

# Good News

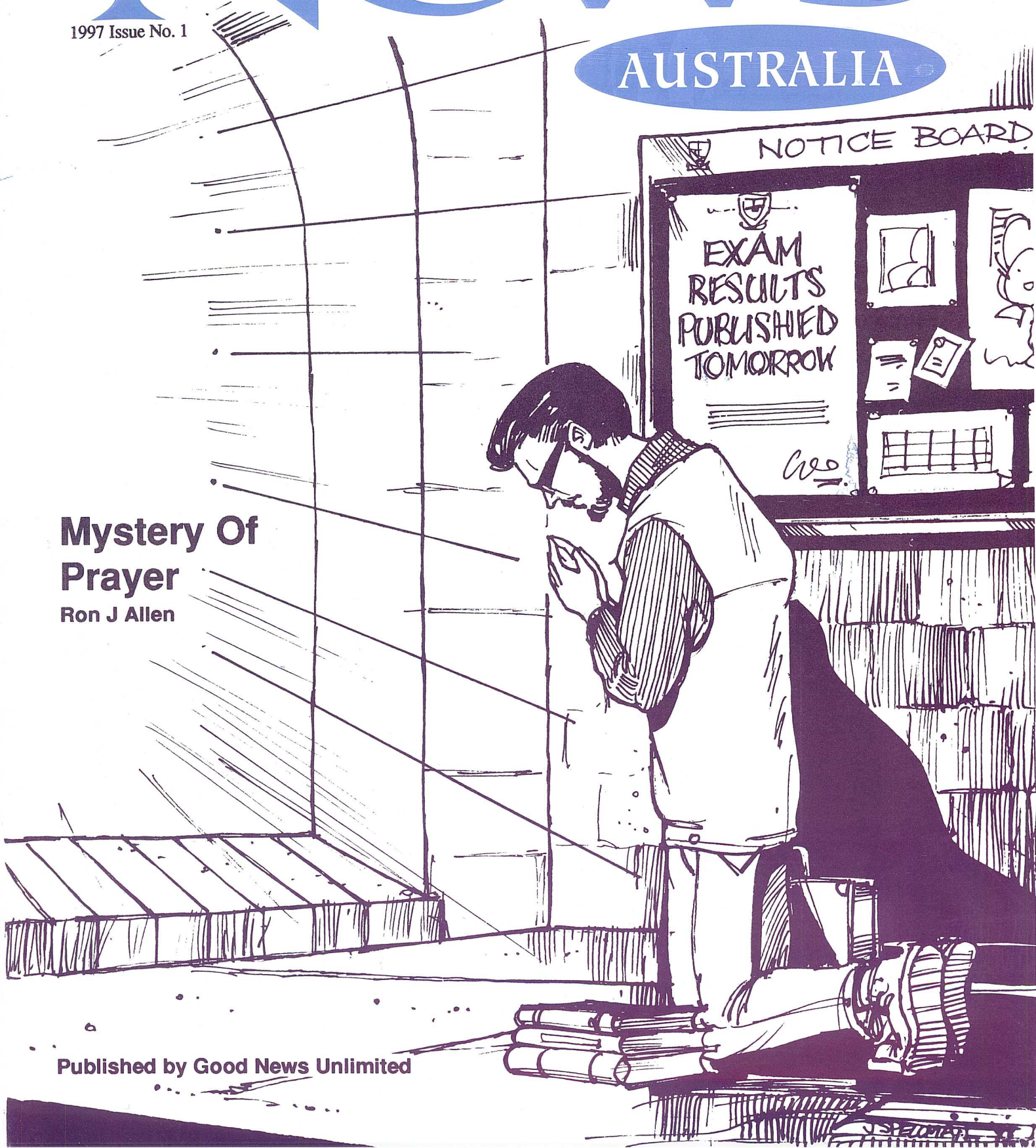
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## Mystery Of Prayer

Ron J Allen

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# Editorial

Ron Allen

Psalm eighty nine divides easily into three sections. Central to each is the idea of Covenant. The first section (1-18), is a hymn of praise. The praise is directed to Yahweh, the Covenant author. He is incomparably powerful (9-12). He made everything. He is trustworthy. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (14).

The next section (19-37), focuses on a Covenant affirmation to David. Most of what is said recalls 1 Samuel 16:11-13. Here are some of the assurances given to David: 1) No enemy will subject him (22). 2) His foes will be crushed (23). 3) The Lord will never stop loving him. The Covenant with him will never fail (28). 4) Even if his descendants are unfaithful, the Lord will never remove his love from David or betray his faithfulness to him (30-33). 5) The Lord will never violate his covenant (34). 6) The Lord will not lie to David (35).

What a pledge! Who but God would dare make such promises?

In the third section of the Psalm (37-52), we are in for a shock. There is a dramatic contradiction between the covenant promise and the way things turn out. As far as we can see, it is God himself who has moved against his King. Note the list of complaints levelled at God by David.

