



Trumpet's Sound

54th year, Australia

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"Trumpet's Sound" is a bi-monthly publication of the Armenian Evangelical Brethren Church in Sydney, Australia.

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Cover photos: Rainbow Lorikeet enjoying the first day of spring



Praise and prayer points

- Praise God for all His goodness; thank Him for all His blessings and protection
- Thank the Lord for all the meetings held at Cornerstone Chapel in Gyumri
- Give thanks for all who come to worship and to study the Bible in the PAROS building in Yerevan
- Give thanks for the youth and the children who attend regularly
- Pray for wisdom and strength for our co-workers
- Pray for the churches in Karabagh and the 150,000 people who have been in lockdown with no food, medication, or electricity for the past 50 days
- Pray for Martun and his family who are looking forward to being in Sydney in March
- Praying for the new outreach in a nursing home where we can now preach the Gospel regularly

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Sin

Why does no one speak about sin? It seems as if preachers have become tired of preaching about it. Or are they concerned not to offend any? But Jesus was bold in speaking about sin, and the Bible from start to finish talks about it. The only reason for Jesus to come to this world was because of sin.

Because sin is just as dangerous and destructive now as it was when Adam and Eve ate the fruit, it should not be taken lightly. Consider

- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)
- “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:9)
- “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin’” (John 8:34)

Sin dominates, sin devastates, sin separates. In today's world we are surrounded by sin, whether on the street, or in a bus, or train or when reading the newspaper, magazines, watching television or listening to the radio. But this is why Jesus came. He came to show us the way to salvation, necessary because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory. The apostle Paul cries out “what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this”.

But the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all of our sins. There is no other name, no other person, and no other God who can wash us and make us as white as snow.

Have you turned to Jesus? Millions of sinners from all over the world have repented and today are free from the bondage of sin. In the past we were slaves of sin but the grace of God has set us free. If the Lord has set you free, you are free indeed.

HK

God's great rest

Hebrews 4

Once I knew a man who lived in the United States and who told me a story of something that happened to his father. His father used to work late, and when he walked home at night he would take a short-cut over a railway bridge. This was a dangerous thing to do as it was a very long bridge over a river estuary, and not designed for people to walk on. There were only two rails on the track. However it saved him a long detour home, so he was happy to take the risk. One night as he was walking along, all his nightmares came true at once. He heard a train coming. He stood out on the bridge in the dark wondering what to do as there was nowhere to go to get out of the way of the coming train. As the train approached, in desperation he climbed down under the track and swung by his arms below the bridge. The train thundered across just above him but it was a very long freight train and his arms were getting tired. By the time the train had gone, his arms were so tired from the strain that he could not pull himself back up onto the track. All he could do was just hang there by his arms in the dark. And he knew he could not even do that for much longer. The time came when his strength was gone and he prepared himself for death as his fingers finally lost their grip and he plunged down into the darkness. He fell about half a meter and landed on a soft sandy beach. In the dark he had not realised that where he had been on the bridge, was nearly to the shore, and a soft landing was just a couple of feet underneath him.

Does knowing God make you feel as if you have to hang on or else you will fall into the dark? Or does it make you feel as if you are being supported safe and secure?

The story of the Israelites leaving Egypt is the story of people coming home. The ancient people of God, the Jews, escaped from being slaves in the land of Egypt and travelled across the desert of the Sinai Peninsula to return to their homeland Canaan. God helped the Jew-

ish nation re-establish themselves into their home country. God had made an interesting promise for when they returned home (Deuteronomy 6:11). He said that they would live in cities they had not built, drink from wells they had not dug, and eat grapes from vines they had not planted. This experience of the Jews coming from slavery in Egypt to enjoying all the work someone else had done, is used in the book of Hebrews as a picture of the Gospel, and here it is called rest. That is what God meant by rest. Travelling from the place of slavery to a place where you can enjoy the work that someone else has done. The message of the Gospel is about God giving us what we don't deserve.

“The promise of entering His rest still stands” (verse 1). That offer of being able to experience inner peace and rest because some else has done all the work for you still stands. It is the key to understanding and experiencing how truly wonderful the Gospel is. It has a meaning for us which can bring a wonderful process of change in our lives.

Many people including Christians, do not experience peace within themselves. They haven't got that rest. What is the problem? There is a time when God's Word is absolutely of no value “The message they heard was no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith” (verse 2). The promises of God are like sacks of cement. Cement is not solid. It is an insubstantial soft powder until you mix it with water and gravel. Then it becomes hard concrete. The promises of God can also be insubstantial and unreal until you mix them with faith. The Hebrews who did not mix God's Word with faith died unfulfilled in the desert. They heard about God's promised rest but did not believe it. Here's a little test: there are 7,000 promises in the Bible. Can you write down 10 of those 7,000 promises? Which of those promises have you used to deal with a real-life situation today? Can you see how easy it is to drift through life not mixing those promises with faith, so that “the Rest of God” can never become a reality in your life?

