

Shared Thoughts

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New Every Morning

God the Three in One : Christ crucified

*"If anyone would come after Me, (said Jesus)
he or she must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me."*
(Matthew 16.24)

Almighty and everlasting God,
Whose Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
triumphed in death on the cross
that He might win life for the world:
help us in the power of His victory
to triumph over all evil
and to glory in His cross alone;
Who is alive and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

Lord Jesus, we praise You for Your redeeming love
and all that You have done for us.

As we bow in penitence before the cross,
we gratefully acknowledge the debt we owe.

For ours was the sin You bore,
ours the ransom You paid,
ours the salvation You won.

Lord Jesus, accept our thanksgiving
and make us more worthy of Your love,
for Your love's sake. Amen

Some miscellaneous observations on life

We make a living by what we get.

We make a life by what we give.

Duane Hulse

You cannot find knowledge by rearranging your ignorance.

Ronald Eyre

We become what we read.

Matilda Nordtvedt

Lose an hour in the morning and you will be looking for it

the rest of the day.

Philip Chesterfield

Be kind. Remember that everyone you meet

is fighting a hard battle.

Harry Thompson

The use of our possessions shows us up for what we actually are.

C C Ryrie

I hold it to be a fact that, if all persons knew what each said of the other,

there would not be four friends in the world.

Blaise Pascal

My train of thought was just derailed.

Nothing is so opened more by mistake than the mouth.

We like someone who comes right out and says what they think,

that is, of course, when they agree with us.

A friend forgives your defects and, if he is very fond of you,

he doesn't see any.

This is a free country, and a good many people are getting it that way –

by agreeing to pay later.

When prices are high, money doesn't talk, it whispers.

Conscience: the sixth sense that comes to our aid

when we are wrong and tells us that we are about to get caught.

Car park:

the place where you take your car to have it dented.

What's the Big Idea? by Paul Hardingham

An Introduction to the Old Testament book of Jeremiah

We live in 'disruptive times', like Jeremiah, who can be regarded 'as a true, honest, and God-revealing companion for the worst of times' (Eugene Peterson). Jeremiah was a priest from the village of Anathoth, just a few miles north-east of Jerusalem. He prophesied in Judah during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. His calling took place in 626 B.C. and his ministry continued until shortly after the fall of Jerusalem 40 years later. Jeremiah was still young when God called him (1.6), with a message of judgment and hope: "See, I have set you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (1.10).

During Jeremiah's ministry the people of Judah had rejected the Lord for idols (2.13). They claimed to be God's people, yet they disobeyed God's word by refusing to be corrected and by following false prophets who spoke what the people wanted to hear. Therefore, Jeremiah was the prophet of judgement. He called Judah to repent, but they refused (6.16–17). So Jeremiah foretold their destruction and Israel could never be made whole again (19.10–11).

However, Jeremiah brought a message of hope. He preached that Israel should place their trust in the Lord (9.23–24) and that a faithful remnant would be restored to the land (23.3; 31.7–9).

In many ways Jeremiah was a reluctant prophet but he felt compelled to speak God's word (20.9). His life was also characterised by sorrow, "My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick" (8.18 NRSV). His people, whom he loved, and with whom he pleaded unceasingly for fifty years, continually refused to hear him. He showed great compassion for his people and shed tears for them. He suffered their ingratitude but forgave them. Eventually the Lord judged them, and they perished as the result.

Much of Jeremiah's message remains relevant because we still fall into idolatry, whether it is wealth, talents or social standing. The nature of sin and its solution are always the same, as God calls us to obey His commandments according to the requirements of the covenant agreement with His people. Sin requires repentance and restoration; obedience brings blessings and joy with it. However, Jeremiah also points to Christ, as the One Who makes this possible for each one of us.

