



Volume 2 Number 3

YPS

Inside this Issue EDITED BY IAN REES

The Valley of the Shadow

Page 1

Understanding what the Bible means

Page 2

Is God ever unkind?

Page 4

Ancient wisdom for a modern world

Page 8

All articles written by the Editor unless otherwise specified

YPS

(Young Precious Seed) is a supplement of *Precious Seed* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

YPS is published by Precious Seed, P.O. Box 8, Neath, West Glamorgan, UK, SA11 1QB, and is also available separately from the magazine.

The Valley of the Shadow

This is Grace's story. She was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1989. She was a beautiful, sweet-natured girl who was well loved by her peers. Her face always glowed with unusual warmth and vivacity and her captivating smile always brought a sparkle to her soft brown eyes. Grace's life was in full bloom until one morning in early July 2003. This is Grace's story as it was published in her school yearbook (a book containing contributions from pupils) and excerpts from her personal diary.

'It was just after grade eight graduation (in Canada). I was so looking forward to a long summer break, but little did I know that that summer would change my life.

In early July 2003 I started to feel very tired every day and weaker than usual. First check-ups didn't show any problems. But I also started having severe attacks of pain in my abdomen, lower back and legs. So, back to the doctors we went again. This time an ultrasound was suggested. I wasn't expecting anything serious. However, the ultrasound showed a mass around my spinal column. The doctor suggested that we go to the Hospital for Sick Children as soon as possible. Although he was able to arrange an appointment quite quickly, my pain increased extremely – almost to the point of my being immobile.



Surprisingly, after our appointment at Sick Kids, we were told that we would be admitted to stay. Many, many tests followed including surgery as well. Then came the shocking news: I had a cancerous tumour on my spine. So many feelings passed through me all at once. I was confused, mad, scared and I was trying to realize what was really happening. I couldn't believe it. I knew God allowed this to happen but I didn't know why. However, I wasn't really upset with God. Most people blame God for the bad things in life. Of course, I was really sad and scared, but somehow God gave me peace so that I could accept it.

I had just gone through major surgery on my back but they could not remove the whole tumour. It was a on very delicate spot on my spine. So instead they released the pressure it made on my spine by scraping some off to test in the lab. This helped a lot with my pain in my lower back and

Understanding what the Bible means

'What saith the scripture'? In this second article we consider a number of principles that help us correctly to understand the meaning of Scripture.

1. Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy

Understanding the meaning of the words used in the Bible is vital. The story about the farmer who complained about a preacher referring to the Hebrew and Greek, saying, 'If the Authorized Version was good enough for the apostle Paul it is good enough for me' still needs to be explained to some people. Thankfully there are today many helpful biblical reference books available. We need to understand important doctrinal words (propitiation, justification) and ecclesiastical words (baptism, bishop) whose meaning is obscured in the AV. The principle extends to all Bible study. 1 Timothy 5. 17 says, 'let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour'. The word 'rule' here is better translated 'take the lead' – elders should not be dictators – while the word 'honour' in Greek has a double meaning. It can mean 'honour', Rom. 12. 10,

but it also means 'price', Matt. 27. 9; Acts 5. 2. Which meaning is right here? Is this verse saying that some elders should be financially recompensed for feeding their flock?

2. Scripture is its own interpreter

We must compare scripture with scripture. This question

must be decided on other grounds, such as context. A text taken out of context is a con. To answer the elders question, look at the next verse. 'You shall not muzzle the ox that treads the corn', and 'the labourer is worthy of his hire', refer to remuneration. Perhaps 'double honour' means that both sorts of honour are due to an elder who sacrifices his income to help God's people. The *immediate context* is frequently decisive. Whether 'when that which is perfect is come', 1 Cor. 13. 10, refers to the completion of the canon of scripture or to heaven is dependent upon what Paul means when he writes two verses later, 'then shall I know even as I also am known'.

