

Inside this Issue

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In My Place

Page 1

The Race

Page 4

Are you still in fellowship?

Page 6

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.

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IN MY PLACE

Luis and Sebastian were twins and their home was a flat-roofed white house outside the walls of a little mountain town. Their parents had died but had left them a small inheritance and the boys lived on in their old home. They were so alike that no one in the town could easily tell them apart, but as the years passed the boys developed differently. Sebastian held a good job; he was kind, steady and hard-working, and everyone spoke well of him. But Luis was lazy and would not work. He was fond of nightlife and drank hard.

Late one night Sebastian sat at the window, strangely uneasy, his eyes fixed on the white ribbon of road that led to the city gates. Luis, as usual, was not yet home, but somehow tonight his brother could not sleep. He spotted the running figure even before he heard the beat of his feet on the road, and he went to the door. Luis was running alone, and pushed past him into the house. By the light of the lamp Sebastian could see that Luis' face was deathly pale, his clothes were torn and blood-stained and he trembled so that he could hardly speak.

'Sebastian, hide me! hide me! They are coming to take me and it will be death for me', he panted. 'What do you mean?' asked Sebastian, running to the window. Sure enough, a crowd of people were making their way from the town to the house. 'We drank too much' cried Luis. 'We fought ... I didn't mean to ... he fell backwards and died. O Sebastian, hide me! What shall I do?'

But Sebastian already knew what to do and was tearing off his shirt. There was not a moment to spare. 'Put on these clothes and take off yours', he said hurriedly. 'Now quick! Stop trembling and go. Out through the back door and up into the hills, and don't come back for a long time. Run, brother, I'll sort this out.'

Luis disappeared through the back door just in time. The crowd was already surging round the house as he disappeared in the dark up the hill behind the house. The town guard hammered on the door and



In My Place

burst in as Sebastian opened it. Sebastian was standing very still, breathing fast, his hair dishevelled, his face dirtied, wearing his brother's blood-stained clothes. The guard handcuffed him, but he offered no resistance. He walked quietly to the town gaol. Several weeks later he was tried and condemned to death for murder.

'How quiet he stood!' commented the men and women in the bars and homes of the town. 'He did not say a word to defend himself. He pleaded guilty, and made no attempt to hide his bloodstained clothes. And where was that fine brother of his? He was not at the trial nor has he been to work for days. He has disappeared and let his brother down. A fine family! Is he ashamed of his brother? Is he to let him die alone?'

Luis hid in the hills and small villages around the town for several months. He worked for a farmer during the day, but was afraid to leave his lodgings at night. He dreamt frequently of those running feet, of the fight, of his fear. He regretted killing his comrade, and longed to see his brother again. He

resolved, at last to return home. By now he had grown a beard and was not afraid of being recognized.

He walked into his home town on the next market day and mingled with the crowd. He overheard some speaking of the murder case and, in particular, of the brother, Sebastian, who had disappeared into his house. Some said it

was because of the shame of what his brother, Luis, had done. 'I hear the killer got away,' Luis interrupted. 'Are they still searching for him, or have they given up?' 'Given up!' someone replied. 'Did you not hear that they caught him the same day, in his own house, still dressed in his blood-stained clothes? He pleaded guilty at the trial, which was therefore over quickly, he was sentenced to death, and was in fact executed last week. He died bravely, there is no doubt, which is more than can be said for that coward brother of his, Sebastian, of whom we all thought very highly at one stage. He has not been seen in the town since, and didn't even come to bid his brother farewell!'

Luis hardly heard this last comment. With a desolate groan he turned from the market place and made his way, half-blinded with tears, to the Governor's mansion and demanded an entrance. The Governor came to see what the commotion was all about. 'You have killed an innocent man,' cried Luis. 'It was my brother, Sebastian you killed, not me. I killed the man in the fight. You must arrest and punish me'. The Governor withdrew. After much consultation he reappeared. 'The law says a life for a life,' he announced. 'If your brother was innocent we did not know that. He looked like you, he wore the blood-stained clothing, he pleaded guilty, he was found guilty and was sentenced. The case is closed, and we do not want to kill two men for one. Go and keep your mouth shut, and see that you make no more trouble.'

