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**Sunday 13 February 2022 to Sunday 20 February 2022**

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Sunday 13 February 2022

# ‘We look for the resurrection of the dead’ (Nicene Creed)

by Sal Huckel

**If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised (1 Corinthians 15:13).**

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–20

I can’t go past the Nicene Creed as I select the Scripture for today: here, we have an absolutely essential truth of the faith.

Already, Paul in early church times needs to correct the false teaching that there is no resurrection of the dead. As Paul works through the logic here, we discover what the essential conclusion must be if this false teaching is true. It reminds me of a person I know who, in their professed Christian faith, also does not believe in the devil.

We cannot pick and choose which elements of our faith we believe.

I grew up on the Nicene Creed and Apostles’ Creed in my Anglican church school experience and the many choral services I was privileged to partake in. I had no discipleship or catechesis, but I could recite the creeds standing on my head. This is not a bad thing. Learning something like this means the Holy Spirit can bring truths to mind whenever he chooses.

One of the purposes of the creeds is to guard against error and false teaching. We discover in today’s reading the outworking of one false claim. Perhaps it reads like a riddle. Maybe you read it and skip over the words. Does Paul ever waste words? If he seems to be repeating something here, we must take note. Take some more time over today’s reading if you skipped it a little the first time. Even if you didn’t, go back and meditate again. Ask the Holy Spirit to use all he has at his disposal – from these readings and from your own history in the faith – to show you Truth today.

We find our hope here. We discover the outworking of Christ being raised from the dead …

‘… And the life of the world to come’ (Nicene Creed).

**Lord, thank you for your simple truth. Help me appreciate the prayers written by the church fathers. Help me stay true to the faith and be aware of and challenge false teaching. Where I need to stay in your word or immerse myself more in it – make this the desire of my heart and help me put it into action. In the name of the resurrected Lord Jesus, I pray, Amen.**

Monday 14 February 2022

# This is the way; walk in it

by Sal Huckel

**Whether you turn to the right or the left your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’ (Isaiah 30:21).**

Read Isaiah 30:18–26

As I read this Scripture, what stood out to me was the certainty that we have a Lord who leads us. We will think about the Lord as our Great Shepherd and his leading many times this week.

Find the words in our reading that tell us about the character of our Lord. Gracious and compassionate, he rises up, blesses us, answers us and provides for us. He binds up our wounds; he heals us.

Think about our worldly leaders. There are all kinds of leaders – some honouring God more than others, but none of them is like him in his perfection. During these difficult times, perhaps we might feel our leaders make decisions one way and then do an about-turn. They do not always know how to manage the current crisis. They do their best; they have many voices calling out to them with different priorities and ideas – and sometimes, those contradicting voices cause confusion in policy and decision-making.

Consider the image in verse 21. In a world where our leaders do not seem to know which way to go, how reassuring it is that whether we turn to the right or the left, we will hear a voice behind us saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it’! We have the Lord on our side, leading us. We must also draw one more thing from this passage as we consider his leading. We must desecrate and discard our idols. This is likely for us to be a figurative desecration – what are our idols right now? Are we putting our own health over the Great Commission? What are we holding back from God? Are we more concerned with reading the news than reading our Bible? Ask the Lord to call out to you, ‘This is the way; walk in it’. Listen to him. Not the voices on the right and the left but the Holy Spirit, the Good Shepherd. Put his leading first, throwing your idols in the trash.

**Lord, I pray you will silence the voices on the left and the right, the tossing about and influences that are not of you. Renew a right spirit within me and speak to me with a clear voice: ‘This is the way; walk in it’. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Tuesday 15 February 2022

# Comfort his people

by Sal Huckel

**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God (Isaiah 40:1).**

Read Isaiah 40:1–5,11,12

The headline here is also the words of a very famous aria from Handel’s Messiah. Glorious! As I first read this passage, I was immediately drawn to find the music to listen along to. I strongly encourage you to do the same, with your Bible open. Find an image in the Scripture to meditate on.

What struck me as I listened was the comforting nature of the strings and harpsichord supporting the soloist. The overall eﬀect, I realised, was perfect: Handel has written a perfectly comforting aria to highlight this wonderful Scripture.