1) You have rejected, spurned and been angry at your anointed (38). 2) You have renounced the Covenant (39). 3) You have stripped your king of his royalty (40-41). 4) You have not supported him in battle (43). 5) You have ruined him at a very early age (45).

King David's lament may reflect events that took place during the harrowing days of Absalom's rebellion. Or it may be about a period of shame experienced by one of David's descendants. The main point is that the 'sure mercies of

David' seem to have failed at every place. The Lord's King is in despair.

The dilemma of God's 'anointed one' is typical of the predicament of God's people in every age. Richard Wurmbrandt was imprisoned in Romania for fourteen years. For three of those years he was kept in a cell, all alone, thirty feet below ground. He saw neither sun, moon nor stars. The only persons he saw were those who came to question and beat him. He was hung by his thumbs. He sometimes yelled uncontrollably. He was gagged and straight-jacketed. Many times he spoke to God using the words of St. Theresa, 'God, why do you treat us so? It's no wonder you have so few friends when you treat them so hard.'

In the Psalm the King represents God's people, but he also prefigures Messiah. The New Testament Church interpreted Psalm eighty nine Messianically. Believers perceived a connection between the government of God and the sufferings of his chief representative. The love and faithfulness of the Covenant announcement is affirmed, and not denied, in the ordeal of the anointed one.

The faithfulness of God often seems like something else. His covenant sometimes seems to be the Covenant that used to be. It is part of the daring of faith and of prayer, to maintain - even in experiences that make us feel abandoned - that God has not forgotten us.

From his hill of shame, Jesus invites us to believe that his wounds are not badges of defeat, but the 'blood of the everlasting covenant'.



- Pr R J Allen  
 Executive  
 Editor



# The Mystery Of Prayer

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Ron Allen

**A**mong recollections of my early religious experience, is the mission appeal incident. The church my family attended had an annual community appeal for money to help third world people. I was tricked into taking part in this appeal by being told that it would be fun. I was also told that as I went from house to house I would not be harmed by angry dogs because Jesus looks after those who do his work. I prayed a prayer along those lines because I was afraid of dogs. Imagine a small boy's disappointment when I was bitten on the leg by a large dog. It was an event that not only marked my leg, It made an impression on my view of prayer.

My father was a preacher. He developed a cancer and was dead before he turned thirty. Don't imagine that he was not prayed over. He was the subject of a large and intense circle of prayer.

My Mum was married to another man; a farmer whose first wife had died tragically while giving birth. My new father was a man of formidable physical strength and spirituality. He prayed a lot. I saw him often around the farm, breathing out his supplications.

Time passed, and he too was sick. In spite of much prayer on his behalf, he died. Many will read these lines with tears brimming, because their own prayers have met a similar end. We would be less than honest if we did not admit that

many prayers seem to go unheeded. It is said that 'prayer changes things.' But there are enough witnesses to testify that there are a lot of things prayer does not change. There are those who have given up praying because they have come to believe that no one is listening.

Jesus foresaw the temptation to give up praying. In a parable he spoke of a judge who was pestered by a woman till at last he relented and gave in to her request. At the end of the parable Jesus asked: 'When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? Will there be any left, who have not ceased to pray?'

Here are some observations on prayer.

1.) God, being who he is, is all knowing. Therefore, our prayers would be misplaced if they had as their aim, the organization of God along the lines of our wisdom and decision. God has not bound himself to the contents of our prayers. He had better not! If that were so, we would have to accept blame for what happens, and for what fails to happen. If we fail to pray for fine weather on picnic day, then we have to take responsibility if it is rained out.

Scripture teaches that God is good and he knows what is good for us. We are also taught that we are not good and do not know what is good for us. We are little boys. We want things that would ruin us. We want them straight away.

Great characters in the Bible did not get everything they asked for from God. Moses wanted to lead Israel into Caanan. He was denied. Paul thought he could better serve God without his thorn. He was wrong. To some, the meaning of God is that he has a job of running around saving people from their troubles. If prayer is understood in such terms it will disappoint.

Scripture speaks of human existence in terms of 'Waiting on the Lord.' Faith in God always has an element of 'waiting' in it. Faith is not God waiting on us. Much distrust of Christianity might be avoided, if Christians did not give the impression they are somehow in possession of God, instead of being possessed by him.

When God is allowed to be God there is always something mysterious, hidden and incalculable about him. Even in the most rewarding human relationships, one is never in the control of the other. There is spontaneity, unpredictability. It could not be any less in relationships with God.

2.) We will likely be disappointed in prayer if we think that our prayers make God obliged to us in a way that he is not obliged to unbelievers. This is a truth that takes some absorbing. Yet it lies at the centre of the Gospel. God has no favourites! He sees us all and sees no difference. He sends his rain on the just and the unjust. When prayers are not answered ac-



cording to our dearest wish—when the thing that is feared most comes upon us, (against an avalanche of prayers) nought has occurred which does not happen a billion-fold around the world, every day.

