

Truth – Never Lost

One of our church members kindly gave me a book on a man I had never heard of, and I am glad he did! The book is 'Gottschalk, servant of God'.

Son of a powerful Saxon nobleman, he was sent away to a monastery as a child. Immediately, that made him penniless, for his entire inheritance was given to the 'church' (Roman Catholic, of course).

What interested me is that his life illustrates the fact that God NEVER leaves ANY age without His truth and His Gospel. Gottschalk had formed an understanding of reprobation and predestination even as a young monk, and later, as a missionary-priest, he travelled extensively, from northern Europe right down to Croatia and the Middle East.

What I see in the book is not just a young monk preaching truth, but MANY monks who had the same knowledge. Born in the large German town of Mainz, he ended up in a remote monastery in what is now northern France. It seems his interest in predestination began with an in-depth study of Augustine, which blossomed hundreds of years before the Reformation was even thought of.

Gottschalk was driven out of Italy, because of the antagonism shown towards him by his former Abbot, Hirabanus Maurus, who became Archbishop of Mainz. So, Gottschalk travelled to Croatia to live under the sponsorship of its king, Trpimir the First, from 846AD to 848AD.

After sending a letter of complaint against his former Abbot, to the Synod of Mainz, he was branded an heretic, beaten and thrown out of the whole territory. After that the accusation of heresy (because of his belief in election, predestination and depravity) followed him wherever he went, whipped, stripped of his priest-title, and imprisoned. The archbishop of Reims tried to get him to retract what he believed and taught, but Gottschalk refused, and wrote to many eminent friends and theologians with the truth, causing a great controversy. The argument was taken up in three Councils, but then went to the pope, Nicholas 1, who demanded the archbishop should attend Rome to state his case, which he did not. So the whole thing fizzled out. But, when you anger the establishment, you must be prepared for much hatred!

When Gottschalk fell seriously ill, the archbishop denied him the sacraments and burial in consecrated ground unless he recanted before he died (sometime between 866 and 870).

Like all original thinkers, Gottschalk attracted many enemies, those who were what we would today refer to as 'PC'. He is considered to be one of the best poets of that era, too.

The real interest is that even in the middle of a strongly Roman Catholic era, God had His man! He came to know, understand and love the truth concerning predestination and reprobation, and fearlessly preached it wherever he went, though it cost him his safety and status.

His example is what ALL modern Christians are called to follow. God's truth is paramount, no matter who is upset by it. Though Arminius was said to be a staunch Calvinist, he showed his true colours by writing against the scriptural truth of predestination, and spawned a parody of truth called Arminianism, a system of thought gladly owned by Rome and repeated by other pseudo-Christians. His thoughts still run parallel to, but not part of, God's word, leading thousands to spiritual destruction.

Gottschalk had nothing in this world, but he willingly gave his life to God's truth. How many today are just as willing? How many care at all?

The Handicraft of God

Less than a mile north of the M4 motorway in the UK is the longest village in Britain, Brinkworth; it runs parallel to the motorway. Most of the village is concentrated in just one mile, but it runs onwards either side. It can be accessed just above Malmsbury.

Interestingly, it contains a large number of racing stables and racing tracks used by trainers for daily exercises, and as you drive along the road it is not unusual to see some of the finest race horses in the land galloping along, full-stretch.

Race horses are indeed sleek and lovely. But, for me, the most lovely horses in the world are the mighty shires. They are simply handsome, strong, and powerful. For me, in the horse world, they represent God's incredible design and creation, used for carrying knights, pulling heavy loads and drays, and dragging ploughs. They are just magnificent! All animals are just as incredible, because God made them; but the shire, tall and mighty, is the most beautiful of all horses.

Because these horses are now rarely used their numbers are in decline. But, this doesn't take anything away from their magnificence. Did you know Christians are meant to be magnificent? To be mighty? To do hard work for the Lord? Like the shires, this kind of Christian is also in decline. It is time to bring them back... will YOU be a spiritual shire?

The Exorcist

Not realising just how much their lives can be changed dramatically, many Christians watch horror films. Now, a series on 'The Exorcist' is showing on TV and 'thrill junkies' watch even though it frightens them witless.

Watching this kind of garbage is not good, but evil. It centres not on God but on Satan, and makes sport of his wildest activities. It is anything but 'entertainment'!

