

The background of the cover is a composite image. The upper portion shows a night sky with the Milky Way galaxy in shades of purple and pink, set against a dark starry background. The lower portion shows a dark, rugged mountain range with patches of snow, reflected in a calm body of water. A small, light-colored car is visible on a road in the distance on the left side of the mountains.

CHANGING *us for* GLORY

Daily Readings on God's Transforming Power

DAVID GOODING

EDITED BY HELEN CROOKES

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GLORY

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Preface

It is said that we become like what we worship and genuine worship presupposes knowledge and understanding of its object. This second volume of daily readings from the works of David Gooding has as its premise the promise in 2 Corinthians 3: 18:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

That is to say, the more we truly see the glories of the character of God in his triune majesty, the more we become like him.

It is the aim of this volume to deepen our understanding of some characteristics of our God in the hope and belief that such understanding will renew our minds and, consequently, the way we live our lives. It is not comprehensive of course—how, indeed, could it be?—and you will doubtless have many thoughts of your own about aspects that could or should have been included; but it is our hope that these extracts will inspire in us a more fervent appreciation of our God and Saviour, enriching our worship and transforming us on a daily basis to become more like Christ.

Helen Crookes

Belfast, 2024

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PART 1

**The Triune God who has always
been the God of relationships**

SAMPLE COPY

1st January

THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Reading: John 1:1–9

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

There was a time when the Son of God was not human. What was he then?

We learn of his eternal existence from the opening words of John's Gospel: 'In the beginning was the Word'. He existed with an eternal, timeless beginning—without beginning of life nor end of days. We learn that he was with the Father, and therefore in some sense distinct from him. But he was with the Father, which indicates that they enjoyed an intimate, living, glorious and marvellous fellowship. He was 'that eternal life, which was with the Father' for the Father's eternal enjoyment.

And so we learn from that same clause of Scripture that God—the supreme God, the Holy Trinity—is not a monolith but a fellowship, a communion. And our hearts are warmed when we read that this life has been manifested for the very purpose that we might have fellowship with God—'and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 John 1:1–3). That is a thing to be pondered, my fellow believers. As we live here on this planet we can, and do, have fellowship in the very intimate things of God. We have fellowship with the Father and share with him this eternal life which is his Son.

Then we are told that the Word 'was God'. Though the Word can be viewed as distinct from the Father, we must try to apprehend that there are not two Gods, nor three Gods, there is only one God. For the Word of God—the Son of God—shares the very basic essential life and being of God. The Son is as much God as the Father is God, and that is true also of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is as much God as the Son is, or as the Father is—all three persons of the Godhead being equally God.

PART 2

**The God who calls us into
fellowship with himself**

SAMPLE COPY

13th January

ONENESS WITH THE DIVINE PERSONS

Reading: John 17:20–26

‘That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.’ (John 17:21)

What a wonderful thing it would have been if our salvation had simply amounted to the cancelling of all our debts and the forgiveness of our sins. That alone would have merited ten million Hallelujahs, undying to eternity. In addition to forgiveness, it would have been wonderful if salvation had secured for us some little collapsible seat round some murky little corner of the celestial courts, (except of course there are no murky corners, nor any collapsible seats). But who can grasp this? It is not just forgiveness, not just a place in God’s heaven, but oneness with the divine persons themselves! What a staggering concept, what awesome reality Jesus Christ our Lord talks to us about in these simple words: a unity between us and the very persons of the Godhead, modelled on that glorious unity between the Father and the Son. Within the holy Trinity, each person is and remains distinct. As the theologians tell us, the Father is not the Son, nor is the Son the Father.

So it is with the redeemed. We shall never be God: there will no blurring of our human personality nor any merging with the absolute, in the Hindu sense. And yet there is a *oneness*, and I should require more than the archangel’s voice to explain it. May God save me from one extreme or the other. But how can I hear it without being moved? He speaks of a oneness between you and me, my brother, and you, my sister, and all of us, with the persons of the Godhead. A oneness in mind, love, purpose and moral character. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, sons and daughters of the living God and one with him.