God does not build a stockade around his Church, so that it does not have to endure life the same as everyone else. Christians have car accidents. Christians get cancer. Christians have children that go off the rails. Christians have marriage breakdown. Christians are unemployed. We are all part of the world dilemma whether we pray or not.

3.) It will help us in our prayers if we know that though God loves each one in particular, he likes to deal with humans as a group. Collectively, we lost Paradise. Salvation was effected for us, racially. Jesus put away the sins of the whole world. God

out, she phones the ferryman asking him to delay the ferry for five minutes so her husband will be sure to catch it. 'It's a life and death situation', she says. The ferryman refuses. He says that there are others who are just as desperate for the ferry to leave right on time. If God did everything everyone asks of him, the universe would be chaotic. We are humanity. As a body-corporate we belong to God. There are advantages for us in being linked together. Twenty four hours a day we depend on the fruit of each others labour. Food, furniture, home, social security. These we have because we are a community. We share the benefits of belonging to one another. Prayer is not going to relieve us of the liabilities.

When an individual suffers disease, accident or injustice, he may well be bearing the

prayer, we need to remember that as a species we are not innocent. The unrelieved distress in Central Africa, is a wound on our own body. In a sense they suffer for us.

God's interest in me is part of his love for the world. His silence in answer to my prayers, may be partly explicable in light of his determination to build a world where no one suffers; where everyone is comfortable and happy.

4.) One of the wisest things ever said, came from Augustine. He said: '**Without God we cannot; without us he will not**'. Unless God does act in the world we are hopelessly beaten. We are simply no match for the forces arrayed against us. So in the matter of redemption, God acts alone, for our rescue. But in salvation from daily terrors, God acts in cooperation with us. He provides plants and their seed but we must dig, sow and reap, if we are to eat. He gives us an appetite for goodness, but we must wage a weary war against evil in order to be good. He gives us wonderful bodies, but we must labour to learn the laws of health. We must strive to discover remedies and preventions. Prayer comes into its own when it expresses a willingness to be in God's purpose; working together with him, for his ends. In Gethsemane Jesus showed us what prayer is often like. He struggled with God's method. He was horrified by the awful silence of God. He petitioned his father many times, to take away the cross which loomed before him. But no escape was provided. The miracle of Jesus' prayers is, that in them he was lifted up into acceptance and trust of God's way. Our prayers are capable of similar achievement. \*

'And this is the confidence we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him' (1 John 5:14-15).

'Anything' and 'whatever' are qualified by 'if we ask...according to his will.' That phrase is all important, for without it prayer can become an illusion. I can ask anything and if I only have faith enough I can get it. My faith is the qualifying factor. That has caused an enormous amount of confusion and disillusionment. It has turned prayer into magic—the wand is faith. Wave that wand of faith over situations and miracles happen! When we believe that faith is the only condition we have missed the point. 'According to his will' is the basic condition. Exercise faith within that condition and anything can and, does happen.'

Quotation from E. Stanley Jones. *Christian Maturity* p 303.

has not just me, but all humanity in view. Unlike me, God contemplates all the brothers and sisters at once.

This may help explain why I do not always get what I want from God. A mother has a sick child. She despatches her husband across the river to procure medicine. As he hurries

result of our collective mistakes. It's possible that drought in Australia could be partly caused by foolish environmental policy in other lands. Acid rain falls in Canada. It is caused by atmospheric pollution from the heavily industrialized North Eastern United States. When an innocent person suffers in spite of



# LEGEND

## Elizabeth Price

Once upon a time, as every good story says, I created a little character out of a soft toy. He came alive and gathered to himself several other characters; whether imaginary or soft-toy did not matter. They were all equally real.

They became walking, talking creatures and part of the family legend. They were the subject of conversation, and their well-being was regularly enquired into. The legend extended through the years, and a voice on a long-distance telephone used the characters as the ultimate passport to identity. I might not recognise the voice immediately, but there was no mistaking the conversation.

The legendary creatures were our connecting link. Children had only to ask one question about them to let me know it was family calling. It did not matter how much history or trivia you knew about this family, if you did not know the characters that were its legend, you could not pass yourself off as part of it. If the whole family had been separated and scattered to the four winds; if their historical documents had been obliterated and their identities changed; if they had lost all connection with each other, they still could identify each other again through the family legend.

Imagine them in an identity line-up years later; all there but not knowing it and not recognising each other. Walk up and down the line trying to con-

nect the family, then tell aloud so everyone can hear it, just one story about the little character. The faces of those who know it come alive and they are alerted to each other. The family is complete again, while everyone else wonders what happened and it is just another ho-hum day.