As Luis turned blindly away, the Governor said, 'Are you his only brother?' 'Yes,' replied Luis. 'Then I have a letter for you,' said the Governor. 'Your brother asked to be given pen and paper before he died, and then



gave this envelope to me to give to a brother of his should he ever come for it. Here it is. Take it and go’.

Alone in his old home that evening, where he and his brother had spent many a pleasant evening in childhood, and many an angry one in later years, Luis sat with his memories, the unopened letter in his hand. It was nearly midnight before he opened it. It was short, and he read it over and over again.

‘My dear Luis,’ ran the letter. ‘This morning I shall die, of my own free will, in your place and in your bloodstained shirt. Now I plead with you, live in my place and in my clean shirt. I send you my love, as always. May God bless you. Sebastian’. And Luis understood. The waster, who had lived for himself, and had drunk hard, fought and murdered, must be counted as dead in the prison. The man who had loved and suffered and sacrificed must go on living. It should be so. If his brother had died for him, he must live for his brother. He sat alone for a long time, his head in his hands. When morning came, he washed, shaved, dressed himself in clean clothing, and went out, as his brother would have done, to face a new day and a new beginning.

This is an old story from Spain which took place many years ago when law courts were not as thorough as they are now. The story is an illustration of what Christ did for sinners. That Christ died in the place of others is the clear teaching of scripture. To a far greater degree than Sebastian for Luis, Christ suffered, ‘the just [instead of] the unjust’, 1 Pet. 3. 18. He was a willing substitute, a good shepherd who came to give His life for the sheep, John 10. 11. He bore the just judgement of a holy God for sin He had never done. He ‘was wounded for

our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all’, Isa. 53. 5-6.

This God did, so that all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ, accept His death on their behalf, and determine to live for God as Christ would have done, might know peace with God.

Do you know the reality of this in your life? That Christ died our death, taking the place of guilty sinners, bearing our punishment, is the clear teaching of scripture. That we who believe this ought to live a new life for God is equally the clear teaching of scripture. He ‘gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us from this present evil world’, Gal. 1. 4. ‘I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me’, Gal. 2. 20. As we identify ourselves with the death of Christ in our place, and as we ‘were buried with him by baptism into death . . . even so we also should walk in newness of life’, Rom. 6. 4.

Go on. Do what Luis did: live the life of the One who died in your place.

This is an edited version of a story originally written by Patricia St. John and published in a book called, *Would You Believe It?*



The Race by ROY HILL Bristol, England

In any race there are at least three stages: starting; continuing; finishing. Each is equally as important as the other in that any one missed means there will be no result. In some sports the strong and compelling feeling among many competitors is that they must win at all costs, even by cheating if necessary, which some do, and ultimately are caught, named and shamed, as well as being stripped of any prize their cheating may have brought them. The International Olympic creed states, 'The most important thing ... is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well'. In keeping with these sentiments the Olympic motto is: 'swifter; higher; stronger'. There are different kinds of races from short sprints right up to the 26-mile marathon. Others may have obstacles strategically placed which the runner must overcome in order to finish. Each has its own demands and challenges. There is usually only one winner.

good start then he is more likely to run a good race. However, not just anyone can start. There are serious matters to be attended to before a competitor stands on the starting line. There must be training, commitment, fitness, desire and confidence, and only when all these have been successfully attended to may a start be made. In the Christian race the runner must be saved (and should be baptized) otherwise he or she is disqualified and a start on service cannot be made. Without a knowledge of the regulations governing the race any competitor would be at a serious disadvantage, for should any rule be breached then disqualification is a real possibility.