It is modelled on the relationship between Christ and his Father. First of all, it is oneness within the divine persons, the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son, who prays, ‘that they may all be one, . . . even as we are one, I in them and you in me’ (John 17:21–23). This is the mutual inter-communion and inter-penetration of the persons of the deity. He is saying, ‘I wish them to be one like that, not merely among themselves, but one in us.’ Who can bear the weight of glory that such words express?

PART 3

**The God who calls us into
fellowship with one another**

2nd February

UNITY THROUGH LOYALTY TO CHRIST

Reading: Luke 22:19–23

So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. (1 Chronicles 11:3)

This will remind us straightaway that our blessed Lord Jesus has done the same for us: he has made a covenant with his people. In that lovely simple ceremony that he himself ordained on the night before he was betrayed, he took the bread and said, ‘This is my body’. Holding up the cup and passing it to his people, he said, ‘This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood’. In response to his request—indeed, his command—we meet as the people of God to celebrate the new covenant and think not only of that gracious promise, ‘I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them’, but we think also of its glorious provision, ‘And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more’ (Heb 10:16–17 KJV).

My brothers and sisters, here is the genius of the King: his power to bring his squabbling little children together, all willing to obey him. Hear him: ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Take it, drink it. I grant you forgiveness, and I propose to write my laws on your heart.’

Is there a man or a woman in Christ who would rise up and say, ‘No, no! Forgiveness is what I want; but I’m not prepared to obey his commandments?’

We don’t say that, do we? But we behave like it sometimes; hence the wisdom of our Lord that calls us to constantly celebrate that central festival of Christianity, the covenant that the Lord Jesus has made with us, his people. There is perhaps no place on earth more calculated to unite God’s people as when they take bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord Jesus. Being many, we are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf (see 1 Cor 10:17).

*We would remember we are one
With every saint that loves Thy Name;
United to Thee on the throne,
Our life, our hope, our Lord the same.¹*

1 James G. Deck (1802–84), ‘Lord, we would ne’er forget Thy love’.

David Gooding, *Mankind’s Pathway to the Coming Age of Peace: Six Studies on the Overall Message of 1 Chronicles*, 28–9

PART 4

**The eternal living and
transcendent Creator**

SAMPLE COPY

12th February

RESTING IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT GOD IS OUR CREATOR

Reading: Isaiah 43:1–4

*But now thus says the LORD, he who created you,
O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel. (Isaiah 43:1)*

In chapters 40–48 of Isaiah we read how Israel will again discover not just the doctrine that God is Creator, but they shall discover it in their own experience when God recreates Israel. It will not be simply that Israel will tell the nations that God the Creator is the true God; they themselves will be the chief exhibit. The nations shall look at Israel and see the reality of God, for God has recreated his people. Israel is encouraged with these wonderful words that we read from chapter 43, ‘But now thus says the LORD, he who created you . . . I have called you by name, you are mine’ (v. 1). As God recreates Israel among the nations, their very recreation will be a testimony to the living God.

What will happen to Israel has in some part happened to us, hasn’t it? Let me remind you what a lovely thing it is: ‘For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them’ (Eph 2:10). Sometimes, as we get busy working for the Lord, it’s our effort that comes to loom large in our minds. Then there are those lovely occasions when we sit back and remember that it’s not merely what I am doing for God, but what God is doing through me and in me, and in every one of us. You, sir, and you, my dear good sister, are a creation of God.

‘If anyone is in Christ,’ says Paul, ‘he is a new creation’ (2 Cor 5:17). Nestling underneath the externals of our bodies there is this miracle of divine grace. You have been created in Christ Jesus, and if any person is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. May God help us to lean upon it and discover again the reality of God as our Creator.

‘You see,’ says God to Israel, ‘I chose you’ (see Isa 41:8). ‘I have called you by name, you are mine . . . I will work, and who can hinder it? . . . that [you] might declare my praise’ (Isa 43:1, 13, 21 DWG). And the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit’ (John 15:16). So as we face each day, let our inner hearts be learning evermore to rest upon God our Creator.