The *broader context* is also important. Just reading the first chapter of 1 Corinthians, we might get the idea that the Corinthians had set up Peter, Paul and Apollos fan clubs within the assembly. However, Paul later writes, 'Now these things I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos . . . that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against another', 1 Cor. 4. 6; 1 Cor. 11. 19 also suggests that the Corinthians were making factions around gifted individuals within the assembly. Rather than repeatedly naming and shaming the individuals, Paul has substituted his own name and Apollos' to teach against preacher-worship.

3. Scripture cannot contradict itself

Is an idea consistent with biblical truth or does it contradict other verses in the Bible? This teaches an important lesson. We cannot fully understand parts of the Bible until we understand the whole, nor can we understand the whole until we understand the separate parts. How then can we understand the Bible? 'Meditate day and night!'



by Andrew Wilson

4. Literary context

Understanding the type of literature we read is important. For example, when Psalm 19 says that God has set a tabernacle in the sky for the sun, it is not making a scientific observation; it is using poetic license. Just as we tell little children that 'the sun has gone to bed', so too poetry employs picturesque imagery when describing the sun 'leaving its house' after a day's work. Likewise prophecies sometimes employ symbolism. We are not to take the 'woman clothed with the sun' in Revelation chapter 12, verse 1 literally, and not all points in a parable have to be explained. What does the donkey in the parable of the Good Samaritan mean? Probably nothing! Other special literary types include proverbs and laments.

5. Asking the right questions

Everyone approaches the Bible with questions. Many only try to prove what they already believe. Instead, we need to listen to the questions the Bible raises. Instead of reading 21st century preconceptions into what a passage is saying, we must ask how a biblical author meant to be understood. We must try to 'think biblically' by reading the entire Bible regularly. A verse a day will not keep the devil away. We need to ask questions of the text. Rudyard Kipling's six serving men who taught him all he knew (their names were How and Why and When and Where and What and Who) need to be put to use. What is the point of this passage? What circumstances prompted this epistle? To what sort of people was the Lord telling the parable? How would I have felt if I had been in the place of this woman? Sometimes difficult questions arise in our Bible reading. Seek God's help in prayer as you meditate and

remember: the bumps are what we climb on.

6. Line upon line

Often recurring words and ideas help us work out what the point of the passage is. Scripture emphasizes important truths by repetition. This is not only true in a case like Hebrews 11 where 'faith' is mentioned twenty-five times, but even more so in narrative sections of the Bible. Historical narratives teach their lessons by selecting incidents that repeatedly emphasize a point. For example, in 1 Samuel we notice David's trust in God by repeatedly refusing to kill Saul or exalt himself to the throne.

7. Rightly dividing the word

In addition to repetition, we need to notice natural division. 1 Corinthians 13 is about love, but what does it teach about love? By dividing up the chapter we learn different lessons about love. Rightly dividing the Scripture helps us notice sub-points that develop variations upon the main theme or subject changes that introduce new themes.

Quick quiz

- Does 1 Corinthians 3. 16-17 teach that Christians should not smoke?
- What is the point of Romans 6. 23?
- How do we find God's will from scripture?



Your God is too small! Essential truths

Is God ever unkind?

Of all the attributes that God possesses, the things that make Him who He is, which would you think was His most glorious? His omnipotence, perhaps, being able to do anything, or His omniscience, in that He knows everything? Perhaps His omnipresence, being everywhere at the same time, His timeless existence, or His awesome holiness? All these things surely impress us. Yet when Moses longed to see God's glory, and asked God to show him His glory, God said, 'I will make all my goodness to pass before thee', Exod. 33. 18-19. And so God descended in a cloud, passed before Moses and proclaimed the name of the Lord as, 'The Lord (Jehovah), the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth', Exod. 34. 6-7. It seems as though God Himself sees His goodness as His most glorious attribute.

Our Lord was once addressed as 'Good Master'. He replied, 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God', Matt. 19. 16-17. But what does it mean to say that God is good? J. I. PACKER has suggested it includes 'the quality of generosity . . . that expresses the simple wish that others should have what they need to make them happy'. This 'goodness' involves kindness, benevolence, mercy, grace and patience.