My brother and I were working a night shift in the psychiatric hospital. Just hours beforehand the original film, 'The Exorcist', appeared in cinemas around Britain. During our shift we heard of an horrific assault in a ward downstairs. A young man (a psychologist it so happens) went to see the film with his father, and during the film he went berserk and attacked the father. The young man was so violent and outrageous he was sectioned by police and brought to us.

We went down to the ward after our shift and looked in the room where the violence was acted

out. It was a shocking scene. Literally all the walls, the ceiling, the floor, the window and door, and what was left of the furniture, were covered in blood. It looked just like a slaughter-house and left us walking home in silence.

The patient had torn a leg off the huge oak table – anyone familiar with the old-style furniture of mental hospitals will tell you the table was very heavy. The leg was used to batter the window so the patient could escape. The nurse in charge that night, Dave, heard the noise and rushed to the room to find the patient smashing the window. The patient then attacked Dave, and the nurse ended up with a fractured skull, fractured ribs and arms, and almost died.

After that the patient was kept in hospital for a year or so. Every day after this episode he would butt the brick walls, cutting his head badly and bleeding profusely. He never recovered from his disturbances.

Others had similar reactions to watching 'The Exorcist' that day, but few understood why. When demons see people showing an interest in satanic activities they zone-in and start to meddle with their lives. Many are terrorised by demons, so do whatever they demand. Others commit suicide (a kind of demonic joke). Yet others go on to do many occult practices.

Overall, they are driven far from even considering God and are resistant to the Gospel. I know all this because I had to deal with people who suffered through occultism. One big culprit was the Ouija board, which sent many people into a tailspin – they were terrified when the board answered them. But, though they did not use it again, that one experience gave access to demons.

Satan will find any possible opening in our emotional, spiritual, and even physical armour to bring us down. Mainly he looks for any interest at all in the occult, no matter how seemingly innocent it might be to us. And once he gets his hook in, he won't let go without a big fight. So, if you watch TV with its fake demons, the REAL demons will take note. Watch horror movies because you like to be scared... demons will gladly scare you witless, but in their case it isn't make-believe. Ask clairvoyants for the future, and you might be afraid of what they'll say... remember that they can only tell you what demons tell them. And demons can manipulate circumstances so the prediction comes true.

Satan's path is in and towards darkness. God's path is ALWAYS in and towards the light. Demonic activity is NOT exciting – it is perverse and leads to destruction. EVERY time!

I expect a lot of people (including very foolish Christians) will watch the new TV rendition of The Exorcist and will love to be frightened. They may even say they have nightmares. But, that is only part of it. They do not understand they have opened a door to Satan that he will readily use.

Some who watched the original film are still in mental hospitals. Others have recurring mental disturbances. Others are fully misled to indulge in occultism. If this is your idea of 'fun' then please do watch it. But, you WILL be damaged, and you do so knowing God hates what you are doing.

My Board and Me

A short while ago I gave away my architectural drawing board to a nephew, hoping he would use it for artworks. It served me well for fifty years, and cost me a huge amount of money at the time in the 60s.

On it I designed many paid-for works, from an old version of the Swansea City Football Club logo, to restaurant menus, to exhibition posters, to... well, anything printers did for their clients. At the time there were no computers, so everything was done laboriously by hand on layers of acetate, and lettering was done by hand, using single-letter transfers. Not easy and very time consuming. So, that board had many memories for me.

But, my biggest memory is reserved for my biggest board. I was allotted it by the company I worked for, designing kitchens, interiors and furniture, well before computers took the strain. Then, you had to be a good draughtsman as well as a designer.

What was special was that the board was bought from an aircraft manufacturer – it was HUGE, with an exceptional system of weights and precision drawing tools on smoothly-moving steel cables on pulleys. It was so big I could have several big drawings going on at the same time!

What I'm saying is that I had the tools for the job and they were great! I also had the latest drawing equipment – pens, etc. Because nothing was on computers my work had to be very accurate, with no errors.

Today, many Christians think they know it all, guessing their way through theological and Bible questions, and having hardly any true knowledge. They 'borrow' ideas and statements rather than work their way solidly through thinking and logic. They usually disregard anything, including scriptures, that does not match what they wish to say, but they still think they are right.

Can you recognise Bible amateurs posing as theologians? They tend to 'borrow' from others extensively, and never have an original thought (that is, thought that falls into line with scripture, and arises from it). This, they think, is being a 'scholar', one fit to teach others. But, it doesn't work that way!