PART 5

The Sovereign Lord's use of power

SAMPLE COPY

24th February

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS GOOD NEWS

Reading: Isaiah 51:12–16

Do you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth, that you live in constant terror every day because of the wrath of the oppressor? (Isaiah 51:13 DWG)

The Bible maintains that God is and ever remains sovereign in the maintenance of the universe that he has made. Rejoice with me over the gospel that this is! What pessimism we would live in, if we were not persuaded by God's self-revelation that he is sovereign in his created universe! You who have loved life and enjoyed its beauty may now see it beginning to slip away from you. You have turned middle-aged and are perhaps feeling the insidious working of decay and disease in your body and mind. If you didn't believe that God is sovereign, even in the physical things of this universe, you might be facing the future with despair, and indeed with fear.

If you have a compassionate heart, you pity the atheists when you consider what a prison they are in. They can't believe there is a God and are obliged to think that this universe comes of blind matter, produced and worked upon by mindless, purposeless forces. A little virus—visible only with the aid of a powerful electronic microscope—will one day do its dastardly work, and the irony of it is that it won't know it has done it. Even a first-class scientist with his giant of a brain, full of intelligence and purpose, is torn to pieces by a mindless bit of stuff. This poor man is in a prison, whose walls gradually contract upon him. One day they will crush him and mindlessly destroy his brain, and finally destroy him.

Thank God we have discovered through our blessed Lord Jesus that there is a God behind this created universe, who holds it in his hand. We think of that occasion when the Creator incarnate was in a boat with his frightened fishermen apostles. The storm came, and those great physical powers threatened to engulf them. When he commanded the wind it was muzzled, the waves reduced and there was calm. In Jesus Christ, we have met the incarnate God who is ultimately in sovereign charge of the physical powers of the universe. What a comfort it is for us to consider the gospel that this is: not merely when we think of the ultimate destiny of our physical world, but when we think of our present situation.

PART 6

**The sovereign Lord's government
and guidance in our lives**

SAMPLE COPY

8th March

THE EASY YOKE

Reading: 2 Chronicles 10:1–11

'For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' (Matthew 11:30)

When our Lord says, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light', he uses the word that the people used when they came to Rehoboam, saying, 'Your father Solomon made his yoke heavy, now you, his son, please make it lighter' (see 1 Kgs 12:4). What they meant by his yoke was his kingly rule, for we remember, surely, that he was king.

Now there have been some folks who have interpreted the yoke in this fashion. They say, 'A farmer who ploughs with the horse, for instance, will have two horses. One is a youngster, full of pranks and prancing around about the place, difficult to manoeuvre. So the farmer will put an older horse beside the younger one so that they're sharing the same yoke, and the older one will keep the younger one in check and somewhere near the line of the plough.' So they say, 'You know, God in his mercy has given us a Saviour. He is (excuse the term) the counterpart of the older horse. We are the youngsters who have to be trained, and he joins us in the yoke. It is his yoke, really, but he loves us and he helps us to plough a straight furrow in life.'

It's a very nice thought, and the Lord is certainly with us; but as far as I can see that is not what he meant here. When he talks about his yoke, he is using the term in the sense they used it in 1 Kings, of a king's rule. 'Take my yoke upon you', he says (Matt 11:29). Our Lord is king and he tells us, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth' (Matt 28:18 NASB). He is the sovereign Lord; his yoke is easy, his burden is light, he is there to serve us; but he is king and will insist on ruling us. What should we say to him? He is the Son of David. Shall we say to him, like the crowd said, 'We have no portion in David' (see 1 Kgs 12:16), or shall we not bow our knees and hasten to say, 'Lord, forgive me that I have not taken your yoke so fully as I should have done. Help me to bow my neck and my heart to receive it and live according to your guidance.'