The benevolence of God

Benevolence is God's unselfish concern for the

welfare of others. God shows benevolence to all of mankind, to those who hate Him, reject Him, rebel against Him, ignore Him, or are merely ignorant of Him, and not just to His beloved believing people. This means that He shows kindness and a willingness to meet the everyday needs of all of His creatures. 'The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing', Ps. 145. 15-16. 'He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust', Matt. 5. 45. Paul, preaching to the heathen in the city of Lystra, said God 'did good, and gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness', Acts 14. 17. We are encouraged to 'give thanks unto the Lord for he is good' in Psalm 136, and one of the reasons for us to do so is that He 'giveth food to all flesh', v 25. This includes the animal kingdom, for 'the earth is satisfied with the fruit of (His works). He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle. The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God', Ps. 104. 14, 22. 'These all wait upon thee that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather; thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good', v 27-28. Yes, 'God is good to all', Ps. 145. 9. 'Since God controls all that happens in His world, every meal, pleasure, possession, bit of sunshine, every night's sleep, every moment of health and safety, everything that sustains and enriches life, is a divine gift', (J. I. PACKER). 'Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men!' Ps. 107. 1. You do not see the gardens of believers having more sunshine or more rain than their unbelieving neighbours. No. God is benevolent to all.



s about the attributes of God

The grace of God

God's grace is His love and benevolence shown to those who do not deserve it. This is seen when God meets the needs of His creatures on the basis of their need, not on the basis of their merit or worthiness. There is no doubt that no-one deserves God's goodness. Ever since the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, mankind has either hidden itself from God, openly defied Him, or turned away from Him. As a result of this, God's verdict is that all have sinned against Him and come short of His glory. Even as they rejected God, He gave them over to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to vile affections and to a reprobate mind, Rom. 1. 24, 26, 28. Yet still He is gracious to sinful mankind, showing such grace in His benevolent care of all. In general terms (common grace) as well as with regard to salvation (special grace) 'the Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy', Ps. 103. 8. He is a God 'ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness', Neh. 9. 17. He is, in His own words, 'merciful and gracious . . . keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin', the One who is sovereign in His dealings with mankind and who 'will be gracious to whom I will be gracious', Exod. 34. 6-7, 33. 19.

The mercy and patience of God

If grace is giving us what we do not deserve, mercy is withholding from us what we do deserve. There is a sense in which the mercy of God is shown to men and women every day through God's patience and longsuffering. Even today, at this very moment, the wrath of a just and holy God is upon the heads of those who do not believe and trust in Him, John 3. 36. Mankind deserves God's righteous judgement and anger

for its rejection of God, its disobedience and rebellion against Him. Yet God's patient forbearance and mercy to the wicked causes many to wonder whether He is really taking account of what is done. David was troubled by this.

Why, he asked, do the wicked prosper and the godly suffer? Where is God's justice in this? Why are wicked men not judged instantly by God? Why is it possible for a man to survive when he shakes his fist towards heaven and say, 'If there is a God, I challenge him to strike me dead!'? It is only when Asaph went into the sanctuary of God that he understood as he was reminded of their latter end, of the judgement to come, Ps. 73. 17. For God will right all wrongs. He will ultimately judge the wicked, the unrepentant, the defiant. Yet, in the meantime, He gives every opportunity for repentance to sinful mankind. Oh! the patience of God, for God is 'slow to anger and plenteous in mercy', Ps. 103. 8-11. 'Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion and gracious, longsuffering and plenteous in mercy and truth', Ps. 86. 15. He is 'longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance', 2 Pet. 3. 9. Even in the days of Noah, God showed great mercy and patience before sending the flood to judge a wicked world, 1 Pet. 3. 20. Yet men should be careful not to despise 'the riches of God's goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth [us] to repentance', Rom. 2. 4.

God's mercy and grace are also seen, not just in withholding judgement from men for so long a time in this life, but also in providing salvation for men in the next. Were God to consign the whole of mankind to eternal punishment and separation from Him, He would be just



Is God ever unkind?

and right to do so. Yet in salvation He chooses to have mercy upon some, to forgive, and save them. God is too good to enjoy judging sinners. 'As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked', Ezek. 33. 12. Yet God chooses to show grace to some and to save them. It is by grace that we are saved through faith, Eph. 2. 7-9. Believers are 'justified freely by his grace', Rom. 3. 24. 'God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace are ye saved); Eph. 2. 4-5.