“The Bible Chapter by Chapter” by Mark Water

This bird’s-eye view of the Bible has a study-page for each chapter shown



JOHN chapter 13

Chapter content by verses

1–17 Christ washes the disciples’ feet

18–30 The treachery of Judas foretold

31–38 Christ commands the disciples to love one another

Key verse

Verse 5 “After that, Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around Him”

Key word / key phrase

Verse 14 “you also should wash one another’s feet”

Key event / key person / key theme

Jesus washes His disciples’ feet

Key thought

Verse 34 “A new command.” It may be asked in what sense this command, which was really an old one (see Leviticus 19.18), could be called a ‘new’ one. It was new in the sense that it showed the quality of the love followers of Jesus should have, as a result of Jesus’ love for them

Key thing to look out for

Note that Jesus is in control of all the events of the last few days of His life

Key Bible cross-reference

Verse 18. See Psalm 41.9

Key ‘by way of explanation’

At a meal a host would frequently offer a special tit-bit to one of the diners. It was a token of special friendship

Key ‘Quotable Quote’

‘Jesus said love one another. He did not say love the whole world.’

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

What's the Big Idea? by Paul Hardingham

An Introduction to the New Testament book of 1 Peter

This letter begins: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1.1). The author clearly identifies himself as Peter the apostle and leader of the early church. The places mentioned are all Roman provinces located in north-east Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) with churches established by Paul. By ‘strangers’ or ‘exiles’, Peter is referring to the Christian community scattered throughout the empire, those ‘who have been chosen . . . for obedience to Jesus Christ’ (1.2). Peter is writing from the church in ‘Babylon’ (5.13), which probably refers to Rome, as in Revelation 17–18.

In terms of date, the letter was probably written towards the end of Peter’s life in 63–64 AD when Christians were experiencing persecution, including that of 64 AD when Nero blamed Christians for the Fire of Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus tells us Nero persecuted Christians with public approval for ‘hatred of the human race’ (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv.44).

This short letter contains important themes that Christian disciples should both understand and apply if they are to serve Jesus faithfully today.

Some of the main themes include:

Appreciating our salvation in Christ, rather than taking it for granted

Learning obedience and submission even through tough times

Practising holiness while being engaged with those around us

Living in the world without being overwhelmed by it

Following Christ’s sacrificial lifestyle so it becomes our own

Growing through our sufferings rather than being defeated by them

Being faithful in our relationships with family, employers, and employees

Grasping our true identity as God’s people

Preparing for judgment without being driven by fear

Developing the character of leaders who reflect the leadership of Christ

Peter concludes by saying “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (5.12).

This sums-up Peter’s intention throughout the letter of pointing his readers to God and His grace, while helping them to see practical ways in which they can grow in the likeness of Christ.

TEARS

Ashamed of tears ? This world of ours
Might be as well ashamed of flowers,
Skies of their stars when night appears,
As mortals be ashamed of tears.
For then, if ever, when we weep,
We waken who have been asleep
And let the flood of feeling roll
Across the desert of the soul.
We live so much the dull drab days,
We walk so much life's treadmill ways,
With heart so dumb, with mind so mute,
We're little better than the brute,
Then some day there comes such grief
That only tears can give relief.
And then the beauty floods our eyes
That God has put in rain-washed skies !
Ashamed of tears, when even He
Knelt weeping in Gethsemane ?
We never see God quite so clear
As through the prism of a tear !
If purity we ever know,
It is our tears that make us so ;
And only they need blush with shame
To whom emotion never came !

Author Unknown

THINGS THAT NEVER DIE

The pure, the bright, the beautiful,
That stirred our hearts in youth,
The impulses to wordless prayer,
The dreams of love and truth ;
The longings after something lost,
The spirit's yearning cry,
The strivings after better hopes –
These things can never die.
The timid hand stretched forth to aid
A brother in his need,
A kindly word in grief's dark hour
That proves a friend indeed ;

The plea for mercy softly breathed
When justice threatens nigh,
The sorrow of a contrite heart –
These things shall never die.
Let nothing pass, for every hand
Must find some work to do ;
Lose not a chance to waken love –
Be firm, and just and true :
So shall a light that cannot fade
Beam on thee from on high,
And angel voices say to thee –
These things shall never die.

Author Unknown

BE THE BEST

If you can't be a pine
on the top of the hill,
Be a scrub in the valley – but be
The best little scrub
by the side of the rill :
Be a bush if you can't be a tree.
If you can't be a bush,
be a bit of the grass,
Doing something for somebody's sake ;
If you can't be a muskie,
then just be a bass –
But the liveliest bass in the lake !
We can't all be captains,
some have to be crew,
There's something for all of us here,
There's big work and little
for people to do,
And the task we must do is the near.
If you can't be the highway,
then just be a trail,
If you can't be the sun, be a star ;
It isn't by size that you win
or you fail –
Be the best of whatever you are !