We open this passage with an instruction to comfort God’s people. We find later in verse 11 a beautiful picture, pastoral in nature, of the Lord tending his flock like a shepherd, carrying the lambs in his arms close to his heart, gently leading those with young. Let’s think more about this instruction to comfort God’s people. Do we still have this gentle touch, or are we feeling worn and jaded? Do we have the patience and gentleness, fruits of the Spirit, in abundance to care for each other in the manner we see the Shepherd in verse 11 in our mind’s eye?

In these trying days, come back to this picture. Listen to this comforting music; lose yourself in this passage we are likely so familiar with that it can just become a memory verse we skip over as we read. Find a way to slow down – and take in the Lord’s words to you – not least this instruction. ‘Comfort my people.’ Who can you encourage and comfort? As our society becomes so preoccupied with our own individual health and freedoms, who are we leaving behind? We might be surprised who needs our comfort. Comfort his people.

**Lord, where we are too occupied with our own comfort to heed your words and comfort your people, please forgive us. May we remember you are the Good Shepherd who carries the lambs and gently leads those with young. May the fruit of the Spirit grow and flourish in our lives so that we can bring your comfort to hurting people in a hurting world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Wednesday 16 February 2022

# Make peace!

by Sal Huckel

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).**

Read Matthew 5:1–12

Make sure you read the whole passage and pray for new insight into another extremely familiar Scripture.

Lord, open our hearts to your word to us today.

So many of us may be feeling some of these things right now. Aware of our desperate need for God (poor in spirit). Mourning, hungering for righteousness. In need of the promises that we find here in Jesus’ teaching to the crowds following him around, desperate for hope.

We have a picture of comfort and the promises of heaven where we will find our reward.

We must remember that while these promises will be fulfilled in heaven, on this earth, we can expect insults, persecution and false testimony to be given about us.

Read verse 9 once again. We are called to be peacemakers to bring the kingdom of heaven into the here and now. We have the antidote here to the negative experiences and behaviours we can receive at the hands of others – those outside the body of Christ. But wait! Outside the body? Are we all always fulfilling this calling to be peacemakers?

Find a recording of the Prayer of St Francis, ‘Make me a channel of your peace’.

As Christians, we are not immune to insults, persecution and false testimony – acts of the flesh that, sadly, we find inside the church, as well as outside it. If we are to be called children of God, we must take this peacemaker role very seriously.

Call to mind someone you have hurt or had a ruptured relationship with. How can you bring the kingdom of God closer in that relationship? When you hear another dearly beloved child of God ill spoken of, how will you respond? Pray for purity of heart, humility, mercy and peace to grow in all of us. There’s enough persecution and trouble in this world without us adding to it. Bring comfort to God’s people – and also be comforted.

**Lord, make me a channel of your peace and use me to bring the kingdom of heaven closer for others. Where we must live with the hurts and injuries of this world, may we find comfort, blessing and mercy from you. Help us understand and accept that we will receive and suﬀer in your name and trust the promise of reward in heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thursday 17 February 2022

# Persecution

by Sal Huckel

**Dear friends do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you (1 Peter 4:12).**

Read 1 Peter 4:12–16

This letter, written to scattered exiles in Asia Minor, makes no bones about the suffering and persecution we should expect as Christians. We are exhorted not to be ashamed of our walk as Christians and to know that we will suffer for it – but suffering for being a Christian is different to suffering from the consequences of sinning.

Are we suffering any more in our present times than the faithful who have gone before us? We might think so, but going back to the context here and the events that lay ahead of those Peter addressed (and ahead of Peter himself), we might find some humility and grounding. Indeed, many suffer persecution as Christians. There are 52 countries worldwide where it is illegal to own a Bible. Some of us have friends who risked everything to leave a country due to persecution for their Christian faith. How persecuted are we, again?

We may be struggling with politics that we feel restrict our religious freedom and laws we believe impinge on our biblical beliefs and how we perceive we ought to be allowed to practise our faith. If we need to be reminded of our freedom, we could count the Bibles on our shelves or the number of devices we can use to access myriad Bible translations, online concordances, devotions, sermons and worship services from around the world – all without restriction.

May we pray for the persecuted and rejoice at our own freedom while standing on the promises we have of comfort from the Lord in times of trial and persecution. May we use our freedoms to immerse ourselves in his word. And may these daily bite-size snacks of Scripture spark an appetite for feasting and banqueting on his word, drawing us into a deeper and deeper relationship with God.