Objection One

Someone will naturally say, but how can God be kind and benevolent if He sends anyone to hell? Surely His goodness and kindness means He will not do so? God's goodness is one side of His character that must not be emphasized against another side, which is His justice and His holiness. God hates sin; He would not be holy if He did not. God cannot excuse and must punish sin; He would not be just and righteous if He did not. But He is able to show grace, mercy and patience because He is good. But His goodness is there to lead men to repentance, not to excuse them from it. Is it fair, then, for God to judge sin? Of course it is. Is it kind of Him to punish sin? It would be more unkind for Him not to. Can a God who sends men to hell be good? It is His goodness that cannot in the end excuse sin, though it may be long suffering in enduring it. Should God eventually judge a man or woman for their sin, it is good and right that He should.

Objection Two

Because God is good, everything that God does

is good. So why does God allow sorrow, and suffering in His world? Why is it that wickedness is permitted? And why do some of God's children suffer? Should not a good God alleviate all that, prevent it? Evil is in the world, but God did not make evil. Sin destroys, brings sorrow, illness, suffering and death. We live in a fallen world, and though we are God's people we may suffer some of the illnesses that others suffer, we may be burgled, we may die, we may be injured by the wrong-doing of others. But we have a double comfort. In the first place, though God may not alleviate the trouble, the illness, whatever it may be, He does give us grace to bear it. 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'; 2 Cor. 12. 9. And secondly, we can be reassured that out of evil a good God can bring good. 'Ye meant evil against me, but God meant it for good', is a wonderfully comforting word for God's people who endure wrong at the hands of others, Gen. 50. 20. And behind it all, we remember and take comfort from the fact that a good God will ensure that 'all things work together for good to them that love [Him] to them that are called according to his purpose'; Rom. 8. 28.

Is God benevolent, kind, merciful, gracious, and patient? If so, so should we. 'If you love them that love you, what thank have ye? But love your enemies, and do good . . . and ye shall be the children of the Highest, for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father is merciful', Luke 6. 32-37. 'Love suffereth long and is kind', 1 Cor. 13. 4. 'Put on therefore . . . kindness . . . long suffering; forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye', Col. 3. 12-13.



...Continued from Page 1.

legs. The doctors needed to determine the type of cancer and any available treatments. As a result, I had to undergo stressful chemotherapy and rounds of radiation. Before any of my tests or sessions with a doctor, I would pray with my mum and dad together. I have to admit I was quite scared sometimes, even to tears. However, deep down I always had a sense of peace.

That summer was filled with endless tests and I met many doctors, nurses and hospital staff. I was praying more than ever the following weeks. Since I was confined to the hospital for the whole summer, I found much more time to read my Bible every day. I felt my relationship with God was strengthening. He and I were becoming closer. I really felt His comfort and peace whenever I prayed. Sometimes I would still ask, Why? Why me, God? It encourages me to remember that God has a purpose for everything, Rom. 8. 28.

Near Christmas time (2003) I felt led to get baptized. I felt that, since I was saved and part of the family of God, I wanted to get baptized. I wanted my life to be a witness for Christ. I felt really good that night. I was consecrating my life to God. When my grade 9 school year began, I was determined that I would do the work and pass the grade. This would have been something impossible on my own, but with everyone's prayers, the Lord helped me through the whole year. With the help of my classmates, teachers, the filming of the classes and sending my homework everyday I was successful. For this I am thankful to all of them.

Today I am still fighting this horrible disease, but only with the help of my Lord have I made it this far. He helped me through the pain, through all the needles, treatments, and through all the bad reports that we have received from



the doctors. My home assembly has made a difference and still does, with thoughtful prayers, caring actions, sincere love and beautiful gifts. I thank them all so much for this. This is the love of the Christian family of God. The power of prayer is great. I can't imagine how difficult this experience would be without the Lord Jesus Christ. So all I can do is pray and depend on the Lord for the rest!