Now, I have a father I have never met. I would not

though it is probably not all strictly true in every detail. Any half-intelligent person could fake his identity and fool me quite easily if they wanted to. I have listened to lots of rumours about him that seemed credible at the time, and I have believed some of them. I am ashamed but it is true. From what I have heard of him, some things are

'The failure of much popular praying, arises from the fact that when we pass from our ordinary, aggressive, workaday world into what we call prayer, we do not thus change our technique. Despite our supposition that we are praying, we are still secular. That is, we are aggressively trying to force our selfish will upon the world. To many people prayer is only an additional way of getting what they want, a kind of spare tyre to be used when the others fail. They are as much go-getters when they pray, as at any time other, and the whole tone of their praying is, 'God, get me what I want!'

Indeed, so prevalent is this idea in popular religion that, alas, many ministers still preach it. The angriest letter I have received this year came from a minister insisting that 'prayer moves the arm of God.' So, a mortal man dares desire to move the arm of God! My friends, nothing much more essentially irreverent than that, is conceivable. Upon the contrary, true prayer begins only when a human soul desires above all else, that the arm of God should move him.'

*From H. E. Fosdick The Greatness Of God pp 96-97*

know him if I fell over him. He is a well-known figure; head of a corporate empire, but if he knocked at the front door I would not recognise him. He has never made any move to single me out for attention or give me any special treatment, and I can't claim particular privileges out there on civvy street. I am left to obey the traffic rules and spend my dollar by myself. He does not intrude.

I talk about him and have built a family legend about him,

invariable and incontrovertible. They are not up for negotiation. They are integral to the legend.

If he were lined up in an identity line and I had to pick him out, I would ask him just one question to separate him from everyone else. The question comes from the family legend about him, and I know he knows the legend—there is some evidence to suggest he started it - and he and I both know he is the only one who

*(Continued p. 7)*



# What Prayer Does

Ron Allen

There are moments in the life of an individual when, the self feels overwhelmed by a sense of insignificance and isolation. I have had this experience whilst travelling by air across the ocean at night, far from home. Beneath, the vast sea stretches away, and above, the limitless, silent skies stare down. And there am I, hurtling through the air in a metal cylinder, an island of consciousness;

a small parcel of thoughts and feelings. Who am I? What am I doing here? Doubt and insecurity flicker in my brain. But then I think of home; of wife and children also work commitments, I 'get my bearings' and stabilise.

I can only be myself in relation to the other people in my life. Prayer gives personal reinforcement because it locates me in relationship to the infinite person of God—whose I am and

to whom I belong. Prayer strengthens and consolidates me by helping me to live on a sure foundation.

Astronomy has made us aware of our smallness. The earth itself is dwarfed by the solar system and the galaxies. We are specks of living matter on a very minor planet. There are forces at work in the universe over which we have no control. No wonder so many turn to things like palmistry, numerology, fortune tellers; stones and crystals. When people do not have communion with an intelligent supreme being, who is kind and good, also alert to all their dreams and fears, they will find a substitute for prayer.

I need to talk to God because without him I have no roots. I have no home. I need not so much beg him for things, as to experience **Him**. Those who pray to God are not weaklings. On the contrary, they are thereby made strong.

Every life needs great convictions, which generate momentum and purpose. Prayer helps to keep these great ideas in focus. 'Our father, which art in Heaven.' 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' These prayers are not shopping lists. They do not concentrate on human perplexity. They affirm instead the existence of God. They embrace truths about God that strengthen, expand and dignify the human spirit.

Tethered in prison; facing death, Paul prayed: 'I pray that





out of his glorious riches ... he may strengthen you ... and I pray that you may grasp how wide and long and deep and high, is the love of Christ. And to know this love, that surpasses knowing.'

Prayers like this one affirm the adequacy of God. It is hard to live without such prayer.

Prayer functions as a means for fellowship with God. Again, this has nothing to do with extracting some benefit from God. In his praying Jesus said, 'I am not alone because my father is with me.' Prayer gives its users the privilege of choosing who they will fellowship with in the privacy of their own minds. We may not be able to choose who our work-mates are; who our neighbours are, but we can be masters in the house of our own consciousness. In prayer we can welcome God in and shut out all others. In prayer Christ comes in and sups with us.

What a long way this is from prayer as a mere emergency or insurance measure. God is much too wonderful to be used as a good luck charm. He likes to fellowship with his children.

Prayer is a weapon in moral conflict. The most decisive battles in history have often been fought within the conscience of individuals. The future of the world was decided when Jesus struggled with himself in prayer, in the garden. Prayer brings us into contact with moral resources not native to us. To think that one will always choose right without praying, is naive indeed.

Finally, there is a divine response to every prayer no matter what it is about. No

'I will never believe that God is not greater and more loving than any human father, though I am ready enough to admit how hard, and often impossible it is to see where he is leading his world and ourselves. ...Nothing can be true of him in terms of power, which would contradict his nature in terms of love, holiness and utter wisdom.

Will this omnipotent and loving father avert his face from our foolish praying? Are we orphans on this lonely planet amid the terrifying immensities of space?

We could bear having our prayers unanswered. We could not bear the thought that there is no response to the longing which prompts us to pray. Rather, may death come soon in any manner that is certain, that we may rest at last from futile desire in a mad universe, where passionate longing is a mockery, and life as meaningless as a nightmare, and as empty and hollow and unsatisfying as a dream.