PART 7

The God of love and grace

SAMPLE COPY

7th April

GOD COMMENDED HIS LOVE TO US WHILE WE WERE STILL SINNERS

Reading: Romans 5:6–11

But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 KJV)

What would you like God to give you? Go on, think of something big. Would you like a whole cluster of stars to look after? It wouldn't impoverish the almighty God to give you ten thousand galaxies; to him that would be a very small thing. The biggest thing that God will ever do for you, he has already done. He gave his Son for you.

Ponder it. Exactly when did he give his Son for us? Did God say, 'I can see those folks are really doing their best, so perhaps it wouldn't be too extravagant of me at this stage to give my Son for them'?

The whole point is that it was while we were still weak, while we were still sinners, while we were enemies that God gave his Son for us. Here is the Holy Spirit arguing with us. He has to do that sometimes, doesn't he? When we prefer to trust our feelings, or anything else, rather than rest in the very unchangeable character of God, the Holy Spirit has to argue against our emotions and against our fear, and point us to this foundational thing: God gave his Son for us *while we were still weak*.

All sin is the same in one sense, but it has these different forms and symptoms. Sometimes it's *weakness*, sometimes it's *ungodliness*—lack of reverence for God or respect for man. Sometimes it's *missing the mark*, sometimes it's positive *enmity against God*. Yes, 'God commends his love toward us.'

What a . . . I nearly said, what a *humiliation* for almighty God! Have you ever had a salesman come to your door, and you didn't want the brooms and the polishes? The poor chap needs to make a little profit and he puts his foot in the door so that you have to listen to what he has to say. He's commending his wares to you.

I find it astonishing that God comes to recommend, to *commend* his love to us. Just imagine it, my dear fellow believer. Almighty God is standing at the door of your heart, commending his love to you: praising its virtues and extolling its details. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit pouring out God's love into our hearts.

PART 8

The God who is loyal and humble

SAMPLE COPY

6th May

WHO IS LIKE JEHOVAH?

Reading: Micah 6:1–8

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old. (Micah 7:20)

God reminds them of the way he had brought his people out of slavery in Egypt and recalls the later incident when Balak king of Moab incited Balaam to curse Israel. But God gave Balaam the command to bless, and so they were blessed (see Num 22–24).

So, does God's mercy predominate over all things? God had not grown weary of them. Even after their repeated rebellions in the wilderness, it remained his desire to put his name upon them and to bless them (see Num 6:22–27). He would not now give up on his people and allow them to be cursed. For that is not what God is like, as Balak had to learn to his cost:

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it? (Num 23:19)

He gave the command to bless, and so it happened—‘Has he said, and will he not do it?’ And just as assuredly, there will one day come the fulfilment of God's promised future reign of peace (Mic 4:1–5).

Not only was Israel's God different from pagan gods in his desire to bless them, but in the extent to which he would go to in order to bring blessing.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. (Mic 5:2)

Even Micah expressed surprise that this ruler should come from Bethlehem. If Messiah had been born in Jerusalem, we may have concluded that he came for others; but he came in humility to this little village, so we see that he came for us. He came near for us. Who is like Jehovah? The man Jesus is; he is Jehovah incarnate! And he came so near that they could hit him in the face. A slap across the cheek is the final insult to a person. By doing that you would ‘deface’ him. Who is a God like Jehovah? When the Lord Jesus came they took a rod and slashed it across his face. So near he came.

PART 9

The Only Wise God

SAMPLE COPY

29th May

REDEMPTION DISPLAYS GOD'S WISDOM TO THE ANGELS

Reading: Ephesians 3:7–13

So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 3:10)

God has been educating the angels all down the vast centuries. I would like to have been there when God set about the work of creation. He spoke the word and here comes our planet! 'It's nothing like heaven,' says Michael to Gabriel. Then God began inventing the giraffes and the buffaloes and the monkeys, and then human beings! Imagine the variety of creation. That was Lesson Number One, perhaps, for the great principalities and powers.

But I wonder what Gabriel and Michael said when they saw the blessed Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, take that tremendous step down and be born of the virgin Mary. Did Michael nudge Gabriel and say, 'How can this be? How can the Son lower himself to become lower than us angels?' That was an amazing lesson for the principalities and powers to learn.

