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**Sunday 11 September 2022 to Sunday 18 September 2022**

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Sunday 11 September 2022

# The lost LEGO piece

by Eden Bishop

**What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? (Luke 15:8).**

Read Luke 15:1–10

There’s nothing worse when you’re building a set of LEGO than realising that you’re missing a piece, especially if this piece is important for structural integrity. You must stop working and look until you find it. Otherwise, the set is not complete and cannot function properly.

The parable in this text highlights how we are utterly helpless until Jesus finds us. We are like lost sheep at the complete mercy of the elements. We are like inanimate objects such as a coin or even a lost piece of LEGO that can’t do anything to help itself. We are dead in our sin and hopelessly lost.

The good news is that we have a God who chases us down until he finds us. This parable tells us that we are not left in our helpless state because we are precious to God. We are valuable like the lost coin, part of God’s flock like the lost sheep, part of the set like the missing piece of LEGO. We can take comfort in knowing that God’s heart and concern are for those who have wandered from the flock. Sometimes it can be a little disheartening when we have friends or family members who have wandered off or haven’t yet come into God’s presence. However, we can take encouragement from this text, which tells us that God is a part of the search and provides his Holy Spirit to strengthen us and do the work.

We can also take comfort in knowing God pursues us and brings us into life, just like the woman who searches desperately for her lost coin. God searches for us because we cannot help ourselves, and he brings us into a relationship with him and into a community with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now like a properly functioning and completed LEGO set, we are whole again in God’s presence and community.

***Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you that you ceaselessly pursue us when we wander off. We also thank you for your promise to search for those we hold dear who haven’t yet come to you or have gotten lost. Amen.***

*Eden Bishop lives in Adelaide and is a member at St Paul Blair Athol. She attends the University of Adelaide and is in the final year of her Advanced Economics degree. Eden enjoys reading (particularly The Lord of the Rings), playing the piano in church, knitting and learning fun facts about dinosaurs.*

Monday 12 September 2022

# When blessings become god

by Eden Bishop

**Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress (Judges 10:14).**

Read Judges 10:6–16

We rely on many different things to provide us with ‘blessings’. These can include our own abilities, money, family and hobbies. Yet, these things are gifts from God, not things that provide us with blessings. And, if we aren’t careful, these things can start to take over all our spare time, and we can begin to give them credit for our happiness.

The Israelites worshipped other gods, falsely believing this would lead to more blessings than simply relying on the one true God. It had quite the opposite effect, bringing suffering and misery because it cut them off from God, the one true source of all blessings. This failure becomes quite apparent in their distress: the false gods cannot save them, and they must turn to God for deliverance.

In this text, we can hear God’s exasperation with his people, just like an exasperated parent. God was the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt and provided for them in the desert, yet the Israelites continuously turned to other gods for provision. God’s response highlights how false these other gods are: we trust them to bring us good things, so why don’t we trust them to provide deliverance? Why do we call on God only in times of distress? The false gods can’t actually save us, which reveals how they also fail to provide us with good things. It is God who blesses and delivers.

This text also highlights God’s great love for us. Despite his exasperation, he still had mercy on them and delivered the Israelites when they turned back to him. God is forgiving and truly loves his people. God wants to provide for us.

**Dear Heavenly Father, we are sorry for the times we have turned to false gods, such as our possessions and hobbies, to bring us happiness. Please forgive us for failing to trust in you to provide us with blessings. Thank you for your mercy. Amen.**

Tuesday 13 September 2022

# Blotting out

by Eden Bishop

**Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! (Isaiah 43:22)**

Read Isaiah 43:22–25

I recently purchased an iPad to use as a tool for my university studies. What is fantastic about my iPad – aside from the novelty of writing on a screen and its ease of portability – is that it is very easy to blot out mistakes and start over. All it takes is a double tap of the Apple Pencil.

The text for today has a wonderful image of God as the blotter of our sins. God blots out our mistakes and allows us to start over. However, in this text, the Israelites have failed to call out to God to blot out their sins. Instead, they have grown weary of calling on and honouring God. The people have grown tired of God and have not trusted him to provide for them. This meant they could not have the advantage of being close to God or being in a relationship with him.