Receiving Christ as Saviour is the decision that commits you to the race and to the course of serving God in your life. Without that you cannot start. There may be some who do try to run but that is like a spectator trying to compete at the Olympics - he becomes an embarrassment to everybody. As a new believer you should endeavour to discover the Lord's will for your life and then make this your priority. His will may be discovered by discussion with other believers, reading His word and listening to His voice in the written and oral ministry that comes your way, and of course, by prayer and waiting on the Lord. It is vital to focus on your specific calling and not be deflected into other service that may be offered to you. For example, many young men have an obvious gift for preaching the gospel. They are commended to that service but soon other believers and assemblies insist on them taking ministry meetings. This encroaches on the time they should be giving to preaching the gospel and because of the additional time needed to prepare for ministry even more is lost to the gospel. So, gospel preaching is curtailed, few are saved and the



The Christian race is different. All who finish the course are winners. It is not a short sprint to glory but a marathon/obstacle race which tests the runners, not to destruction, but to the utmost of their abilities. It, too, consists of starting, continuing and finishing.

Starting

The start is very important. If a competitor makes a

assembly numbers diminish. And we wonder why! Let no one deflect you from your race no matter how helpful or encouraging they may seem to be. You need to be determined to remain in the work to which you are called and are equipped to do. In doing that, and in doing it well, is where your blessing lies.

Continuing

We need to remember we are not in a short sprint to glory but in a long-distance race. Being able to continue is therefore vitally important. Along the route there may be many distractions, even critics who will shout advice or abuse from the sidelines. Though maybe doing little themselves they think they know better than those who are doing the work and running in this race. Other runners too may be distracting as they surge ahead or fall behind. However, much advice is provided in the word to help us continue, e.g., we are exhorted to continue in: 1) 'my word', John 8. 31; 2) 'the grace of God', Acts 13. 43; 3) 'faith', Acts 14. 22; 4) 'in the things ... learned', 2 Tim. 3. 14; 5) 'doctrine'; 6) 'fellowship'; 7) 'the breaking of bread'; 8) 'prayers', Acts 2. 42. If we heed these exhortations then we will surely persevere to the end. We recall Paul saying, 'having obtained help of God I continue', Acts 26. 22, showing that we need more than personal effort in this race ... we need God! Sometimes in the spiritual race runners do fall by the wayside and their once-effective service suffers irreparable damage. Let us resolve not only to run but also to continue in running unhindered by the world, the flesh or the devil.

Finishing

Finishing is very important! When 'finished' the race is over for the

individual though others may still be running. Some would think that we continue to run until the day we die. And so some might! However, it is probably more normal for one to finish one's work before death arrives and we know that Paul did. A real problem for some believers is that they don't know what they were supposed to do in the first instance and therefore don't know when it is done. So, they continue working and serving though their gift may be no longer effective. Some brethren encourage them in this and instead of allowing them to enjoy a period of calm and rest after service and before passing over to the other side they make them keep on running rather than suggesting the passing of the baton on to others and commending them to the grace of God.

To finish is a great achievement and in the spiritual race all who finish receive a reward from the hand of the Lord Himself. This is an incentive to service but is not the objective. To 'take part ... to struggle ... and to fight well' is our creed and to please the Lord is our goal. The receiving of praise from Christ Himself and a 'well done good and faithful servant' is more than we deserve. So, let's 'run all', and let's run well that we may obtain.



ROY HILL is Chairman of the Trustees of *Precious Seed*.

Are you *still* in fellowship? A.N. OTHER

'Dear Steve, You asked me why I chose to come into the assemblies and why I am still in fellowship in them. Here are some of my reasons.'

Shortly after I was saved, I went to two churches in Cambridge, one a Baptist church and the other an assembly of Christians with no denominational name. I had a number of reasons for moving to this Hall, reasons I would still have now. My views, which have changed very little since then, were developed when I was travelling round the world over that summer. I'm not very succinct when trying to explain stuff so I apologise in advance if this seems long winded.