But this cannot be. For God has made a response that goes on sounding in men's ears forever. A Word made flesh. God himself in loving human form, with us once and for all in history, and with us in his Spirit day by day. He is the reality behind all men's longing. He is the answer to all men's prayers.'

*From: Leslie D. Weatherhead. When The Lamp Flickers .pp 183 -184*

prayer is ever said in a God-vacuum. The greatest possible incitement to prayer, is in Romans 8 where Paul asserts that 'nothing can separate us from the love of Christ'. If that is true, then God is present every time we pray.

There is nothing in life that could not be enriched by praying. All manner of common pursuits may be turned into 'fellowships' by prayer.

If Christ be true, not to pray is to shut out a reality that could only bless our lives; could only make life fuller and more rewarding. Just as it is easier and more vivifying to breathe than to not breathe, so it is easier to pray than not to pray. And the results of a prayerful life will speak for themselves.

Continued from p. 5 **Legend**

knows it and the only one who could answer my question about it.

No other person could possibly have the answer to the question. It has grown out of a commitment to identifying with him through the legend. Only one identity in the whole universe could respond with credibility.

I would ask out loud, without any attention to the niceties of grammar, so all the lineup could hear: 'father, who did I pray for this morning?' Because he said in Matthew 6:6, 'But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your father who is in secret, and your father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.' ■



# Believing Without Seeing

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Johnathan Maverick

One of the favourite 'zinger' questions of my atheist friends goes something like this: 'What about someone in China who's never heard of Christianity? They just go straight to hell because they have never accepted Jesus, right?'

Interesting question. Indeed, if the only way to salvation is through acknowledging Christ as Lord and Saviour, how can someone be saved who, for example, lived in China before Christ was even born? Or lives in some remote part of the world (not even reached by gospel radio broadcasts!) How is it that even King David could have been saved, for he never spoke the words, 'I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour.' King David didn't even know anyone by that name!

Christ was a real flesh and blood person, who really lived, died and rose again. His sacrificial atoning death on the Cross is the sole basis for our salvation. Christ is not a myth, and neither are the events of his life. He experienced real physical death, and real physical resurrection. And when I confess my belief in Christ, I also confess my belief that these events actually took place. They are not just myths, symbolic of an idea. However, while they are real events, that does not lessen the fact that they are symbolic, as well. Belief in Christ does not just involve belief in the person

of Christ, but in the idea of Christ as well.

In fact, we cannot accept the person of Christ without accepting the idea of Christ. What is this idea? Simply, it involves the following beliefs: 1.) There is a God, who created mankind. (If there is no God, it is nonsensical to talk about God's Son).

2.) Mankind is in a fallen state, separated from God. This is because of mankind's own actions, and its natural tendency toward further separation. (If humanity is not fallen, why would it need to be saved by Christ or anyone else?)

3.) Mankind cannot return to a state of unity with God, except through God's help and grace. That is, humanity cannot recover this lost unity through its own efforts. The effort—or whatever is necessary to heal this rift, must come from God. (If mankind could have made it back to unity with God on its own, no doubt God would have just sent the instructions, rather than his own Son to perform a necessary sacrifice. Also, the fact that Christ performed the sacrifice is the evidence that it was a necessary sacrifice. (Would anybody volunteer to do such a thing if it were optional?!))

This is where my belief comes from, on how an ancient Chinese person is saved. While the person who lived around 500 BC in China had no opportunity to accept the person of Christ, I believe that he, and everyone

else has always had the opportunity to accept the idea of Christ.

St. Paul makes it clear in the book of Romans that:

1.) All people have knowledge of the existence of God, innately and through God's creation.

2.) All people through conscience are aware of their fallen state.

I had an interesting discussion of this last point with two Buddhist friends, one an atheist, the other an agnostic. (Gautama Buddha declared nothing one way or the other on the existence of a God).

When I remarked that I saw certain similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, the atheist argued that Buddhism rejects the basic Christian doctrine of Original Sin. Buddhism teaches that mankind achieves enlightenment through its own efforts, with no need of a God, and certainly no need of a Saviour.

The agnostic Buddhist replied that he wasn't sure that was right. 'If we are naturally good', he asked, 'then why are we all naturally in an un-enlightened state of illusion?' He continued: 'Does Buddhism not teach that the ideal state is a state of innocence beyond the concepts of good and evil? Is not that the state that Adam and Eve were supposedly in, in the Garden of Eden? And can we indeed achieve enlightenment on



our own? My understanding of Buddhist teaching is that we can only prepare ourselves to receive enlightenment—can only open ourselves to it. We cannot make it happen. And when it does happen, it happens on its own, not through our efforts. Is that not a form of grace? Does it not require some form of faith?’

I am not saying that a person might just as well be a Bud-

dhist as a Christian. I firmly believe that the most perfect revelation of God is the Man, Jesus. Anyone who has been introduced to Jesus will, if he sincerely desires God, be drawn to accept and embrace Christ.

