****

**Sunday 20 February 2022 to Sunday 27 February 2022**

****

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.**

Monday 21 February 2022

# God’s amazing providence

by Pastor Noel Due

**As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Genesis 50:20).**

Read Genesis 50:­­­15­–21

Joseph’s story is an extended example of the truth Paul later expresses in Romans 8:28: ‘And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose’. And that, in turn, arises from Paul’s reflection on Jesus’ death and resurrection. That took place through the predetermined plan of God, but also as the result of human wickedness and spiritual evil.

By the cross, God saves the world through betrayal, cowardice, denial, and the schemes of the devil himself. It’s counterintuitive: God used the evil and godless actions of wicked people to establish his kingdom in the death and resurrection of his Son.

Joseph is the forerunner of Jesus in this respect. Despite everything that had happened in the long saga that was Joseph’s life, he was able to say that God had sent him ahead into Egypt, to save life, not to destroy it (Genesis 45:5,7). It was not the jealousy and betrayal of his brothers that had carried him there, but the hand of God.

We can’t always see that at the time. Most often – perhaps always – we see it only in retrospect. But there’s no surer thing: God’s plans will be accomplished, come hell or high water. Joseph’s story is the example. Jesus’ story is the guarantee.

**Dearest Father, thank you that your sovereign power is such that you use even the works of evil for their own destruction. Thank you that you are bigger than all our thoughtless actions and stupid mistakes. Thank you that you don’t give us what we want but what we need. Thank you for the blessing of knowing you are working all things together for the good of your people. In Christ’s name. Amen.**

Tuesday 22 February 2022

# Everyone is bankrupt, just in different ways

by Pastor Noel Due

**And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt (Matthew 18:27).**

Read Matthew 18:21–35

The parable of the two indebted servants answers the spirit of Peter’s question about forgiveness: ‘how many times should I forgive?’ (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ answer – ‘not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times’– was not meant to be a greater numerical response to a meagre ‘seven’, but it illustrates a completely different spirit.

Peter’s question was legalistic. Jesus’ answer is sheer grace. It’s a parable of ‘the kingdom of heaven’, whose operative principles are entirely alien to us. Its economy and coinage are nothing like ours.

The parable hinges on the fact that neither servant could repay his debt. An irremediable debt is irretrievable, no matter the size. In the case of the unforgiving servant, that debt was extreme. A Roman ‘talent’ was a measure of weight, which translates to about 32 kilograms, most likely (in this instance) 32 kilograms of silver. And the servant owed 10,000 times that! To put that into perspective, it would take a typical worker (on a silver denarius for a day) 15 years to earn one talents’ worth, which equates to 150,000 years to repay the amount.

His plea, ‘have patience, and I will repay you everything’ (Matthew 18:26), was confabulation on the grandest scale. It was an impossible commitment in the face of an immeasurable debt; the promise was as empty as his purse.

Though receiving immeasurable mercy for an impossible debt, he seized another servant who owed him only 100 denarii ‘by the throat’ (Matthew 18:28). When he pled for mercy, the unforgiving servant refused and (in an act as irrational as his own confabulation) threw him into prison ‘until he could pay’ (Matthew 18:30).

Jesus is saying that Peter’s legalistic approach was of the same spirit. If Peter (and we) understood the utter impossibility of the debt we owe and the incalculability of the mercy we’ve received, we wouldn’t withhold the forgiveness we are asked to extend. Neither we – nor those who sin against us – can pay anything. The mercy of God is the motive and power by which we extend mercy to one another.

**Dear Father, thank you for your mercy, which is boundless, rich and free Thank you for not treating us how the unforgiving servant treated his fellow servant. Deliver us from any legalistic spirit. May we forgive one another as you have forgiven us. Amen.**

Wednesday 23 February 2022

# Forgiveness that frees

by Pastor Noel Due

**Jesus stood up and said to her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ (John 8:10).**

Read John 8:1–11

Without a doubt, this is one of the most moving encounters recorded in any of the Gospels. Though some ancient versions of John’s Gospel don’t contain this passage, and others have it in a different location, its spirit and message are entirely in keeping with all we know about Jesus.

Moreover, it is (sadly) entirely in keeping with the legalistic religiosity from which God came to save us. This was a classic set-up. The text emphasises that the woman was caught ‘in the very act’ of adultery (John 8:4). So, one asks, ‘Where’s the man?’ Why was he not also arraigned for summary execution, as the law required (for example, Leviticus 20:10–12)? And how could they be ‘sprung’ by a group of men – the religiously zealous scribes and Pharisees no less? Was that mere happenstance? And what was their purpose in dragging her before Jesus?