Douglas Malloch

FOURSCORE YEARS

My hands are gnarled and my hair is grey
And I'm just eighty years old today.
My friends are coming my hand to shake,
My children are bringing a birthday cake.
A candle for every year? – Ah no,
A cake can hold but thirty or so.

Yet I shall enjoy the thoughts they bring,
The ties and socks, and the songs they sing.
Eighty years have passed me since my birth,
A right long time to be here on earth.
I'm tired and I've had almost enough.
Life hasn't been easy – the road was rough.

Yet I know as I wait Time's knock on my door
I'd like to remain a year or two more,
To see what becomes of my Billy and Bess
But the chances are slim that I may, I guess.
With the back of my hand I brush a tear
As I open a well-worn book that's near.

There I see on a page once turned down by my wife –
“I come that you may have eternal life.”
And then turning over a page or two –
“I go to prepare a place for you.”
Once more I turn and the lines now say –
“For a thousand years are but a day.”

Old Book, you've never been known to be wrong
And, according to you, I've not lived very long.
So I get out my pencil and soon it is clear
Though I've spent eighty years on this earthly sphere,
Though they've worn my body and stiffened my knee –
Yet I'm but two hours old in eternity!

So at last I know, though my frame is old,
Thou my eyes are dim and my hands are cold,
Why it is that inside I'm still young and gay –
It's because I'm just starting on my way:
A babe in the eyes of time to be,
Just two hours old in Eternity!

Author Unknown

Good News for Poor People by David Winter

When Jesus came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day . . . He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” . . . The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. Then He began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

LUKE 4.16–21 (abridged)

This is the first recorded public statement made by Jesus after His Thus He came to His home town, Nazareth, with something of a reputation already, so doubtless the locals packed in to see what He had to say for Himself. Invited to read (and explain) the scripture, He opened the scroll of the prophet Isaiah at chapter 61 and began to read. Intentionally or by providence, the reading was the Lord’s mandate for His Servant, the messianic figure Who suffered for His people.

In sharp contrast to some of the teaching elsewhere in scripture, where wealth and riches are seen as marks of God’s favour, the favoured ones in this ringing declaration of purpose are the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed.

The Messiah came to bring “good news” to poor people, which meant most of those who heard Jesus speak. In the coming kingdom, human wealth and status would count for nothing. Among Jesus’ followers, some will be rich, as the world counts riches, and some will be financially poor, but all, without distinction, are rich in Christ.

Jesus declared, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The hearers then showed how little they understood its message by rejecting Him on the grounds that He was a nobody – He was just the village carpenter (Mark 6.3)!

A Man on the Throne from Fred Mitchell

“Behold, the Man!” (John 19:5) “The man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)

You may have heard of Athanasius (296–373, AD), who inflexibly defended Christ’s essential divinity. It is in his creed that we read concerning Jesus ‘God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God, and Perfect Man.’ So the two facts of Christ’s perfect Godhead and Manhood are held in faith with conviction. He is the Man Christ Jesus, made in the likeness of men.

It is as Man that Ezekiel sees Him on the throne of heaven and indeed, since God rules over all, of the universe (Ezekiel 1:26–2:1). He is there now, having taken His Manhood back to heaven. He represents redeemed mankind there and His presence reassures our hearts that we shall be there. But He is not only in heaven; He is on the throne of heaven. The Perfect Man, the one Who suffered for mankind, is now enthroned. Judgment is committed to Him and all authority is His. Could any other person be so suited to rule and to judge?

We who are redeemed are united to Him. He joined Himself to us in His incarnation, represented us in His death and then by the work of His Spirit enabled us to be linked by saving faith. We are one with Him now He is enthroned and faith daily draws strength and joy from such union. Let us lift up our hearts; though they so often cleave to the dust, let us lift them up unto the Lord.

He sits at God’s right hand,
Till all his foes submit,
And bow to His command,
And fall beneath His feet:

(Charles Wesley 1707–88)

It is the Christian’s fervent hope for the ultimate recovery of a ruined world that Jesus Christ has conquered every foe and now lives in eternity to bring in His glorious Kingdom.