This passage tells us there were two kinds of Hebrews: those who heard God's promise of rest in this wonderful new land, but never got there because they did not believe. And those who combined God's

Word with faith and enjoyed the rest and wonderful life in the land of Canaan.

What does it mean to rest? The Bible shifts from the example of the Hebrews. This time the illustration is about when God created the heavens and the earth. "On the seventh day God rested from all His work" (verse 4). On what day was Adam created? On the sixth day. When all the other work was done. Adam arrived on the scene after God had made everything else. He arrived in time for the day of rest, not to help God create the world, but to enjoy the work God had done. The Hebrews also arrived in their homeland to enjoy work they had never done. Being a Christian is all about resting, not in your own work and effort, but in the work Christ has already done on the Cross for you.

Like the man swinging from the railway bridge, we give up on our ability to hang on, and allow ourselves to fall, not to disaster, but to a place of security and safety in God. That is faith. This passage is teaching us that God's love is like a wonderful hammock that you can throw yourself back on, relax and bask in the sunshine of His love, without ever fearing that the hammock will collapse. Many of us spend most of our lives sitting on the edge of the hammock with one foot on the ground in case it lets us down.

"Anyone who enters God's rest also rests from His own work, just as God did from His" (verse 10). Maybe we find it hard to rest because we are not persuaded that God's love is big enough, or the death of Christ powerful enough to make us secure. If we want to experience God's rest, we must cease from our own works in the same way God rested from His work. Why did God rest? The answer will help us understand the reason why we can rest. God rested on the first Sabbath day after creation because the work He had done was so good that He couldn't improve on it. So He stopped working and rested. Now we must cease from our works, as God did from His. We can stop trying to work for our own salvation. Christ did such a wonderful work of salvation for us on the Cross that God couldn't add to it, and neither can we.

There are some people who become troubled by this teaching of the Bible. They think something like “It is dangerous to talk too much about the love of God and how secure we are because of Christ’s work on the cross. Believing that will make people think they can do anything they like and still go to heaven”. When a person says that, it shows that they have much to learn and experience about the grace of God. What is it that teaches us to deny ungodliness and live disciplined lives? “It is the grace of God... it teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness” (Titus 2:11-12).

Why can I not rest? The Bible tells us that we are broken people trying to live in a broken world for which we were never designed. Christians are people who have both “arrived” and are also “still on a journey”. Because of Christ they have arrived in the security of God’s love, but they are also people on a journey of discovery about themselves and all that God is and can be to them. We often make the mistake of thinking that the Bible is for making us change our behaviour. The Bible is actually designed to do more than just change our actions on the surface of our lives. “It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (verse 12). Through the Spirit’s power, we need to allow the light of God’s Word to shine into the deep places of our hearts. That is a journey that will begin to change you.

God invites you to rest. You cannot enjoy God until you are resting. That is the very basis of a full and obedient life.

Rex Dearlove



“God does not always act with justice. Sometimes he acts with mercy. Mercy is not justice, but it also is not injustice. Injustice violates righteousness. Mercy manifests kindness and grace and does no violence to righteousness. We may see nonjustice in God, which is mercy, but we never see injustice in God.”

R C Sproul

Pharaoh against God

(Part 1)

Pharaoh used three methods to resist God. He used magicians in an attempt to show that he was as good, as great, or as powerful as God. He resisted God by hardening his heart. He made very limited offers of release to Moses.

1. Using magicians

Some people imagine that they can do things which in reality can only be done by God. In Moses' day the magicians were acting as if they were God. Their aim was to prevent Pharaoh from realising how powerful God was, to hinder Moses in his work, while at the same time they tried to prove they were as powerful as God.

In many ways things are no different today. Think of the attempts within science in today's world to create life!

There were three areas in which the magicians tried to prove they could outdo God. The first was when they were summoned by Pharaoh after Moses' staff had become a serpent. Exodus 7:11-13 tells us that the magicians cast down their rods, and they became serpents. However, the magicians could not produce life. What they would have done was to take mesmerised snakes with them; when they threw them on the ground they began moving. One can imagine their surprise when Aaron's rod consumed these snakes.

The second imitation of the magicians was to turn water into blood. Because they could do this by their secret arts, Pharaoh's heart remained hardened. He would not listen to Moses and Aaron, as the Lord had said. Exodus 7:22-23 tells us that Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and did not take even this to heart.

The magicians were still able to produce frogs by their secret arts. Yet this should not surprise us. There were so many frogs, particularly near the Nile, that it would not have been difficult for a magician to conjure up some frogs. Pharaoh continued to harden his heart against the Lord.