**Lord, I pray for the persecuted church worldwide. Bring hope, perseverance and the promise of eternal life with you to these faithful servants and children of God. May I never take my freedoms for granted, and may I keep them in perspective. Give me an appetite and passion for your word that begins to honour the privilege I have to access it. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Friday 18 February 2022

# Behold the lamb!

by Sal Huckel

**For the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water (Revelation 7:17).**

Read Revelation 7:9–17

What a glorious reading! We have had various pastoral images in our Bible readings this week where we have been reminded of the Good Shepherd leading us, carrying lambs. Here, we have a description of a glorious scene before the lamb of God on the throne.

One day, we will also be praising God in heaven with the multitude.

The promises of heaven are ahead. No more hunger, thirst, scorching sun and heat. Instead, springs of living water and all tears wiped away.

As we lose loved ones who have gone on to glory before us, we can take comfort in our own mourning that they are in this place with him. As we are persecuted and suffer, we can look for the day we will also be comforted and our tears wiped away.

In the meantime, we might turn our thoughts to the Great Commission, and our job as followers of Christ to ourselves lead others to him. We are to model ourselves on the Great Shepherd and show others the way to him. Who can you guide towards the Lord right now?

**‘Praise and glory, and wisdom and thanks, and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever Amen!’ Lord, draw the lost ones to you, so they with us can praise you with these glorious words in eternity. Amen.**

Saturday 19 February 2022

# Comfort in suffering

by Sal Huckel

**Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7a).**

Read Psalm 37:1–11,39,40

Have you ever gone through a time of intense suffering or injustice, felt isolated, and found the well-meaning words of those around you only compound the pain? If not, bookmark this psalm – you’ll need it at some point.

The words and emotions of the psalms are so real. They don’t beat around the bush. All Scripture is God-breathed, and these difficult verses are there, whether we want to read them in ‘polite company’ or not. Suffering isn’t neat and tidy. Sometimes Scriptures are even censored for public worship. I discovered this at school when we looked up verses that we heard were deliberately omitted from evensong psalms.

But here, this is my kind of comfort! No need for the psalmist to censor their pain. The comfort names the pain and encourages and exhorts at the same time. We are assured our suffering will not be forever – but the pain is acknowledged. Sometimes, yes, the evil will succeed in their ways and wicked schemes. Yet, there are still exhortations to refrain from anger, remain meek, and enjoy peace and prosperity in the stronghold of the Lord.

If you’re suffering right now and your friends’ attempts to comfort you bring you pain, and it feels as though your pain is being minimised, explained away, or made to feel you are exaggerating, remember Job. His friends got it wrong. Sometimes our friends can be ‘Job’s friends’. But here, we have the psalmist, sitting with us in our sadness, as the Lord does – acknowledging yet exhorting also.

A week of comfort from all over the Bible. We need to take comfort from the Lord, not from earthly attempts to fix. Some of our pain will not end on this earth. Pray for the spiritual endurance we need to run the race and get to the finish line and for the wisdom and comfort to bring to others that we can only do in his strength.

**Where there is despair in life, let me bring hope; where there is sadness, let me bring joy; may I seek to console with your words and your truth. Give me your heart for others, and when I need that consolation and comfort, Lord, bring me the right person to sit with me until I find my healing and deliverance in you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Sunday 20 February 2022

# No more quid pro quo

by Pastor Noel Due

**If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them (Luke 6:32).**

Read Luke 6:27–38

Jesus, as always, puts his finger directly on the spot. His teaching – especially in his parables – emphasises the difference between our normal ways of acting and relating to one another and God’s ways of acting and relating to us. Our default principle is quid pro quo: a favour for a favour. We’re so familiar with the ‘I’ll scratch your back; you scratch mine’ approach to life that we don’t begin to think of how wrong it is. But Jesus exposes the folly.

The real world (that is, in the kingdom of heaven) doesn’t operate by that principle at all. It’s not just that Jesus teaches us about the difference; his incarnation is the proof of it. It’s not just word – but deed. In Jesus, God comes to a hostile world with mercy in his hands and love in his heart. He loves those who hate him (us) and rescues those who despise him (us again).

There’s nothing quid pro quo about that – it is all sheer grace. Jesus’ words expose our tawdry, conditional ‘love’, and his presence reveals the true nature of God and his universe. His death and resurrection enacts God’s saving love. We earn none of it. Hell is where quid pro quo rules; heaven is where that principle has been obliterated forever.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that you do not treat us as we deserve. Thank you that your kingdom is so different from our wrong-headed attitudes and actions. Thank you for your kindness to us in Christ. Amen.**