As a young artist I took time to buy the kind of board used by architects. It was complete with ebony edging on the board and the T Square – expensive! Both gave me accurate lines. My aeroplane board allowed me to do drawings that were accurate, and I was able to do multiple designs at the same times because it was vast!

Every Christian is given an accurately devised 'board' by the Lord, which He tailors specifically to the life of the individual. He expects us to follow Him and prepare our spiritual lives on His foundation, the 'board' of doctrine. But, sadly, many Christians use their own board, made of rough selfist materials, that produce poor lines. Without accurate doctrine no Christian can even begin to think properly or act wisely. Do you want real faith... or are you content with your bit of amateur plywood board, producing nothing of merit!

Depression

I have never watched the TV series, Duck Dynasty, but it seems the whole family is Christian. Mary Kate Robertson married-into the family, and recently said she suffers from depression and yet God still gives her joy. I think maybe there are some mixed ideas here.

Her depression appears to have centred on being apart from her own family when married and going to college. She speaks of usual signs of depression, including crying for no apparent

reason. (Of course there **WAS** a reason – the anxiety of leaving home and not being closer to her family).

Every day she felt a lead weight of sadness. This led to the same sadness when with people and in gatherings. The thing is, catch a depression soon enough, when it is still only a bud, and you can trace where it comes from and where it is going. Feeling overwhelmed when with people can easily lead to the mysteries of other mental imbalances, such as agoraphobia and repetitive behaviour like hand-washing. It is just a transfer of emotions to separate areas of life and activity. But, let the depression grow and the initial cause will be lost in the mists.

I remember the wife of a well-known preacher who came into the hospital as a patient, with seemingly unrelated anxieties. She, too, was overwhelmed by fears and depression, and even entered into several sexual relationships with other patients. She had moved many times while her pastor husband took on a variety of pastorates. She was never able to settle or have real friends because of this. But, her husband was so wrapped-up in his ministry, he did not understand why she was so depressed.

And so her symptoms of anxiety grew. Sadly, she took her own life as everything spiralled out of control. If only her husband listened and took it seriously, the depression would have evaporated. All she wanted was closeness and love, but the husband was keen to make his mark. Possibly God called him to ministry – but this was no reason to put his wife second. How could they possibly be ‘as one’, a married couple, when only one of them was fulfilled and ‘doing his thing’? This is why many married wives sink into depression.

Mary says God gives her joy in her depression. However, this might be seen as an insult to God. Why? This is where proper analysis is needed of what depression is and does. In the ordinary sense, a depression can simply be a poor way to respond to life and things we cannot change, or do not want to deal with. Then, we just pull the blanket over our mind and fall into misery. This can happen to everyone.

The problem arises when that feeling of misery is allowed to develop into depression. It is a sure sign that the person has somehow ‘missed’ the vital step of handing everything over to God.

1 Peter 5: 6-7

6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

7 Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

The person who is unsaved, though, cannot do this, so feels there is no way out but to sink under the waves. Sadly, there is little a Christian can do about this, because it is outside his sphere of authority and power.

To be frank it is an odd thing to say – that God gives joy in the midst of depression. Why? Because, in a Christian, depression (neurotic, that is) is a failure to rely on God! Does God really give joy in the middle of a behaviour we have undertaken against God's will? Better think that one out!

In a strict informational sense I can describe depression as sin. But, when I counsel folks I fully understand how people get that way... especially as I had a very brief flirtation with it myself some years ago... and am more than willing to help them overcome, by guiding them to God and His open arms.

In other words, my descriptive material may be tough-line and hard fact, but my face-to-face encounters are sympathetic and empathetic, because we are all prone to fail. I try never to mix the two approaches. Usually I will describe what is happening to a person, and then urge them to walk through the pain and misery until they come out into the sunshine again.

Only yesterday I saw a programme about a man with so-called Borderline Personality Disorder, a category now being used to excuse people of violence. He becomes violent when he drinks too much, and takes drugs, and then becomes depressed. In that case the cause is very simple – a sinful desire to booze and take drugs, and to be violent! It is nothing like the usual depression, coming upon a normal person who is unable or unwilling to face reality in a genuine way.

Christians need to understand the basis of depression – or get swamped. Believers who stray from God will become depressed. Heed the cause and stop it!

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