What I am saying is this: That those who have never been introduced to Christ can still embrace, or reject, the idea that Christ embodies. That idea

is - mankind can only, and ultimately realize its own sinfulness. Therefore, mankind must fall back on the grace of God as its only hope for salvation.

My two Buddhist friends are excellent examples. Both were raised in a tradition that knows nothing of the Man, Jesus. Yet one believes that he is himself naturally good, and can achieve his spiritual goal solely





through his own efforts.

The other sees himself in a state where he is separated from where he wishes to be. He does not think he can recover his natural place in the universe through his own effort, but only as a gift of grace. All he can do is believe that the gift is there to be received, and open himself to it in faith.

Even within this tradition that teaches nothing of the Man, Christ, people still have to make the personal choice as to how they see themselves: righteous or fallen, self-sufficient or dependant on grace.

It is that choice that I believe everyone, everywhere, throughout history, has made, no matter what his professed religion. And in making that choice, everyone has either accepted or rejected Christ.

In choosing, everyone comes down either on the side of the self-righteous Pharisee who did not see himself as in need of salvation, or on the side of the sinner, conscious of his sin, who threw himself on the mercy of God.

Chuang-Tzu writes, in a Chinese Taoism text, about the often confusing and paradoxical nature of existence. He concludes his passage by musing, 'One day a great Man will come and explain it all to us. Or perhaps he has already come.'

Chuang-Tzu, who lived in China around 300 BC, never heard of Christ and probably never heard the Jewish predictions of a Messiah. Yet he somehow seems to have suspected the incarnation of God in Christ.

Chuang-Tzu believed in a creative force which he referred to as Tao, or the One. His basic belief was that the problems of the world result in our being out of harmony with this Tao. The

very first words written in the fundamental book of Taoism, the *Tao te Ching* read: 'In the beginning, there was the One. The One begot two, the two begot three, the three begot everything else in the universe.' An interesting parallel to the opening words of both Genesis and the Gospel of John. Also an interesting allusion, in wording at least, to the doctrine of the Trinity.

I am not saying that you can find God's revelation as clearly in Taoism as in Christianity. I am saying that just as Christians consider the Old Testament a dimmer glass to see through than the New Testament, so we might consider such traditions as Taoism and Buddha, to be even darker glasses. (We would view such traditions as subject to error, however, unlike either Old or New Testaments).

However dark and erroneous they may be, it is still possible that within these ancient traditions there is yet enough light, that the person who sincerely seeks Truth, may be guided by the Holy Spirit. (This is true of many other traditions such as Native American religions).

That light, however small, leads the Spirit-led person to embrace a doctrine that he does not clearly understand; to reach out in faith to a Person he does not even know exists; to trust the grace of God (even a God he does not know) to save him, somehow.

King David cried, 'You will not abandon me to the grave' (Psalm 16:10 NIV). David did not know how God would save him. David never saw with great clarity the coming of Christ. But he acknowledged God as God, and admitted his

own sinfulness. David relied on God's mercy to redeem his soul from the grave.

I believe that there are other people, from other times and other places in which Jesus was never known. Yet, in all these places there have always been people who, influenced by the Spirit, somehow reached out in faith to embrace the same idea that King David did. They embraced the cross of a Christ they did not know by name.

Christ said, 'Many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast' (Matthew 8:11). Think how blessed these people are. When we step off the cliff of Self Mountain (those of us who have been fortunate enough to receive the revelation of God's Word), we see the welcoming arms of Christ waiting to catch us. But these people, 'Who have not seen, yet have believed' (John 20:29), step off that cliff with only a dim faith that something they do not truly know will catch them up, and lift them up to a heaven they only intuitively sense is there. Christ said of the Roman centurion, 'I've never found anyone with this much faith!' (Matt. 8:10 CEV). Of these others, he must say: 'Theirs is a remarkable faith indeed. And under the influence of the Holy Spirit, it is saving faith.'

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# Good News Unlimited Presents SEMINAR 97

## DANIEL & The Coming King

- The book of Daniel had more influence on the New Testament than any other Old Testament book.
- Daniel is the only Old Testament book to which Jesus pointed, saying, 'Understand this'.
- Daniel's themes include: The Christ, The Antichrist, The Church, The Time of the End, The Everlasting Gospel.

## FEATURING Dr Desmond Ford

### *Auckland - February 14-15*

New Life Cntr., Akoranga Dr, Northcote - Friday 14 at 7:30 pm & Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm.

**Palmerston - February 16** - Evelyn Rawlins Room, Square Edge Creative Centre, 52-56 The Square, Palmerston North. Sunday at 11:00am-4:00pm

**Rockhampton - February 24** - Central Queensland Uni., time to be announced.

### *Brisbane - February 28 - March 1*

Mercure Hotel 85-87 North Quay Brisbane City

Friday 28 at 7:30pm and Saturday March 1, 10:00am - 5:00pm.

