Merriman, South Wales

Just two letters, but there could be a lot riding on them, because they are often followed by a 'then'. For example, 'If only I had done, or known, this or that, then the outcome would have been different'.

People have been heard to say, 'If God would do this or that . . . then I would believe in Him'. When someone questions our ability to do something, it can provoke in us a sense of pride that wants to prove them otherwise. Some have stretched themselves to perform reckless acts with varying degrees of success. However, God is never guilty of pride and does not try to 'prove himself' on our terms. Faith in God is not about what we want Him to be or do, but accepting who He is, and what He has done. Graciously, He rewards those who seek and trust Him.

One day, the devil came to Jesus suggesting that if He was the Son of God, then He could turn stones into bread.¹ Jesus was in the desert and had been without food for some time. Satan proposed that Jesus could satisfy His hunger and at the same time demonstrate His power to prove who He was. But Jesus had not come to perform miracles to gratify His own desires, nor to showcase His power for popularity. His works were always for the glory of God, and He had nothing to prove to the devil. On another occasion, Jesus said, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work'.² The work of God, His Father, was more important to Him than physical food. Pleasing God was food for His soul – it satisfied Him.

Again, the devil took Jesus to the highest point of Jerusalem's temple

and said, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here', suggesting that angels would preserve Him from harm. But Jesus had not come to put Himself in danger's way just to prove who He was. Yet, a few years later the Lord Jesus headed towards Jerusalem, knowing that harm would be done to Him. He was beaten, scourged, and nailed to a cross. There, a mocking challenge was hurled by the soldiers – if He really was the king of the Jews, surely He could save Himself. One of the two criminals hanging next to Jesus added, 'If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us'.³

Little did these people realize that death was the very purpose for which He came – 'to give His life a ransom for many'; He came 'that the world through Him might be saved'.⁴ This is a far-reaching statement. His life and death reveal God's love for all.

The 'if' question is often asked from the standpoint of unbelief, as a challenge, requiring God to act. But, in giving His Son, God has already acted to make it possible for us to be saved.

The 'if' question is really ours to answer:

1. If God is not a God of love who wants to rescue us from our sin, then why did He send His Son?

2. If God is not a holy God, who cannot overlook sin, then why was it necessary for His Son to face God's judgement, to suffer, 'the just for the unjust', to satisfy God's righteousness?⁵
3. If Jesus is not the Son of God, then why did He live a perfect, selfless life and allow Himself to be so cruelly treated and nailed to a cross? Why did He not come down from the cross, when His miraculous power had been shown on so many occasions? Why was the tomb left empty three days after His burial, as He had said?

The centurion who witnessed the events on Good Friday felt the weight of that challenge. In belief he confessed, 'Truly this Man was the Son of God'.⁶

There is another 'if' in the Bible for us to consider – and it comes with a promise. Since our eternal future is riding on it, we do well to give it our full attention: 'If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved'.⁷

¹ Matt. 4. 1-11

² John 4. 34

³ Luke 23. 39

⁴ Mark 10. 45; John 3. 17

⁵ 1 Pet. 3. 18

⁶ Mark 15. 39

⁷ Rom. 10. 9

I Am a Sinful Man

Andrew Greave, N. Ireland

Sometimes, at my work, I've been asked to write what is called a 'pen picture' of myself. A short description that sets out some key points that might help people understand the kind of person that I am. I want you to imagine that you are doing that kind of thing but your challenge is to describe yourself – accurately – in just **five** words?

One of Jesus' disciples, a man called Simon Peter, met that very challenge. You can read about it in Luke chapter 5. After a night's fruitless fishing, the Lord Jesus told Peter to push out into the sea and let down his net. Despite his misgivings and doubt, he did, and caught so many fish that the fishing boat began to sink! This had such an effect upon Peter that he fell down before Jesus with these five words: 'I am a sinful man', Luke 5: 8.

Why would a person describe themselves this way? Was Peter a thief or a cheat? Was he abusive to his wife or did he have a violent temper? Did he live an immoral life? We actually know that he wasn't any of those things because the Bible reveals him to be quite the contrary. So why did he describe himself as 'a sinful man'?