However, the situation changed drastically when Moses changed dust into gnats. The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but could not. They were forced to admit that this was the finger of God.

There were definite limits on what the magicians could do. They could oppose God but could only go as far as He allowed. They could mesmerise snakes to look like staffs. They could change water into “blood” and bring up frogs by sleight of hand. But to create life out of dust was another matter altogether.

The plight of the magicians became even worse with the sixth plague. They could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils came upon the magicians and upon all the Egyptians. Those who continually oppose the Lord can expect a time to come when he takes action against them. This is the message of 2 Timothy 3:6-9 which shows that limits were placed on the Egyptian magicians.

We note that there always has been opposition to God and his message. Sometimes magic has been used to blind the eyes of men and women. Sometimes science will be quoted to “prove” that God’s word is impossible. We can expect opposition to continue until the Lord returns! But His word will remain unchanged forever.

In fact, we can expect those who are opposed to Christ to oppose us in some way. Sometimes the opposition will be intellectual and sometimes personal. But we need to realise that the one who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world.

2. Pharaoh’s hardened heart

God, who knows the end from the beginning, knew that Pharaoh would not let Israel go unless compelled by a mighty hand. Even though He multiplied His signs and wonders in Egypt, Pharaoh would not listen. While Moses was still at Horeb, God said that He would harden Pharaoh’s heart.

However, before God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, Pharaoh continually hardened his own heart. He hardened his heart when Aaron changed the rod into a snake. He hardened his heart when the water

of the Nile was turned to blood. After the plague of frogs, when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to Moses and Aaron, as the Lord had said. He still hardened his heart after the magicians told him that the plague of gnats was caused by the finger of God. The same happened after the plague of flies and again after the plague that killed the livestock.

However, after the plague of boils, we read that the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he did not listen to Moses and Aaron, as the Lord had told Moses. Again, before the plague of locusts God told Moses He would harden Pharaoh's heart.

Why are people's hearts hardened? There are two main reasons. Man intends to remain in rebellion against God. He is also determined to control his own life.

And who hardens hearts? Initially people harden their own hearts. However, at some stage God may reinforce people's decisions to rebel against God. Paul's message in Romans 1 confirms this. Because people do not want to retain a knowledge of God, He gives them up or gives them over to the desire of their hearts. Because people do not like to retain a knowledge of God, His wrath falls on them. God in effect reinforces the decision that people make to reject him.

However, God doesn't give people over until they have made it clear that they will not acknowledge God in their lives. Pharaoh was fully responsible for the decisions he made and the same is true of all people today.

The continuing message

One of the continuing principles of God's dealings with men and women is that He will not force people to obey Him against their will. If people want to go their own way, He does not forcefully stop them. What God is looking for is people who will obey Him because they love Him.

All this places responsibility firmly where it belongs. We must decide whether we will obey God or turn against Him. We plead with you to believe and obey while there is time for you to do so.

Why does the Bible describe "death" as "sleep"?

As this metaphor is used in the Old Testament, that is where we will begin. It is related to three Hebrew words: shakab, which means "to lie down"; yashen, which means "sleep"; and shenah, which also means "sleep".

In one of the oldest books of the Bible, death is described as "lying down in the dust" (Job 7:21; 20:11; 21:26 NIV). In death an Israelite's body is said to be resting with their ancestors (Genesis 47:30; Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 2:10). Here we see that, in ancient history, death was associated with lying down to rest.

In the Psalms, death is described as the "sleep of death" (Psalm 13:3; 90:5) and the death of the Assyrian army is called their "final sleep" (Psalm 76:5). In God's predicted judgment of Babylon, they will "sleep forever and not awake" (Jeremiah 51:39, 57). Here we see that the Israelites associated death with sleep. This metaphor is also evident in Greek mythology.

In the following verse the word "sleep" has been added by the translators by inference as it isn't in the text, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Clearly in this context "sleep" means "death", and "sleep in the dust of the earth" means the body after death (corpse). So, in the context of death, the word "sleep" refers to the corpse. Therefore, "awake" means resurrection of the body. Here we have a clear indication that death isn't the end of the body.

New Testament

Both Jesus and Paul use "sleep" as a metaphor for death in the Bible. They would have been familiar with this metaphor from their knowledge of the Old Testament.

The Greek word *koimao* means "to sleep, to fall asleep, or to die".

Similarly the Greek word *katheudo* means “sleep or sleeping”. Both words are also used metaphorically for death, with the meaning in a particular passage being determined by the context in which it is used.