Both the Israelites and God bear the burden of sin and the distance between God and his people. Not calling on God is itself a sinful act because it shows a lack of trust in him. This leads to a lack of closeness with God, and we can easily become weary of ‘duties’. God bears the burden in two ways. The first: the sins of the people are going unatoned for, un-blotted out, and are thus piling up. The second: God is pained that his people don’t want to be in a relationship with him.

Yet, despite all this, God still provides deliverance and forgiveness; he ‘blots out [our] transgressions’. God does this for his own sake: he loves his people so much that he will not remember their sins so that he can be in a relationship with them. This text encourages us not to grow weary of calling on God and being in his presence or offering sacrifices in response to his great love. We should not grow tired of bearing fruit out of the relationship with him that he has brought us into.

**Dear Heavenly Father, we are sorry for the times we have grown weary of calling on you and have failed to bear fruit or offer our sacrifices to you. Please forgive us and continue to bring us back into your presence. Amen.**

Wednesday 14 September 2022

# Not another set of impossible goalposts

by Eden Bishop

**I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mark 2:17).**

Read Mark 2:13–17

Who is worthy of salvation? We are very blessed that we don’t live in some comic book or movie universe where salvation is like Thor’s magic hammer that only those who are worthy can access. Why? Because no-one is righteous enough to be worthy.

However, modern society certainly likes to focus on being ‘righteous’. The world is caught up in proving, doing and being good enough to be accepted. Cancel culture and purity culture police the internet and all we say, leading to a set of impossible goalposts that we will never reach but still strive to achieve to be perceived as ‘righteous’ enough for acceptance within wider society. This is both mentally and physically exhausting.

This text encourages us to reflect on the life-changing fact that Jesus did not come to call the righteous but came to call the sinners. Unlike what the Pharisees believed, the Messiah did not come only to save those who are already righteous. This is a very good thing because no-one except for Jesus is righteous. If God operated the same way the Pharisees expected, no-one would be considered worthy enough for salvation. We would certainly be in big trouble if this was the case.

This text reveals how desperately we need Jesus because we will always fall short of righteousness. This text also provides comfort: we don’t need to constantly strive to be perfect or worthy or to say the ‘right’ things that society expects us to. Instead, through Jesus, we receive total acceptance based on what he has done for us, not on our performance.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you that we don’t have to prove ourselves worthy enough or righteous enough for salvation! Thank you for sacrificing your Son so that we can be brought into your presence. Amen.**

Thursday 15 September 2022

# Not toxic positivity

by Eden Bishop

**Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).**

Read Romans 5:1–11

We often hear the term ‘toxic positivity’. This term describes unhelpful positivity, such as an obsession with trying to put a positive spin on all situations we might find ourselves in. If we aren’t careful, we can easily misuse this text in a way similar to toxic positivity. If a fellow Christian is having a hard time, it is all too easy to dismiss their struggles and say, ‘It’s all part of God’s plan to make your life better’.

What this text actually tells us is that having faith and the Holy Spirit transforms our lives and especially transforms suffering so that we can have peace. This text does not tell us to rejoice in suffering for suffering’s sake, but now that we have the Holy Spirit, God can bring good things out of suffering. We can take comfort in this fact. We now have hope for the future, whereas before, suffering was yet another unendurable part of existence.

Suffering no longer totally crushes us. If we have nothing else, we have the hope of a life with Jesus and God after death. We can take heart and comfort in knowing we have this to look forward to. That is why we, and Paul, can say that this hope will not put us to shame because Jesus has already conquered death. Jesus has suffered. He embraces us in his suffering, and suffering will not have the final say.

This is the peace that faith and the Holy Spirit bring: the benefit of being in a relationship with God.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for always being with us, even during difficult times. Thank you that Jesus suffered so that we can look forward to a future with you where there is no suffering. Amen.**

Friday 16 September 2022

# True enlightenment

by Eden Bishop

**The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (John 1:9).**

Read 1 John 1:5–2:2

Light is an important symbol in many famous pieces of literature – the phial of Galadriel in The Lord of the Rings, the light of the two trees of Valinor in The Silmarillion, the green light at the end of the dock in The Great Gatsby and Victor’s sudden, dizzying light of realisation in Frankenstein.

