

Faith Matters

What Jesus really said - to His closest friends?

Luke 18:1-8 and the Kingdom of God

Exploring the relevance of faith for us today

The Bright Field

by R.S. Thomas

I have seen the sun break through
 to illuminate a small field for a while, and gone my way and forgotten it. But that was the pearl
 of great price, the one field that had
 treasure in it. I realize now that I must give all that I have to possess it. Life is not hurrying
 on to a receding future, nor hankering after
 an imagined past. It is the turning
 aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush, to a brightness that seemed as transitory as
 your youth once, but is the eternity that awaits you.



The Parable of the Widow and the Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

Discuss the ways in which this parable reinforces Jesus' instructions in Matthew 7:7-11 (We see the same instructions in Luke 11:5-13)

The unjust judge was considered the worst of men. How does this help us to understand the parable? (See also Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13)

Why are we encouraged to persist in prayer?

The Kingdom of God

Jesus has just explained that the 'kingdom of God is in their midst' (Luke 17:21) and many times He used parables to say what the kingdom of heaven is like (Read Matthew 13:31, 33, 44, 45, 47)

What do the following passages contribute to your understanding of God's kingdom?

Psalm 145:13.....

Exodus 19:5-6.....

Romans 14:17.....

John 3:3.....

To put the parable into context: the preceding chapter (17:20-37) and 18:8 describe God's coming Kingdom. How might this relate to prayers for justice and Jesus' promise that it will come?

Consider how the Lord's prayer encourages prayer for the coming Kingdom (Matthew 6:10, Luke 11:2)

Summary of Jesus' Message

Jesus again tells us that we should persist in prayer, especially for justice...and for His Kingdom.....'on earth as it is in heaven'

The kingdom of God was with God's people (Matthew 3:2, 4:17 and 10:7); it is ours now (Colossians 1:13) and will be fully realised later (Matthew 26:29, James 2:5, 2Timothy 4:18, Revelation 21:1-6)

'Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done On Earth, As It Is In Heaven'

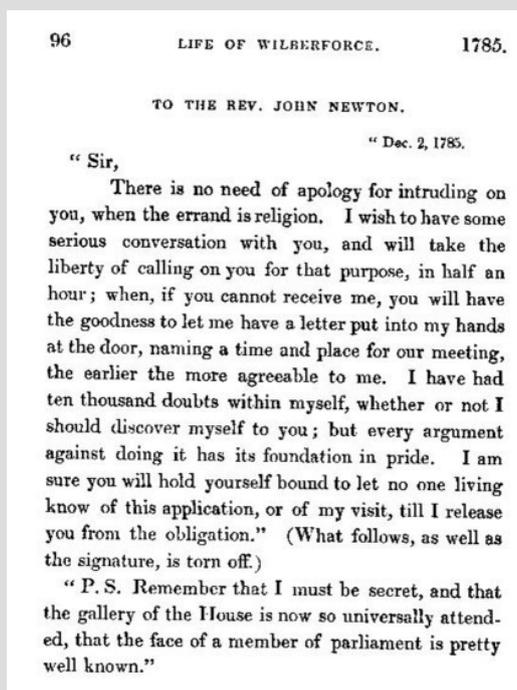
An excerpt from Wikipedia on John Newton

'Many young churchmen and others enquiring about their faith visited him and sought his advice, including such well-known social figures as the writer and philanthropist Hannah More and the young M.P., William Wilberforce, who had recently undergone a crisis of conscience and religious conversion experience as he was contemplating leaving politics.'

An excerpt from the diaries of William Wilberforce

- 30 November I thought seriously this evening of going to converse with Mr Newton.
- 2 December Resolved again about Mr Newton. It may do good; he will pray for me. Kept debating in that unsettled way...
- 3 December Had a good deal of debate with myself about seeing Newton.
- Wednesday After walking about the Square once or twice before I could persuade myself, I called upon old Newton

"When I came away I found my mind in a calm, tranquil state, more humbled, and looking more devoutly up to God."



And finally, from 'What's So Amazing About Grace' by Philip Yancey (ISBN: 0-310-24565-6)

Bill Moyers' documentary film on the hymn "Amazing Grace" includes a scene filmed in Wembley Stadium in London. Various musical groups, mostly rock bands, had gathered together in celebration of the changes in South Africa, and for some reason the promoters scheduled an opera singer, Jessye Norman, as the closing act. The film cuts back and forth between scenes of the unruly crowd in the stadium and Jessye Norman being interviewed. For twelve hours groups like Guns' n' Roses have blasted the crowd through banks of speakers, riling up fans already high on booze and dope. The crowd yells for more curtain calls, and the rock groups oblige. Meanwhile, Jessye Norman sits in her dressing room discussing "Amazing Grace" with Moyers.

The hymn was written, of course, by John Newton, a coarse, cruel slave trader. He first called out to God in the midst of a storm that nearly threw him overboard. Newton came to faith only gradually, continuing to ply his trade even after his conversion. He wrote the song "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds" while waiting in an African harbour for a shipment of slaves. Later, though, he renounced his profession, became a minister, and joined William Wilberforce in the fight against slavery. John Newton never lost sight of the depths from which he had been lifted. He never lost sight of grace. When he wrote " ... That saved a wretch like me," he meant those words with all his heart.

**Amazing grace, how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found --- Was blind, but now I see.**

A remarkable thing happens in Wembley Stadium that night. Seventy thousand raucous fans fall silent before her aria about grace.

By the time Norman reaches the second verse, "'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved ... ," the soprano has the crowd in her hands.

By the time she reaches the third verse, "'Tis grace has brought me safe this far, And grace will lead me home," several thousand fans are singing along, digging far back in nearly lost memories for words they heard long ago.

**When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we first begun.**

Jessye Norman later confessed she had no idea what power descended on Wembley Stadium that night. I think I know. The world thirsts for grace. When grace descends, the world falls silent before it.

'Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.' Winston Churchill