

Weekly Newsletter: 19th December 2023

Reflection: Strong Painless Limbs

By Joe Barnard

Just this week I finished reading *The Last Battle* by C.S. Lewis to my two younger children. After we had read the final page, David, who is eight-years-old, looked at me and said, “Do you mean that I have to wait eighty years to experience that!” He had picked up on the joy, the richness, and the vitality of Lewis’s depiction of eternal life. This picture left him with a holy longing to experience what Christians often refer to as “heaven”, but what is more accurately labelled “the new heavens and the new earth”.

Now, if I am totally honest, ever since David made this comment, I have been wrestling with a sense of conviction. Why, I keep asking myself, do I *not* feel more of this thirst for the glorious things yet to be revealed? Why is it that I feel myself rooted to the present life as a tree is rooted to the earth? Why is it that the passage of time often strikes my psyche as the movement of life toward death rather than the movement of mortality toward immortality? Why, thinking of death itself, do I often feel as if that momentous moment is a transition from light to darkness rather than a transition from darkness to light? How have I come to prefer a stay at a Travelodge to the hope of attaining a permanent place in what the Psalmist refers to as the “fullness of joy”?

The answer of these questions, I’ve come to realise, is that I’ve not spent enough time meditating on 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8. In this passage, Paul reminds us of three truths that ought to have an effect on our hearts not unlike what happens to our beliefs when we stare at a beautiful chocolate cake through a store-front window.

1 – The Seen Is a Shadow of the Unseen

In *The Last Battle* Lord Digory makes a surprising comment near the end of the book. He says, “It’s all in Plato, all in Plato”. What Lewis is suggesting here is that Plato and Paul were in agreement on one fundamental point. To use the language of Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:18 he says, “For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal”. This world, as real as it might be, is in the end the Shadowlands of something far more permanent and glorious. This means that Christians should not fear ultimately departing from this world. The best pleasures here are at most appetizers of a main course that the chef is still keeping under wraps. Or, to change the metaphor, the delights of this life are merely the trickling burns that, if followed to their end point, merge with an ocean of joy that exceeds anything our feeble minds are currently able to imagine.

2 – Prolonged Suffering Is Not Purposeless

Paul says one thing about our suffering in 2 Corinthians 4 that always catches my attention – partly because, at first, it sounds pastorally insensitive. He says, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment”. The two words that always stand out to me are “light” and “moment”. A lot of us don’t feel as if our suffering is “light”; likewise, a lot of our pain lasts – not for a few minutes – but sometimes for years, even decades. How, then, can Paul say this?

The answer is because Paul is using a deliberate point of comparison. In other words, “light” and “momentary” are for Paul relative terms. Our sufferings are indeed “light” in comparison with the “weight of glory” that one day God will give us. Similarly, our pain is “momentary” when set beside the eternity of joy that one day we will inherit.

Seen this way, Paul is not being pastorally insensitive but pastorally astute. He wants us to feel the joy of knowing that the sufferings of the present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory yet to be revealed. The horizon before us is not an indefinite process of aging and enfeeblement. Rather, through the alchemy of grace, the very worst of our pain will one day be transmuted into heavenly rewards. God will have used every last grain of our mortal existence in order to fashion something worthy of imperishable life.

3 – Jesus’ Resurrection Is Both Fact and Promise

Any gospel believing Christian professes faith in Jesus’ resurrection. What we often fail to trust in – at least in our heart of hearts – is that we, too, one day will one day be resurrected. Paul is clear: Our hope is not to be “unclothed” but to be “further clothed”. Our hope is not to pass through death into a ghostly, disembodied existence, but “that mortality may be swallowed up by life”. That last phrase should catch our attention. What does this mean? Rather than me try to explain it, here are two quotations to whet your spiritual appetites for the life that one day the resurrected children of God will enjoy in the enlivening light of His manifest presence.

“It is so silly of people to fancy that old age means crookedness and witheredness and feebleness and sticks and spectacles and rheumatism and forgetfulness! It is so silly! Old age has nothing to do with all that. The right old age means strength and beauty and mirth and courage and clear eyes and strong painless limbs.” (George MacDonald, *The Princess and the Goblins*).

“But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on for ever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*).