What did they say when they saw that same Son of God taken by brutal men, scourged, crowned with thorns, languishing, nailed on a cross? Did Michael say to Gabriel, 'Surely God has gone too far now. Isn't this bordering on folly?'

What would Michael have said if the answer had been told him, 'God has done this to save a sinner called Gooding'? Through that, the angels have learned a staggering lesson.

It was a novel thing when on the fortieth day after the resurrection the blessed Lord Jesus ascended and entered into the very presence of God. 'Whatever next?' says Gabriel—as the angels parted to allow the blessed Son of God come through the portals of heaven and sit at the right hand of God—a human being, elevated above us!

God sat him down at his right hand, far above all principalities and powers—a man! God's wonders have not finished. The angels discovered that not only is the man, Jesus Christ, seated above all principalities and powers, might and dominions, but you are as well. If you have got over the wonder of it, the angels have not!

Can you imagine Gabriel whispering to Michael, 'Are we meant to serve them? We knew some of them when they were on earth!' And Michael says, 'They have been bought by the blood of Christ: they are so valuable to God that we shall willingly serve them!' To this present day the angels are watching this marvellous thing.

David Gooding, *Where Does God Dwell Today? Two Studies on the Purpose and Nature of the Church*, 8–9

PART 10

The God of truth

SAMPLE COPY

15th June

TRUTH OR POWER AND THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH

Reading: Psalm 45:1–9

*In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth
and meekness and righteousness. (Psalm 45:4)*

People generally are obsessed with power rather than with moral integrity and truth. When the Lord Jesus told Pilate, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world—to testify to the truth.’ Pilate replied, ‘What is truth?’ And then he tried to bring the conversation down to what he thought was a more realistic level. ‘Don’t you realize’, he said, ‘I have power either to free you or to crucify you?’ (see John 18:37–38; 19:10).

All of us can remember examples of world leaders, and not merely from the remote past, who worshipped power and sought to build their world empires on its basis. But Jesus was different. His passionate concern for truth, his love of righteousness, his hatred of wickedness—these are matters of historical fact, not of pious fantasy. The records of his life have been open to scrutiny for centuries, and still issue the challenge: ‘Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?’ (see John 8:46). If to love God with the whole heart, mind, soul and strength is the first and greatest commandment of God’s law, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself is the second, the Lord Jesus fulfilled both in his life and superabundantly in his death.

The records show that in his life on earth he possessed supernatural power, and used it on occasions. But the records also show that he saw more clearly than any that this world cannot be turned into a paradise of justice and peace simply by the exercise of power, even of divine power. The problem of human sin and guilt must be faced and dealt with. What future of justice and peace could be achieved by acting as if the world’s past and present sin did not matter, and brushing it under the carpet? Christ certainly would attempt no such thing. He loved righteousness. Divine justice must be upheld. But to use divine power to insist on divine justice, as Christ will do at his second coming—that would mean the execution of sinners. In that case, how many human beings would survive and enter the paradise of peace? Christ loved sinners, and had come to save them and bring them to repentance and make them, like the dying thief, fit subjects for paradise.

PART 11

The God of revival and restoration

SAMPLE COPY

7th July

GOD IS A GOD OF RESTORATION

Reading: Zechariah 8:11–13

The God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

I propose that we should listen to God speaking to and through his ancient prophet, so that we might see again what kind of a God our God is. As we see him reacting to the behaviour of his ancient people and discover something of his heart, something of the personality that is God, we shall find it speaking its own words of encouragement to us in our very different circumstances.

The first great lesson that we shall learn is that God, our God, is the God of restoration. He was then and he is now. Granted that in this prophecy God will be concerned chiefly with the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, yet even that is a remarkable thing and speaks volumes to our hearts about the nature of God. Remember how uniquely privileged Jerusalem city had been of all the cities upon the face of the earth, throughout the length and breadth of history. It was favoured uniquely above all by God dwelling there in his temple. Yet, in spite of that incalculable grace, Jerusalem city had grown ungrateful and obstinate in her sin and perversity, until at length the infinite patience of God could do no other than bring grievous discipline upon her at the hands of the ancient Babylonians.