There have been, so far, two key stages in my faith, and two realisations. In becoming a Christian I had realised that much of Christendom was fake, and that the real Lord Jesus was not the one I had perceived Him to be. Consequently I accepted the true Jesus as Lord and Saviour. The second stage, while I travelled, and read, was the realisation that there was a disparity between the Christians of the Bible, and evangelical Christianity today. The Christianity of the Bible was about 'living' faith, and about a 'community' of believers.

This notion of 'living' faith meant a number of things to me as I travelled. It meant communicating with God, through seriously studying the

Bible and seriously praying. It didn't mean relying on being spoon-fed Bible teaching by a 'minister' and relying on others to lead me in prayer. It also meant using worship as a means to reflect my feelings, not to create feelings in me. This meant, as far as church membership was concerned, that I wasn't looking for somewhere where people relied on one man to teach them and did nothing for themselves. Equally, I wasn't looking for somewhere where I would be led in prayer. I was looking for somewhere I could be free to pray. Finally, I wasn't looking for somewhere that would create in me a feeling, or excite me, but somewhere that I could express my feelings in worship.

The notion of a 'community' of believers meant a body whose head was Christ. I saw throughout God's history that His people were often corrupted by their leaders, and that He wanted us to gather around Him and not any one individual. This is, perhaps, still my greatest passion. I rejected the principle, so ingrained in Christendom, of one-man leadership by Pastors, Vicars, Bishops etc. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are sometimes described as the community of the Godhead. I wanted the church to be like that – a community on earth – and I believe that is what it should be. Therefore, feeling very much like the original brethren, I had an ideal in which Christians would be a real priesthood of believers, gathered only to Christ, truly free in their worship and taught by God directly through His word, with other believers as guides and teachers.

What I found was the assemblies. An imperfect, and shrinking sect, some may say? Well, I disagree with many things in these assemblies. I feel they often place too much stress on

This article is the substance of an email sent to a young believer who has been questioning whether to remain in assembly fellowship or not. The sentiments expressed above are the writer's personal opinions, but have been reproduced here as they express in forthright, conversational and contemporary style, his conviction that, despite the undeniable problems and weaknesses that come when we feebly attempt to obey the Scriptures, New Testament principles of gathering are still the ideal for which we strive. We may not all share the writer's views of our weaknesses, but we cannot deny the importance of facing up to our failings. Sometimes young believers are stumbled by our refusal to be honest with ourselves, and it is often our pride and arrogance that drives youngsters away. ED.

**In Christendom
I feel helpless to
change anything
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prophetic teaching of the End Times. I disagree with them about the wishy-washy role they often give to the Holy Spirit – His unique ministry should be given far-greater prominence than it often is (and I am by no means charismatic when I say that). I don't think they give women enough opportunity to teach children and other women. I often disagree with them about the way they evangelize. So why do I still go? and why could I not go anywhere else? Because I feel free to be there, and I believe at the fundamental level they are right.

In the first place, I can go to the Lord's Supper, the highlight of my week, and I can worship the Lord Jesus in freedom. I went to that Hall in Cambridge on that first Sunday and I said nothing, but I have never felt so free to worship. It was only a small meeting of 17 people. If I wasn't there my absence would be noticed. In larger churches there is no sense of a community. In the second place, in the assemblies any one of us can make a difference. I believe God saves everyone not for any merit in them but for His purpose, and if we don't make a difference where we are we aren't fulfilling one of our purposes. I think that some people in the assemblies have too much influence, so that they can become like pastors or vicars. I think the assemblies fail when they move too much towards the rest of Christendom; when doctrines are created and set in stone as if we have nothing else to learn, and traditions of our own become muddled with Bible truth. In Christendom I feel helpless to change anything or to make a real difference; in the assemblies I feel able to do something.

Being a Christian in the assemblies is hard work. That is why it is so unattractive to many. It means being

involved. It means taking responsibility for your own faith, and it means learning to worship without aids. I ended up in the assemblies not by accident but because I made the decision to take the hard, but rewarding route. The assemblies are full of people who have grown up in them. Many don't really want to be there. Perhaps they should leave, if they don't appreciate the freedom they have to worship and pray, if they don't want to take responsibility for their own faith and worship. If they don't believe they can make a difference, then they won't.