Grace's father writes:

'Our daughter, Grace, was saved in 2001 and later on baptized and received into fellowship at Eglinton Avenue Gospel Hall. The title Grace chose for this yearbook article was 'Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for thou art with me'. While Grace walked through the valley, she was conscious of the Lord's presence as He promised. Shortly after she wrote this article, the doctor told Grace there was nothing more they could do for her medically except to try to manage her severe pain. The day after she heard this news, Grace wrote this prayer in her personal diary:

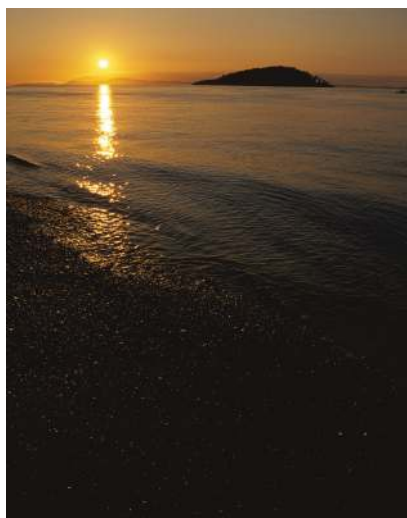
Dear Lord Jesus, I know everything is in Your hands. It has always been. There is nothing that human doctors can do. However, You are the great physician. I do not know what Your plan is, but I do know You! Whatever You do is the best for me. You have promised in Your word, 'all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are

Continued from Page 7

called according to His purpose! I know You have a purpose for my illness. I just do not know what the purpose is. Of course I want to get better; but You may have other plans. I accept whatever You do. I thank you so much for everything You have done for me. You may want me to be with You soon. I love You, Lord. I thank You for dying on the cross for me and for saving me from my sins. I know You can heal me, but Your will be done. Thank You for giving me peace, I really need peace. I know You can take away my pain. Please do, Lord, but again Your will be done. Lord, You have helped, comforted, calmed and cheered me up. You have brought me through a whole year and about three months. Now, please let me be able to see the yearbook when it comes. I am really excited – just two weeks please.

These were Grace's last words in her diary. God granted her prayer and gave her exactly two weeks. He also granted her simple request to see the yearbook. Two weeks later, Grace died and went to be with her beloved Redeemer on November 1st 2004 after battling with cancer for about 16 months. We are missing her greatly but we know she is in a far better place!

Grace would have been 15 years old just over two weeks after she died.



Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World

Wise words
from the book of Job



Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith

Which of us has not preferred a simple meal with good companions to a feast with those with whom we do not get on? The force of this proverb is that a happy loving relationship, though it may not be wealthy, is more desirable to wealth and ostentation where there is hatred.

One doesn't have to be wealthy to be happy, though no doubt many would like to be better off than they are. Riches do not bring happiness; in fact, neither do they bring lasting love and companions, as the prodigal son himself discovered. Only the other day there was a report of a lottery winner who had turned to drugs. The man, who was 38 years old at the time and his 36-year-old wife had won £5.4 million. Yet, young and wealthy though he had become, he turned to drugs to cope with the pressures of becoming a millionaire overnight. The stresses led to his wife walking out on him and his two young children having to move schools. Magistrates in Sheffield gave him a two-year conditional discharge and two weeks to pay £50.00 costs. His lawyer said, 'If he still lived on the council estate like an ordinary family with 2.4 children, he would not have received the same media attention that he has today. His life has been made intensely difficult'. How devastated his wife must have felt when family life, love and companionship was replaced with wealth and stress; and who could blame her if she wished the old days back again?

The word of God, from which this proverb is taken, is far from being out of date as a commentary on society and a source of wisdom for us today. In fact, it is extremely relevant, for though our circumstances and cultures may change, the heart of man is essentially the same. After all, were we to paraphrase the proverb and say, 'A ploughman's lunch with friends is better than a Sunday roast with our enemies' who could disagree? Let us be thankful with what we have, though it be little.