Light can represent many things but is especially used to symbolise knowledge and revelation. We call the European intellectual movement in the 18th century ‘the Enlightenment', which focused on knowledge and reason.

In this text, the light – Jesus – brings true enlightenment to us because he brings us into a direct relationship with God. This is not some philosophical movement that places rationality above all else but the true enlightenment of being in God’s presence. God is made known to us through Jesus’ coming into the world as a human being and his great sacrifice. Our once dark lives are illuminated through Jesus. We are brought out of our sinful and ignorant state when estranged from God and into a new life reconciled with God, who continually gives us his light.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your only Son into the world to bring us the light. *Thank you for making yourself known to us and continually drawing us to the true enlightenment of your presence*. Amen.**

Saturday 17 September 2022

# God subverts our expectations

by Eden Bishop

**Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high. He raises the poor from the dust (Psalm 113:5,7a).**

Read Psalm 113

The subversion of expectations is often employed as a device in music and literature. We expect a novel to go in one direction or a particular musical phrase to end in a certain way, but it goes off on another path. We have expectations based on our familiarity with a literary or musical genre, and when an author or composer doesn’t follow a particular pattern exactly, this can be extremely effective and engaging.

God subverts a lot of our human expectations. We can see this in his great plan to save us: send his Son to be a servant and die in the most shameful way possible. We would expect something much more glamorous.

This psalm highlights how God subverts our expectations. God is Lord over all things, ‘high above all nations, and his glory is above the heavens’. Yet, he is concerned with the wellbeing of the poor, the lonely and the needy. He puts them in places of honour and blesses them. This is not what we would expect of a great ruler – why should he be concerned with the lowest of society?

God has done the same for us. He came to us while we were still sinners and brought us into his presence. We are no longer lost, helpless or empty because we have been brought into a relationship with him. We can bless and praise the Lord, for God brought himself down to save us. We can ask ourselves, in what way might God subvert our expectations to bless us and give him glory?

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for subverting human expectations and calling us sinners into your presence. We ask you today to continue revealing more ways you have subverted our expectations in accordance with your glorious will. Amen.**

Sunday 18 September 2022

# Use what you have wisely

by Pastor Glenn Crouch

**I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings (Luke 16:9).**

Read Luke 16:1–13

When you first encounter this parable, you may think that Jesus is promoting unethical business practices. However, this parable is akin to the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and is used to illustrate a particular point that Jesus is making.

Some have suggested that the shrewd manager removes the interest charged on each invoice – or reduces the invoice to a fair price – as Israel had been commanded to not charge each other interest and be fair in their business practices. Thus, the master would not be able to be too harsh with the manager as that would reveal too much about his own business practices. Whether this is the case or not, it is the shrewdness that Jesus wants us to ponder.

We can easily fall into the trap of worshipping (or at least paying too much attention to) money and all the ‘stuff’ it can buy. Jesus is challenging us on this. We cannot serve both God and our ‘stuff’. Jesus’ proposed solution is for us to be smart and find ways we can use our money and our stuff to help others. Not so that we earn our way into God’s kingdom, but because through him, we are already God’s children.

Are there ways in which you could better use your money? Have you been blessed with wonderful assets that could be used to help others and thus gain friends for the gospel? Often you can do even more by combining with others – so what ways can you, a group of Christians, wisely use your stuff?

**Heavenly Father, thank you for the many blessings you have given me. Help me, through your Holy Spirit, to be wise and generous with it all. Keep reminding me that the things of this world will pass away, but all you have given me through your Son will remain forever. In his mighty name, I pray. Amen.**

Glenn Crouch was born in Brisbane and was baptised in the Methodist Church. He married Karen in a Reformed Baptist Church, and they moved to Kalgoorlie in Western Australia 37 years ago, where Glenn worked as a lecturer in computing. After serving as a Baptist pastor, Glenn joined the Lutheran Church with Karen in 1995. Glenn served as a lay preacher, which led to him becoming a Specific Ministry Pastor (SMP), and he recently transitioned to General Ministry Pastor (GMP). Glenn still lives in Kalgoorlie-Boulder with Karen, where they have raised two boys.