I know that, to many, the assemblies are an unattractive place to be. Many seem dead, they seem sexist, they seem to stick to out-dated traditions, and they often appear to be closed and unwelcoming. What I have experienced is a place where people are sometimes lacking belief, where women are sometimes lacking confidence, where people hang on to the familiar and where people are scared of strangers. These are things we can change, just by being there and showing faith, giving women confidence to work for Christ within the constraints of New Testament teaching, introducing the new but testing it to be true, and welcoming the stranger. Perhaps we can change things by our example.

I believe that in Christendom the core is rotten even though the outside looks good to eat, while in the assemblies the core is right but the outside is sometimes unattractive. But I also believe passionately that you can clean up a dirty apple but you can do nothing about a rotten one.

THE TWO PRAYERS

Father, give me,

Luke 15. 12.

Father . . . make me,

Luke 15. 19.

‘Give me,’ he prayed,
the foolish, wilful boy.

He thought that but
to have was to enjoy.

A broken, sobered man,
robbed, hungry, bare,

‘Make me,’ he prayed,
and ‘twas a wiser prayer.

Much wiser.

My possessions may decay:
What I become

can no one take away.
A man’s true worth
may be appraised the best

By what he was,
not by what he possessed.

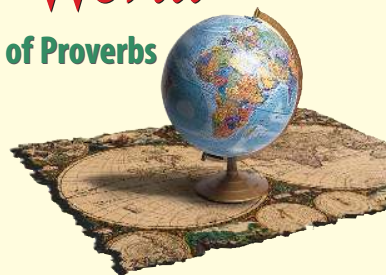
J. M. S. Tait



Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World

Wise words from the book of Proverbs

**‘For him that is joined to
all living there is hope:
for a living dog is better
than a dead lion,’ Eccles. 9. 4.**



To understand where Solomon is coming from in the Ecclesiastes is to realize that he is speaking only of those things that are, ‘under the sun’. In other words God has allowed the wisest man that ever lived to record for us his wisest wisdom as that man and not as a divinely inspired individual. He is inspired of course but writes only as the wisest of men with men’s wisdom about the things he had come to see while living in this world. To grasp this will save you from a lot of the pitfalls this Old Testament book strews across your pathway and the confusions that can result.

Having said this we must account that God has a deep interest in what he thought and has provided it in scripture in order to provoke us to think about what the wisest man considered important and how he saw things. We would be foolish to ignore such a provision!

In these few verses, 4 to 7 of chapter 9, Solomon waxes wise regarding ‘being alive’ and ‘making that life count for something’ rather than ‘being dead’ and having therefore, ‘done with all the things of this life,’ see verse 5. To stress the point he leads us to consider the contrast between a living dog and a dead lion. For all that the lion possesses in reputation, fierceness, aggression and strength the very fact that he is a ‘dead’ lion immediately nullifies his assets! At least a living dog, although far inferior to the lion, can still bark, bite and harass an enemy or would-be thief. This is only because it possesses life - it is alive!

There are several things spiritually that we can learn from this simple but profound principle so ably illustrated by Solomon here. Firstly, as believers we can live in such a way that we are dead spiritually and as such our testimony is clearly wiped out. We will never be effective and fruitful Christians. What we need to be is ‘alive as believers’. No more pretending or minimal commitment. It is all or nothing as far as Christ is concerned and we need to grasp that! Secondly, the life you have as a believer needs to be your life not that which is conformity to what others seem to expect of you. Truly, as a believer you need to ‘get a life’ and that life needs to be what you have developed with the Lord as you have learnt it from Him.

So here’s to being a ‘living dog’ rather than a ‘dead lion’. We have a life that’s well worth living so let’s ‘live it to the full’!

By **KEN RUDGE** St. Austell