**Cooranbong - March 6** - Bonnells Bay Salvation Army Hall - **Thursday** 7:00pm-9:30pm

**Sydney - March 8** - Epping Baptist Church, 1-5 Ray Rd., Epping - Saturday 10:00am-6:00pm. **Bring food for sharing at fellowship lunch.**

**Melbourne - March 14-15** - Nunawading Arts & Entertainment Centre, 379-397

Whitehorse Rd., Nunawading - Friday 14 at 7:30pm & Saturday 15, 10:00am-5:00pm.

**Bring food for sharing at fellowship lunch.**

**Perth - March 22** - Dianella Uniting Church, 450 The Strand, Dianella.

Saturday 10:30am- **Fellowship lunch**, then a meeting at 2:30pm.

**Adelaide - March 23** - The Baptist Union Christian Centre hall, Church St., Norwood.

Sunday at 3:00pm and 4:30pm



# Good News

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# Good News Liftout Series

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NUMBER SIX

## Why Believe?

The Miracle  
of the God-Man  
Dr Desmond Ford



**T**he Bible is marvellous for what it does not say in connection with Christ's resurrection. It doesn't say anyone saw the actual rising. If I had been writing it — inventing it — I would surely have put that in; with all the trimmings. 'The risen Christ, full of holy strength, touches the huge rock that seals his tomb. It flies away; knocking over the soldiers in its course!' But the Bible says no such thing. It doesn't mention the rolling away of the stone. It would have been such a good story — but the Bible has none of it.

The Bible never tells about the risen Christ appearing to his old enemies. If the account was invented — if I had been writing it — I would have had Jesus knocking at Pilate's bedroom window in the hush of the sunrise. After Pilate was put in his place I would then tell about Jesus going to visit Mr Herod.

But the Bible has none of that. The narrative of Christ's resurrection is so candid it must be true. It is so honest; so lifelike, considering the uniqueness of its topic.

Thomas was blessed because he saw the risen Christ and believed. I would have been harder on Thomas. If I'd been writing it, Jesus would say: 'Thomas, I'm glad future believers are not going to be like you. I curse you for your unbelief.' Jesus does better than that. Far better. He says, 'Thomas, you are blessed because you believe. Those who believe in me in the future, without having seen as

you have seen, will be even more blessed!'

The Bible is so lifelike in its narrative of John and Peter running to the tomb (see John 20:3-9). Who arrives first? John. Why? Because he is younger. Who rushes in though? The man who got there first or the man who got there last? The man who arrived last — Peter. Why does Peter rush in and not John? Because Peter was always rushing in. You see how lifelike the resurrection story is?

Then there is the beautiful story about the women who are last at the cross and first at the tomb. The most pro-women book in the world is the New Testament. There's not a trace of chauvinism anywhere. In Christ there is neither male nor female. All are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Therefore, the New Testament has women as the first witnesses to the empty tomb and the risen Christ. Please understand that the culture of that time, the Jewish culture, would not accept women witnesses. If I had been writing the story, I would never have used women witnesses to prove my point. But God was changing things. He had women witnesses at the tomb.

What a beautiful story it is when Mary is at the tomb. Her tears are quietly coursing down her cheeks when the risen Christ comes toward her, gently and softly. She doesn't altogether look up. She can only see someone's feet.

'She thought he was the gardener and said, "Sir, if you

have taken his body away, please tell me, so I can go and get him"' (John 20:15 CEV). How was Mary going to carry a corpse all alone? How lifelike to say something absurd under duress.

The risen Christ just says one word, 'Mary.' The psychological factors for the resurrection are in themselves overwhelmingly sufficient to assure us of its truthfulness. And the reality of the miracle of Christ's resurrection guarantees all other resurrections. That is, the resurrections to come at the return of Jesus. Christ's resurrection guarantees the resurrection of every believer.

There is one miracle more (a predictive miracle) we need to think about. After Christ fed the five thousand, the crowd wanted to make him king. Jesus compelled the disciples to climb into the boat. As they crossed the lake they began to grumble: 'Why won't Jesus let the people make him king? It would be the kind of success we've been seeking. One of us could be Prime Minister; another, Secretary; another, Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Treasurer of the new kingdom.'

So God did what he always does when we grumble. He gives us something worth grumbling about. A terrible storm came down on the disciples and the billows rose up. They were now convinced that their lives were coming to an end, and none of them would be Prime Minister, or Secretary. They wrestled with the storm



until the fourth hour of the night.

What they did not know was that there was One up on the mountain who was watching them. His eye was ever on them. Not for a second was his gaze distracted from them. He saw them toiling at the oars.

His strength surrounded the boat. He measured the billows so that they could not flood that little boat. Then, when all seemed lost he came down from the mountain and walked across the lake to them, on the water.

At first sight the disciples were scared to death. Then Jesus said, 'It is I, be not afraid' (John 6:20 KJV). The record says that when they took Jesus on board, 'immediately the ship was at the land whither they went' (John 6:21).