Compared to other people he was a good, hardworking, decent, man – maybe just the way that we think of ourselves. But Peter wasn't just in the presence of other people! He was in the presence of the holy and all-knowing Son of God. Maybe, up to this point, Peter had thought of the Lord Jesus as a particularly good man – maybe that is the kind of view that you have of him. But as he was faced with this tremendous miracle – before One who was

able to control nature itself, in a way that this seasoned fisherman knew was not normal or natural – he recognised who Jesus really was. Beside Him, Peter recognised himself as sinful and unbelieving. Despite his many qualities before men there was no hiding his sinfulness before God.

We console ourselves by comparing ourselves with others – but in light of the holiness of God, we need to see ourselves for what we really are: defiled, guilty and condemned. Like Peter, we ought to face up to our sin. The apostle John wrote, 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves', 1 John 1. 8, and we are good at doing that. We can ignore it, we can excuse it, we can dismiss it as unimportant. But our sins have separated us from God. Isa. 59. 2.

When Peter realised his sinfulness, he said to the Lord: 'Depart from me,' Luke 5. 8. Peter recognised the great gulf that existed between himself and God and, what's more, he felt uncomfortable in His presence. The problem nowadays is that far too many people are untroubled by their sin. It gives them no concern at all. But Peter realised that his **condition** was a barrier which kept him from God. And it wasn't simply that Peter was concerned about the sins that he had **committed** - he hadn't committed what we would call 'enormous sins' but about the fact that he was a sinner. He realised

the problem, not just of what he had done but, of what he was.

But here's something wonderful. Although Peter said to the Lord Jesus, 'depart from me', the Lord didn't say to Peter, 'depart from me!' - despite having every reason to since it is our sin that has polluted God's creation and is an offence to God.

There is a great judgement day coming – a day of reckoning for all humanity – when He will say, 'depart from me,' Matt. 7. 23, to all who continue in their sin. But today God does not say 'depart'. In Matthew chapter 11 verse 28 the Lord Jesus said, 'Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest'. God is issuing an invitation to 'return unto the Lord,' Isa. 55. 7. He invites you to turn from your sin – to repent – and to enter into all the blessing that God planned for mankind from before creation.



The Afterlife According to Jesus



Fraser Munro, Scotland

Life, then death, then what?

Nothing? Or, something?

Could any question be more important?

The potential responses are many and varied, but what if we had the answer from the most reliable source of all? From someone who could be wholly trusted?

Jesus Christ.

In Luke 16, the Lord Jesus lifted the veil between this life and the next as He told the story of two men.

These men came from the same area, but their lives were so very different.

One enjoyed abundant prosperity: the other endured abject poverty. The contrast between them could hardly be greater!

So little in common, but ultimately the same event came to them both. Death, the great leveller, brought each life to a close.

But was that the end?

Throughout history, among people the world over, there has been a general awareness that life does not conclude at the grave.

Could that be more than wishful thinking?

The Bible, in Ecclesiastes 3 verse 11, speaks about God having set the world in the hearts of men. This phrase has also been translated as, 'He has put eternity into man's heart'.

Man was created by God and He has given us a conscience. We know right from wrong. God has also given us a consciousness of something more than the material, something

beyond the temporal. There may be those who try to suppress such thoughts which have been placed by God in our hearts.

As the Lord Jesus continued to speak, He confirmed that neither man had ceased to be. Each continued to exist after death.

For the poor man, death meant a dramatic change in his situation. His soul entered a realm of bliss. His trials and tribulations, his difficulties and distress gave way to a realm where he would be forever comforted.

It is good to know that there is a heaven and that there are those who go there!

For the rich man, death also meant the greatest of changes, but not in a good way. The words of Christ were very blunt, 'The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments', Luke 16. 22, 23. Not a place of joy for him; rather, a place of judgement.

How solemn to know that there is a hell and that there are those who go there!

Why the differences in destination? Did the one go to heaven because he was poor and the other to hell because he was rich? Is eternal destiny simply a reversal of earthly status?

Absolutely not!

It is clear from the account given by the Lord Jesus that the rich man not only retained his senses, he also had his memory. He was fully aware why he was now eternally separated from God. He had never repented of the life he had led, of the sins he had committed. His great concern was for relatives still alive. He wanted them to be aware of where they were heading. He wanted them to do what he had failed to do. He wanted them to repent.

How grateful we should be for the information given by the Lord Jesus!

The immortality of the soul.

The reality of both heaven and hell.

How much more grateful should we be for the intervention made by the Lord Jesus!

In His life, He warned of hell. In His death, He secured a way whereby that fearful place can be avoided.