Why didn't God take the easy route and destroy Jerusalem city completely? What need has almighty God of a few bricks there, in a tiny little postage stamp size country? Could he not start again afresh? But no, not God. What a marvellous God we have. God is a God of restoration and he will have patience with his people still and restore even that city.

The fact that God is a God of restoration is made clear to us on the first page of our New Testament. As it opens up the new vistas that come with the birth of Jesus Christ our Lord, it pauses to survey the story up to that point. Matthew divides the history from Abraham to our Lord's coming into three parts, ingeniously arranging the genealogies so that we might see the point. Three equal parts, as Matthew counts them, of the ways of God with his people, leading up to the birth of the Lord Jesus.

PART 12

**The eternal God whose purposes
are fulfilled in history**

SAMPLE COPY

24th July

CHRIST THE LORD OF TIME

Reading: Isaiah 46:5–13

And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:17)

This is a vast universe in which we live. This year we and our little planet have been travelling millions of miles on our annual journey round the sun. Travelling with the sun in the rotating arm of the galaxy that we're in; and then travelling in another direction with the whole of the galaxy in the direction that our galaxy is moving.

And of course that raises the practical question, where are we travelling to? And also the bigger question of life and life's travel, for in another metaphorical sense life is a journey, isn't it? Even within the confines of our little seventy years, the matter of the past and the future often looms up in front of us, sometimes with worrying concerns. Here's a good mother and wife, preparing her husband's dinner. 'He is coming home from work,' she says, but she doesn't know that already there's been an accident and the man is lying dead on the roadside. It will take some time for the news to catch up with her because, generally speaking, we are behind things. They happen and then later we discover them; and what has already happened we don't necessarily know. That future, which is now past, is still future to us and we shan't learn of it until sometime later.

That could be a worrying thing, couldn't it? How happy are those who have discovered Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. Not only were all things made by him and through him and for him, but 'he is before all things'. Not, he *was* before them, he *is* before them. And seeing he belongs to God's eternity all things in our space and time do not come before him; he is before them. Nothing will happen to you, my brother and sister, that he has to learn about six or seven days later.

'He is before all things, and in him all things hold together,' and we go forward into the future calm and confident, knowing that whatever happens nothing will be a surprise to him. If we receive a shock, a grief and a calamity, then let us comfort our hearts that he is before all things, in him all things consist and he knew it was going to happen. It didn't happen because he was asleep in a boat or something.

PART 13

**The God who makes our lives
part of his grand story**

SAMPLE COPY

21st August

AN ENLARGED CONCEPT OF HISTORY

Reading: Matthew 16:24–17:9

'For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.' (Matthew 16:25)

When our Lord first told Peter that he must go to Jerusalem, be rejected and crucified, Peter rebuked him. Peter thought that there was just this one age, and he was hoping that Christ would be successful in it. If Christ were to be rejected, he would lose everything he had invested in him.

It was in that context that our Lord Jesus took Peter, James and John up the Mountain of Transfiguration and gave them a vision of the Son of Man. Six days before this he had told them, 'The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father' (16:27). It revolutionised Peter's concept of history when he learned that there was not just this age, there was another age to come.

For Peter it had raised another conundrum. Our Lord said, 'Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (16:25). That sounded very strange to Peter. But now the conundrum was solved. There's not just one age. There are two ages—the present age and the age to come—and you have to make up your mind which age you are going to live for. If you live for this age you will lose everything that you invest in it. If you live for that age you will keep everything that you invest in it.

What is your soul? It isn't something you can put in a box. A soul is a life; it's got a time element to it and energy. It's got love and ambition and abilities of all kinds. Souls are things that you have to spend. What are you going to spend yours on?

Our Lord shall one day come again, 'and then he will repay each person according to what he has done' (16:27). If I believe that, what difference will it make? It will give me a new motivation and an enlarged concept of history. It will constantly alert me as to how I should spend my soul—my life, my love, my time, my energy, my everything; lest I should become like Demas (2 Tim 4:10), who loved this present age and invested his life in it, only to find at length that he had lost it all.