The All-sufficiency of Christ

derived from [F.B.Meyer](#), whose books are on the internet

*“The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our lawgiver; the Lord is our king;
it is He Who will save us.”*

Isaiah 33.22 NIV

The prophet Isaiah was referring to a greater and more powerful God than he was to experience in his lifetime. The reference he made could only be to our Saviour, Who is the Divine Vice-regent of the world. Through Him it was created, by Him it has been redeemed, in Him its government is vested. He is the King of all kings and the Lord of all lords. His are the Glories of the Cross, of Victory over death and hell, of His Father’s acceptance of His sacrifice through the Ascension, of Pentecost, of the Millennial Reign and of the Judgment Seat!

Now we have a glorious and transcendent Saviour Who is willing and eager to be the complement of our deficiencies and needs. We look around and some of us, as we compare our lot with others, lament, even if we do not audibly complain, at our disadvantages. The bare necessities of life may have been our only portion, and a sense of anxiety as to our future may well have haunted our dreams.

But we are not alone in this experience. When the people went to their own homes, our Lord Jesus spent the night on the Mount of Olives. He declared that “foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8.20).

Difficult experiences remind us what our glorious Lord was obliged to suffer to become our Saviour whilst living as a man on this earth in adverse circumstances. Jesus is now willing to complete our lives, however imperfect and ineffective they may seem to be. He is able to compensate for all our material and emotional deficiencies. By faith in Him, we can learn to trust where we cannot see, to lift our burdened hearts above, and bless our Father for His love.

*PRAYER Be to us, O Glorious Lord, our sufficiency during our times of need.
Amen*

The Way I See It : ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE by David Winter

February is few people's favourite month but it does contain a favourite date. On the 14th it's Valentine's Day. This is, of course, beloved of the greeting card industry but also of millions of romantically inclined men and women, otherwise totally sane, who take the opportunity to post a message of love in the hope that it will be reciprocated.

Few of those who send or receive these messages realise that February 14th is actually the feast day of St Valentine. That's hardly surprising, as we know very little about the person the day commemorates. There were two Christian martyrs of that name, both living in the third century, a soldier and a bishop. No one has ever successfully found any link at all between either of them and courting couples and their desperate hopes.

The most likely explanation of the association of this date with hopeful lovers is a very old tradition (at least as old as Chaucer) that birds begin to pair on February 14th – St Valentine's Day. As they noisily go about choosing their mates, young men and women pursue a rather subtler, if more roundabout, route to the same end!

Whatever its provenance, Valentine's Day at least reminds us of the irresistible force of love. 'Love changes everything', as the song says - or, as the Beatles put it, 'All you need is love'. The problem then becomes interpretation. In English the one word 'love' covers everything, from sexual intercourse to motherly care, from close friendship to a lifelong partnership. Happily, the Greeks have more than one word for it. So the New Testament is able to establish that eros (sexual attraction), philadelphia (friendship) and agape (sacrificial love) are distinct qualities, yet all are part of the mysterious and wonderful chemistry of human love.

'All that I am I give to you', the couple say to each other in the wedding service. What a thing to promise! And yet what a testimony to the deepest possible understanding of the love of God for us, and (in our better moments) of human love in all its tenderness, commitment and unselfishness. So physical attraction plus true friendship plus self-giving love add up to – well, everything that the Bible means when it says that 'those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them' (1 John 4.16). Happy Valentine's Day!

What are you haunted by?

*“Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord?
God will instruct him in the way chosen for him”*

Psalm 25.12 NIV

Do you feel fearful and haunted? To some extent we are all haunted and living in fear of something, even of ourselves or perhaps of past experiences. The writer of the psalm says we are to be fearful and haunted by the presence of God. We are to live and move and have our being in God, to look at everything in relation to God, because the abiding consciousness of God pushes itself to the front of our attention all the time.

In a helpful, positive way we can be fearful of God Whom we are to love and obey, and know that He is round about us. To be haunted by God is to have an effective barricade against all the onslaughts of our spiritual enemy.

“His soul shall dwell at ease” (Psalm 25.13 KJV) In the midst of the things that would bring us despair and attempt to destroy us, such as misunderstanding or slander when people speak ill of us in our absence, He will, according to this promise, keep us at ease. By not trusting that He is doing this, we can rob ourselves of the marvellous revelation of His abiding companionship.