The clearest explanation of the metaphor is given in the following Scripture passages:

- After He had said this, He went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.” His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” Jesus had been speaking of his death, but His disciples thought He meant natural sleep. So then He told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead ...” (John 11:11-14).
- Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

The metaphor is used to refer to the deaths of:

- The girl who died and was raised back to life (Matthew 9:24)
- Lazarus (John 11:11-14)
- Some godly people who died in Old Testament times (Matthew 27:52)
- Stephen (Acts 7:60)
- David (Acts 13:36)
- A husband (1 Corinthians 7:39)
- Some of those who abuse the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:30)
- Christians (1 Corinthians 15:6, 18; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-15)
- People who died in Old Testament times (1 Corinthians 15:20)
- Jewish ancestors (2 Peter 3:4)

Also, 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 1 Thessalonians 5:10 say that not all Christians will die (or sleep) because the bodies of Christians that are alive at the rapture will be transformed without going through death.

“Death”, “departure” and “sleep”

How is death like sleep? Sleep is the time period when the body rests between falling asleep and awaking. It is a temporary condition, not a permanent one. How is death a temporary condition, not a permanent or eternal one? The Bible teaches that although our bodies decay after death, they will be resurrected on a future day. In fact everyone will be raised from death to one of two destinies (Acts 24:15). Jesus said, “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:28-29). Here goodness is evidence of salvation and evil is evidence of unbelief.

At death there is a separation of the body and soul and the believer’s soul goes to be with Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8). As the soul is very much alive, when the word “sleep” is used in connection with death in the New Testament, it refers to the body, not the soul. The body is “sleeping” until its resurrection.

It is said that the early Christians called their burial grounds *koimeterion* (or “sleeping places”, a word used by the Greeks to describe a rest-house for strangers). This is the derivation of the English word “cemetery” (meaning “the sleeping place”).

The state of the soul after death is illustrated by the story of the rich man, Lazarus, and Abraham (Luke 16:22-31). After he died, the rich man had an extended conversation with Abraham, who died about 2,000 years earlier. Likewise, Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). Moses died about 1,400 years earlier and Elijah was raptured about 850 years earlier. This is consistent with the soul of a believer living with the Lord after death. The Bible metaphor for the soul at death is “departure” as the soul departs from the body to be with Christ, which is better than the struggles of life on earth (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23).

Awakening

As people awake after sleeping, so in a coming day our bodies will be resurrected. The first resurrection takes place in various stages, in-

cluding the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:20; Matthew 27:52-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:4). It includes Jesus Christ and all those who have trusted in God. These are rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). They are raised to eternal life and immortality with the Lord.

The second resurrection is when those who have rejected God's witness to them are judged at the Great White Throne (John 5:29; Revelation 20:4-5, 12-13). The penalty is to be thrown into the lake of fire where they are tormented forever. They are raised to condemnation and banishment from the presence of the Lord.

So the metaphor of sleep for death should be a warning to be ready for the resurrection when we will face Jesus as either a lifesaver or a judge. What will it be?

George Hawke

I do, I am, I will

As you read the Acts of the Apostles, it strikes you that baptism at that time was quite different from baptism as it is practised in many churches today. In every one of the nine accounts of baptisms in Acts (see Acts 2, 8 (twice), 9, 10, 16 (twice), 18, 19) the people appear to have been baptised on the same day that they believed, or else very close to it.

So how did the apostles think of baptism? It seems that to them baptism was at the gateway, so to speak, of the Kingdom of God. They did not believe or teach that you are saved by the act of baptism, but rather that in baptism you declared your faith and resolve before God and man, and so began your new life as a disciple of Christ.

In some respects, baptism is like a marriage ceremony. When two people decide to marry they arrange a wedding at which they pub-

licly declare their commitment to each other and so begin their married life. In a similar way, the apostles saw baptism as the way you began your life as a disciple of Christ – you believed, and therefore you were baptised to declare your faith in, and your commitment to, the Lord.

When a person wants to be baptised, we could ask them three simple questions.

First, “Do you believe that the man once known as Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, sent into the world by the Father to seek and to save the lost?”

To this question we would expect from this new believer a loud and clear, “I do!”

Second, “Are you trusting in Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of your sins, knowing that by no effort of your own, nor by any number of good deeds, could you ever escape God’s just judgement of your sin? Are you trusting in His death on the cross for you and in His resurrection, and nothing else, for your salvation?”


And we would expect a loud and clear, “I am!” to this second question.

Third, “Will you seek to follow the Lord Jesus in every area of your life, to learn from Him and to serve Him? Will you actively seek to live a life that glorifies Him and that bears witness to His grace and mercy?”

And we would expect from a new believer a loud and clear, “I will!” to this last question.

Three simple questions. Three simple answers – “I do”, “I am”, “I will”.

We didn’t ask if the new disciples understood many things, nor if they had gained victory over their sinful habits, because they are just starting on this heavenly way. Understanding, and a godly life, will come as they hold to the faith and the purpose they are declaring in their baptism.



These three questions might be asked of every true believer, and at any time. No matter how many years we may have been in the faith, every day our answer will be the same – “I do”, “I am”, “I will”.

Neil Buckman