1 Greek, *psyche* = soul, or life.

PART 14

The God who saves

SAMPLE COPY

16th September

OUR MORAL SENSE DEMANDS JUDGMENT

Reading: Psalm 98

Let [all creation] rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness. (Psalm 98:11–13)

A colleague of mine said to me once, ‘You can have a morality without God; it is a matter of a *social contract*. If you put your finger in my eye, I shall reply by putting my finger in your eye and you will learn that it doesn’t pay. You don’t need God to support that.’

What will the atheist say to a row of people who are going to be gassed? They are pleading with him, ‘We want justice!’ What the atheist will have to say is this, ‘I am sorry, but there is no point in your crying out like that. You are not going to get justice, you are going to be gassed and there is nothing that anybody can do about it. You won’t get justice in this life, and because there is no God you won’t get justice in any life to come either.’

If there is no God, our moral sense is in the end a mirage. But of course there is a God and there is a judgment. When the ancient Israelites heard there was going to be a judgment, they made a joyful noise to the Lord and asked all creation to join in as well (vv. 6–9). Don’t you clap your hands at the very thought that in heaven there is a God of judgment and one day he will arise to judge the world? And don’t you rejoice at the fact that evil men, like these terrible industrialists James speaks of (see 5:1–6) who have trodden on the poor so wickedly, shall be dealt with? We shouldn’t always preach the coming judgment as though it were a gloomy thing. We should preach it as a subject over which you should clap your hands for joy. Why don’t we clap our hands?

If God came along and cut off the heads of all the unrighteous and left the good, where would our heads be? That is why our gospel is so marvellous. It has the answer to the predicament of human beings with a conscience, a moral judgment—a capacity to understand right and wrong that comes from God himself. We are conscious that not only has the world sinned, but we have sinned too; and we have the answer in the gospel, from which we can find forgiveness and peace with God.

PART 15

**The God whose great salvation
changes our thinking**

SAMPLE COPY

24th October

THE PATH TO SALVATION

Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12–16

Formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief. (1 Timothy 1:13)

Explaining God's strategies for the eventual conversion of his beloved Israel, Paul wrote to the Gentile Christians at Rome:

For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy by their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. (Rom 11:30–31)

The word he uses for disobedience means not so much the breaking of a commandment but rather the withholding of the obedience of faith. When he reminds the Gentiles that they were once disobedient, he is thinking of what he said earlier; that God originally revealed himself to the nations but that they did not like what they saw of God and refused to accept or believe it (1:18–28).

Now God has revealed more of himself in Jesus, and this time the Jews have not liked it, and have refused to accept or believe it. It is a disaster; and yet God is determined to turn it to their eventual good. 'God has consigned all to disobedience,' Paul concludes, 'that he may have mercy on all' (11:32).

The first indispensable step to true faith, and thus to salvation, is to discover that one has so far been an unbeliever. For religious people that can be very difficult. It was so with Saul of Tarsus. For some years he fought against admitting it; but on the Damascus road he caved in and confessed that, for all his sincere faith in God, in the only sense that really mattered he had never yet believed. And in that moment he found faith, mercy and salvation. The same applies to us all, whether pagan, Jew, or nominal Christian.

PART 16

The Holy God who makes us holy

SAMPLE COPY

14th November

THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

Reading: Exodus 40:1–5

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)

When the tabernacle was formed and God graciously deigned to dwell in it, then he called to Moses out of the tabernacle and invited him and the people to draw near. As they came to that small but exquisitely designed and exceedingly expensive shrine, they learned about the holiness of God.

There were ascending degrees of holiness. First, you would pass through the gate, which was one area of holiness; then the door, an even greater area of holiness; then the veil at last, and you were in the very presence of God, in a holiness that could not be exaggerated or increased here on earth. The holiness was symbolic of the very holiness of the thrice-holy God in heaven itself.