On the cross, He experienced the wrath of God against sin. As the Son of God, He was sinless, but He took upon Himself the sins of others and the sentence against such sins. He endured the darkness and the desolation associated with hell and then cried in triumph, 'It is finished', John 19. 30.

The message of the gospel tells us the way to heaven. 'Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ', Acts 20. 21. Repentance of our sins and a reception of Christ as our Saviour!

We are not here forever – and there is a hereafter. How important to heed the words of Christ and trust in His work on the cross.

Says the Bible, 'O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!', Deut. 32. 29.



nine

Your BENEFITS Package



Peter Francis, South Wales

I was privileged to spend the last two years of my full-time education in a building in which Swansea's famous son Dylan Thomas had also been educated. Converted into a College of Education, the old Swansea Grammar School overlooked what Dylan described in a 1943 BBC radio broadcast as an 'ugly lovely town ... crawling, sprawling ... by the side of a long and splendid curving shore'.

Fresh from college, having exchanged jeans and t-shirt for a pristine suit, I started my first job on Monday 10th June 1968. Getting your first job is an exhilarating feeling. You have passed the interview, secured the job, and now you are ready to start your new role and make a great impression. The transition from college to office life can sometimes be a tricky one. You have a boss to impress, previously

unknown colleagues to bond with and a whole set of new skills to learn.

It can be difficult to find the right balance between making an impact in your new role and disrupting the balance of the delicate office ecosystem. You do not want to walk in and ruffle any feathers, but you also do not want to fade into the background either. You try to balance energy and enthusiasm with humility on your first day in a new role to avoid coming across as arrogant rather than simply keen to learn.

Thankfully my job came with a generous benefits package: five weeks' paid leave; generous sick time; medical benefits; a healthy pension plan; and job security. The Psalmist David was thinking about his benefits package when he wrote Psalm 103.

He could hardly contain himself. He erupted in a fountain of praise at the start of the Psalm in verses 1 to 5:

'Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from destruction,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.'

So often we are focused on the bad things in life – the disappointments; the family problems; the hurts and emotional wounds; the hard times and the financial distress; illness and everything associated with lockdown during the pandemic. David had his share of problems too, but it seems when he was alone with God his spirits were lifted! Perhaps he was taking a stroll beside a flowing river or sitting on a hill overlooking a picturesque valley. Maybe he was on his knees beside his bed at the crack of dawn – alone with his God. Quiet. Alone. Reflective.

David was basically saying, 'With every ounce of energy and every fibre of my body and every faculty of my being – I want to bless and praise the Lord for ALL His benefits! The benefits of which I am aware,

such as the forgiveness of my sins and His ability to heal my sicknesses but also the umpteen times He has preserved me from injury, accident and death'. Most of the time we are not even aware of the calamities, the accidents and the illnesses He has preserved us from. We only know about the obvious close calls.

Is that all? What about the other innumerable blessings and benefits of being able to have an eternal relationship with the Almighty? Jesus said in John chapter 10 verse 10, 'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly'. Christianity is far more than a series of dos and don'ts. In fact, living as a Christian is the way to have an excellent life, an abundant life, an eternal life.

The apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 7 about not only what we can enjoy in the here and now but also what awaits us in the future, 'that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'

Make sure that God's free and generous benefit package is yours today and like David the Psalmist you will want to bless and praise the Lord for ALL His benefits.

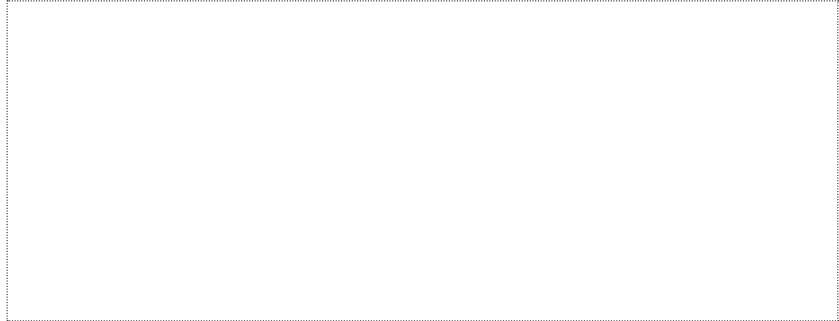
Note:

All Bible quotations are taken from the New King James Version.

QUICK QUOTE

'God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.'
Hudson Taylor

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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, or 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.

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