Community Week – Items Needed

By the Mission Team

In preparation for the Family Fun Afternoon during the Community Week, we are looking for some items:

- Scottish Children's story books
- Craft paper/tissue paper
- Brown wool
- Tartan Paper

We have put a box in the front foyer of the church with the label of *Community Week drop off box* for the items to be put in. If you wish any of the items back particularly the books please put your name inside. Thank you!

Christmas and New Year Plans

Here are the plans for over the holiday season –

- **Sunday 24th December** – Worship service at 10.30am (no Home Groups) There will be no Sunday Club this Sunday but there will be provision for the younger class (i.e. those under 8)
- **Wednesday 27th December** – Prayer meeting (on Zoom) at 7pm. Ernie Shippin leading.
- **Sunday 31st December** – Worship service at 10.30am (no evening service)
- **Tuesday 2nd January** – Handel's Messiah at 12noon at the Usher Hall
- **Wednesday 3rd January** – Prayer meeting (in person) at 7pm. Joe Barnard leading.
- **Sunday 7th January** – Communion Service at 10.30am and Equip at 6pm

Liz will be on holiday from Friday 22nd December and back to admin duties on Thursday 4th January. There will be no weekly newsletter or prayer bulletin for the next two week. Normal service will resume the week beginning Sunday 7th January 😊

Baby & Toddlers and Warm Space will start back for the new term on Monday 8th January.

Christmas Eve at Abbeyhill Baptist Church



We have been invited along to a special Christmas eve service this Sunday at 4pm at Abbeyhill Baptist. They are running it in partnership with All Nations Church, a Korean fellowship that meets in their building. Everyone is welcome to attend and mince pies and Korean finger food will be served afterwards.

The Leadership Team at Abbeyhill Baptist send us warm Christmas greetings as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour.

Cornhill Book in a Day – 17th and 18th January

Come and spend two days at Cornhill in Glasgow digging deep into the book of Psalms with **James Hely Hutchinson**. James is the Director of Institut Biblique de Bruxelles (IBB), in Belgium. IBB is a wonderful college teaching the Francophone world how to preach and teach the Bible faithfully. James has studied, taught and written extensively on the book of Psalms and this book in two days event is not to be missed.

The day will be a great opportunity to learn key Bible handling skills and to grow in your understanding of the book of Psalms whilst enjoying warm fellowship with like-minded brothers and sisters. Please contact Liz (Liz@holyroodevangelical.org) if you would like to attend so that we can book together as group.

Sunday Morning Series

We're finishing up in our studies in the book of Isaiah on Sunday mornings and are moving onto John's gospel in the new year. Why not read through the gospel over Christmas in preparation?

Christmas Appeal 2023

We wanted to highlight two of the projects that we're supporting for the Christmas Appeal this year –

- **Scripture Union Scotland** have produced a short video about the lives of two people who have been impacted by the work of SU <https://www.suscotland.org.uk/donate/christmas-appeal/> - 'Your gift could help introduce a child or young person to Jesus and help us to walk alongside them in their journey of faith. What greater gift could you give this Christmas?'
- In response to the war in Israel and Gaza, **Tearfund** launched a Middle East emergency appeal - 'Thousands of people in Gaza and Israel and the wider region are experiencing devastating loss, trauma and overwhelming need. The situation continues to worsen on a daily basis, increasing the number of people being displaced from their homes. Tearfund is working with local churches and partners to support their preparations and help them respond to the needs of people across the region. Your help can make a difference. Please give if you can, and join us in praying for the lives that have been ruined by the unfolding crisis.'



We're also supporting the **Tranent Church Plant (lead by Tim Rawlinson)** and **Kilmallie Free Church (for their Minister in Training)** and have heard about these on Sunday mornings. The elders decided that the funds would be allocated with the Tranent Church Plant and the Kilmallie Minister in Training receiving 30% each. Scripture Union and Tearfund will receive 20% each.

The current total is £4800. Giving towards the appeal can be made by bank transfer to the church account <https://holyroodevangelical.org/giving/> (using the reference 'Christmas Appeal') or can be placed in an envelope marked 'Christmas Appeal' in the offering box. Thank you!

Church Calendar

For your prayers and info:

- Tuesday: Pickleball and Table Tennis at 7pm in the church
- Wednesday: Prayer Meeting at 7pm on Zoom
- Sunday: Worship Service at 10.30am (and live streamed). Joe Barnard preaching.



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