As the people came near, they were not only struck by the holiness of God; as they saw the rich colours on the gate and on the door and on the veil, they were struck by the beauty of that holiness. As the priests surveyed the cherubim on the veil, it reminded them of the wonderful mysterious beauty of the glory of God who dwelt there.

Therefore, the offerings they were to bring to God were to be the very best they could find. They would be made awesomely aware of that holiness, of its standard and of its right demands. As that glory reflected on them, they would come to see how inadequate their gifts were, how far short their devotion came, how compromised their holiness was, and their own sinfulness in personality and character and deed. So, as they learned of the holiness of God, God graciously put into their hands offerings of substitution that would cover their inadequacies and be the ground upon which they drew near to God.

Moreover, as those offerings were offered, the priests in Israel were charged with the inspection of the animals. They had to be cut into their parts, examined and carefully laid on that altar. The priests would be responsible for seeing that those sacrifices were healthy sacrifices, fit to take the place of the people and die in their stead in this sacred ministry to God.

PART 17

**The God of Revelation
who wants to be known**

SAMPLE COPY

14th December

GOD IS HIS OWN EVIDENCE

Reading: John 5:31–47

'And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me.' (John 5:37)

We should always remember that God Is His Own Evidence. That is to say, since he is the Creator, he is the ultimate source of everything. There is no being in the universe who is altogether independent of God and able to give us an independent assessment of God's claims to be God! Neither is there anyone able to provide us with evidence that did not ultimately originate with God himself. God is self-evident; and true faith on our part is our response to God's self-revelation.

And so it is with the Son of God. He is his own evidence. If you wish to provoke faith in him, proclaim him himself. Preach his person, repeat his words and sermons. Relate his deeds and miracles; tell out his virgin birth, his cross, his death, his resurrection. Relay the interpretation that he himself gave of these great events. It is this that creates and draws out people's faith. Of course, like John the Baptist we can each give our own personal testimony to Christ and to what he has done for us. That is certainly valid and helpful, and the Lord will use it to lead other people to himself and to salvation.

But as our Lord himself pointed out, at the ultimate level he does not accept human testimony as though it were some independent source of validation for his claims (vv. 33–34). There is no such independent evidence, nor can there be. The divine persons themselves are the source of all the evidence that draws out our faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the Samaritans spoke more wisely than they knew, when they said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world' (4:42).

PART 18

The True God who is the God of joy

SAMPLE COPY

24th December

THE LORD'S JOY

Reading: Luke 15:1–7

'I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.' (Luke 15:7)

To the critics of Christianity, the Lord appeared as too joyful to be truly religious. It was not so much that he was personally jovial, but rather that his religious activities were accompanied with a joyful spirit, almost bordering upon excitement. 'This man,' they said in dismay, 'receives sinners and eats with them.' And our Lord did nothing to dispel the thing that seemed to grieve them so much.

This joy that centred around his evangelical activities, he pressed home on the dismayed Pharisees with such parables as the Prodigal Son. He described the return home of the prodigal, not accompanied by him singing and praying, but by singing and dancing and a banquet! This wasn't the way a Pharisee was accustomed to take his religion. Our Lord seemed surprised that they could not perceive what it was that gave him such a great joy.

He said, 'Suppose one of you, being a farmer, lost a sheep. You would go out over the mountains after the lost one, and when you found it and brought it home you would hold a celebration and say, "Rejoice with me for my lost sheep has been found." You would do it if it were your business and your cash. How is it that your joy doesn't carry over into religion? Why do you count it strange that to me it is a joyful thing to sit by the side of a prostitute or tax-collector, and little by little bring them back to God and watch the joy of their spirit as they become reconciled to him?'

Yet they did count it strange, for there was very little room in the religion of the Pharisees for that kind of joy. They were accustomed to the art of proselytizing, but that was merely a matter of changing from one form of religion to another: from being a Greek to becoming a Jew. Pharisees on the whole were strangers to the joy of leading someone personally to God. In consequence, they missed what was one of the chief delights of religion; indeed one of the chief delights of heaven. 'There is more joy in heaven,' said Jesus, 'over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine very religious people who have no need of repentance.'