There is two thousand years of history! Jesus broke the bread to feed the multitude. That is the Cross of Christ, where his body is broken for us. The disciples climb aboard the ship. A ship is always used in Scripture, in Christian history, and in Christian doctrine, as symbol of the church.

The disciples are in the ship (or church) on the tossing billows of earth's history. And Christ foretells, that at the end of the church's voyage, there will be a great storm, a great tribulation such as never was (see Matthew 24:21). This terrible event will threaten to wipe out all of them in the tossing ship.

And where is Christ? He is up on the heavenly mountain - in heaven - and his eye is on

us. Therefore, the billows are never higher than he sees is good for us. Then, just when it looks as though the world is going to swallow up the believers in the last great stormy tribulation — Jesus returns. He comes down from heaven at the second advent. 'It is I; be not afraid; peace be still.' As soon as Jesus is with his disciples again, they are at the other shore—heaven itself.

There is a whole cluster of miracles in this story. There's the multiplying of the loaves and fishes; the miracle of walking on the water and the calming of the sea. But the biggest miracle of all is that the story predicts twenty centuries of history. There is the cross of Christ; the disciples in the ship of the church; Christ interceding in heaven above, his eye always upon his people; the final tempest and his coming down to rescue us. What a miracle! I tell you, the New Testament is no ordinary book. Yet it is literature. The Bible is holy literature. I often wonder whether the Jesus Seminar reads the great classic books of the centuries. If a person is unfamiliar with literature, they won't be much good with the Bible. We need to know literature, or our vision will be too narrow to see things in proper perspective and proportion.

An elderly lady attended a lecture. The lecturer was an atheist. He poured scorn on all the fools who believed in Christ and the Bible. After he finished, there was a question time. Up went the lady's hand, 'Sir, will you kindly answer my ques-

tion?' 'Of course, good woman. What is it?' The frail and bent woman said: 'Sir, over twenty years ago my husband died and left me with eight children. All I had was my Bible and faith in God. I raised those children. We've been a very happy family. I'm soon to die. Yet I am still a very happy woman and a happy mother because I am a happy Christian. Immortality is mine. I have no fears about death. That is what my faith has done for me. Tell me sir, what has your faith done for you?' The lecturer mumbled something inaudible and left the podium.

## The Miracle of the Book

(1)

Desmond Ford

Have you ever wondered where the title of the Bible comes from? It's from the Greek word, **Biblia**. That's the plural of **Biblion**, the Greek word for 'book'. So the title, **The Bible**, is 'The Books'. But why is it a Bible and not a babble?

Remember the Bible took one thousand five hundred years to write. It was written on three continents, Europe, Asia and Africa. It is written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic.

It has at least forty contributors. Some of them lived in palaces and some lived in caves. Some of them were shepherds and some were princes. Some of them were priests and some were fishermen. Think of that variety.

Imagine that we gathered



together such a variety in the realms of general religion, law, medicine, philosophy, and politics. Gather any forty and ask them to put their written contributions into one volume. You couldn't find leather strong enough to hold the forty! The book would be a babble not a Bible.

Suppose it was decided to build a magnificent house of worship in Washington D.C. Every state in the Union agreed to contribute some stone to this temple; this cathedral. There would be quartz, granite, sandstone, brownstone — all different varieties. There would be different shapes (square, round, rectangular). All these various pieces come from all the states in the Union — and they all fit together! Lo and behold, a perfect temple is built.

You'd say, 'No problem. There had to be one organizer, one architect, one mind behind it all. That one person sent out the word, and here's the perfect

result.'

Let's look at a Bible passage about the building of the temple in Jerusalem. 'In building the temple, only blocks dressed at the quarry were used, and no hammer, chisel or any other iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built'. (1 Kings 6:7 NIV).

Here is a remarkable building put together without noise! You heard no sawing, no hammering. The fabrication of the temple was so very quiet. That's because everything had been done beforehand. All the builders had to do was gently, quietly, lay one piece upon the other.

My friends, the Bible that we possess, this most precious book in the world, was designed like that. It was planned in the mind of God long before the first writer put quill to paper. Designed with a marvellous unity, like that ancient Jerusalem temple.

The great German poet,

Heinrich Heine, (1797-1856), once saw the beautiful statue, Venus de Milo. He knelt before it and wept. He said, 'It's beautiful, but it has no arms.' Our world is somewhat like that. The world is beautiful, but it cannot hold us, cannot embrace us, cannot love us. Often it kicks, stings, or kills us. The world not only lacks arms, it lacks a heart. At times the world seems so unreasonable, we think it lacks a head.

But the wonderful thing about the Bible is that it reveals a God who wants to put his arms around us. That was the meaning of the outstretched hands on the Cross. 'Come unto me and I will enfold you' (see Matthew 11:28). God has a heart that loves sinners, and he has a head that plans our way through life. And he has given us a book that is about himself.