The writer of the psalm goes on to tell us that “The Lord confides in those who fear Him; He makes His covenant known to them. My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only He will release my feet from the snare” (Psalm 25.14, 15 NIV). So let us keep our eyes on Him and by His help trust Him always. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46.1 KJV). Nothing can come through His mighty protection.

derived from ‘My Utmost for His Highest’ by Oswald Chambers p154

Signs & Symbols: The timing of Lent by Jo White

Have you ever wondered why we start Lent on a Wednesday? It's not really a very convenient day, is it, if we like to eat pancakes the day before, and it's a working day. It would be so much more convenient to have Pancake Tuesday on the Saturday then we could start Lent on the Sunday. Sounds so much more practical, doesn't it? So why didn't the church take up the idea decades ago?

There is, of course, a catch with this suggestion. How can we hold 'Lent' – a time of reflection on Jesus and our relationship with God and others – at the same time as we're rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus on a Sunday? Now that would be a stretch too far.

If Lent is intended to be a period of reflection, how long does it need to be? Long enough for us to actually connect with the purpose, and not just skirt over it with a token gesture. Short enough so that we can see the hope within it, that there will be an ending and we shall see the glory of God revealed through the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. If something goes on too long, then we feel there's no end in sight so we don't engage but, if it's too short, then there's not enough time to consider, test and try, and then actually commit.

It's like a family meal. Too long and the children start to get restless and the whole thing breaks down into chaos or shouting; too short and there's not enough time to enjoy each other's company, for each to have enough time to share their thoughts and news and to relax together.

This month: How long do you think Lent needs to be for you?

Do you jump in from the very start or does it take you until the last week to make the connections? Then count how many days are in 'Lent' and work out why we start on a Wednesday.

Books for help & relaxation

In the Steps of Saint Paul

By [Peter Walker](#), LionHudson, £12.99

Drawing mainly on Luke's account in Acts, as well as on Paul's own letters, Peter Walker reconstructs Paul's wide-ranging travels, detailing some of the most important sites of the early church. We begin in Damascus, then follow Paul on his first and second 'missionary journeys', then trace his final visit to Jerusalem and Caesarea, and eventually arrive in Rome.

Readers are transported to the rugged 'Cilician Gates' of southern Turkey, the market places of Athens, Corinth and Ephesus, the bleak expanses of ancient Galatia, and the wintry, wind-swept shores of Malta.

99 Words

By Liz Gray, Darton, Longman and Todd, £10.99

Liz was a successful film-maker until a serious injury left her for a while unable to speak, write or read comfortably for more than a few minutes at a time. Hers had been a visual world. Now she had to think again. She turned for help to those she most wanted to hear. Her request for their '99 words' touched a chord in an extraordinary range of people: poets and musicians, politicians and scientists, people working for peace, for spiritual understanding and for health. Their response showed her how every word can be precious.

For the love of God

A daily companion for discovering the riches of God's Word

By D A Carson, Inter Varsity Press, £12.99

Many people would admit that they have allowed the pressures of life to crowd out serious and thoughtful reading of the Bible. Also, in a culture that has moved away from a Christian worldview, the Bible's unwavering proclamations and fantastic stories seem ever stranger. The big picture of the Bible is gradually fading from view.

The Love of God encourages us to face these challenges. Now, more than ever, the need to read the Bible and to grasp its relevance for our lives is critical.

Still with Thee, O my God,
I would desire to be;
By day, by night, at home, abroad,
I would be still with Thee.

With Thee, when dawn comes in
And calls me back to care;
Each day returning, to begin
With Thee, my God, in prayer.

With Thee, amid the crowd
That throngs the busy mart;
To hear Thy voice 'mid clamour loud
Speak softly to my heart.

With Thee, when day is done
And evening calms the mind;
The setting, as the rising sun,
With Thee my heart would find.

With Thee, when darkness brings
The signal of repose;
Calm in the shadow of Thy wings,
Mine eyelids I would close.

With Thee, in Thee, by faith
Abiding I would be;
By day, by night, in life, in death,
I would be still with Thee.

James Drummond Burns (1823–64)