The answer to the last question is easy: they wanted to play Jesus off against the letter of the law. If he said she should be set free, they would have him as a law-breaker because chapter and verse would be on their side. If he said that she should indeed be stoned to death, then Jesus would be in their camp and under their control. She was the bait. Jesus was the target.

There is indeed ‘a time for silence’ (Ecclesiastes 3:7), and this was one of those. Jesus said not a word, but whatever he wrote in the dust on the ground said plenty. His demeanour and their consciences got the better of them, and they drifted off, knowing the plot had failed, leaving Jesus and the woman alone.

There is also a time to speak. And this was it. ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and sin no more.’ Jesus doesn’t dishonour the law by excusing the sin. He goes beyond that – to forgive it. Forgiveness doesn’t excuse sin, as if it didn’t really matter; rather, it obliterates it because it matters so much.

That is the engine room of Jesus’ comment to ‘sin no more’. Without forgiveness, it’s an impossible command. Jesus’ verdict is mercy in the face of sin, not condemnation because of it. That is the word God loves to speak to us and the world. And it is the word that Jesus still speaks to us today: ‘Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and sin no more’.

**Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the blessing of your words and deeds, revealed to us in the Gospels. Thank you for your mercy and the verdict of ‘no condemnation’ spoken to us through the testimony of your Spirit. Thank you that your words bring life, not death. Amen.**

Thursday 24 February 2022

# Goodness is power

by Pastor Noel Due

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).**

Read Romans 12:9–21

This verse is not only a command, but it is also a description of what God has done for us in Christ. Evil cannot be conquered by force. No human strategies affect it (indeed, these are what it thrives on!). And there is nothing in our world that is not tainted by it. God alone is good. And he alone overcomes evil through his own goodness.

We see and receive that goodness in many ways every day: the bread on our tables, the rain and the sun, seedtime and harvest, the gifts of love and promises of hope. All these things point to the goodness of God, revealed fully, finally and inescapably in the gift of Christ himself.

Through him, we come to know the goodness of God personally and as a community of faith. And through the Spirit whom he pours out – who teaches us to cry ‘Abba, Father’ – we experience all the gifts and graces that allow the family of the Father to love him and serve one another.

All the other commands in this passage flow from that experience of mercy. The love of which the passage speaks, the mutual care and consolation, the gifts of forgiveness and humble service, and the willingness not to seek ‘like for like’. All of these are only possible because of the goodness of God, who has been good to us. We overcome evil with good because God has overcome our evil by his own goodness.

**Dear Father, thank you for not leaving us to our own destructive patterns of thought and action. Thank you for overcoming the evil in the world in the goodness of Christ crucified and risen. Thank you for the gift of your Spirit, who shapes us and constrains our lives. Dear Father, Son and Spirit, thank you that you are good and do only God. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Friday 25 February 2022

# Bearing our burdens

by Pastor Noel Due

**For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me’ (Romans 15:3).**

Read Romans 15:1–7

This verse appears in a section of Scripture devoted to Christian freedom. That’s where things often become unstuck.

Christian freedom (in Paul’s setting around issues like eating meat sacrificed to idols) is not the excuse to flaunt your liberty against the weaker faith or less free conscience of others. Instead, it is the freedom to be what you need to be in the context of your fellowship.

Martin Luther wrote: ‘a Christian is the most free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is most dutiful servant of all, and subject to all’. The pattern and model for this is Christ. As the freest man who had ever lived, Jesus lived not for his own sake but for the sake of us, the ‘unfree’. The question is not ‘What am I free to do?’ but ‘Whom am I free to serve?’

In Paul’s context, that meant not forcing a person to go against their conscience in the matter of food or other cultural sensitivities. The power for this is what God has done for us in Christ.

Paul quotes Psalm 69:9, applying it to Jesus. He bore our blaming, reproaches or anger against God, even though he was free of any of them. Jesus didn’t blame God for his sufferings or blame us for our weakness. Rather, he served us in his freedom so that we (who were bound by our sin and angry reproaching of God) could be free. That’s the pattern for our fellowship also: how do we bear one another’s burdens, and what will bring the most blessing to those among whom we serve?

**Most loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your humble grace, which serves us through Christ, giving us freely what we could never earn. Thank you for the gift of Christ’s cross, where he bears our angry and reproachful actions and attitudes towards you, not blaming us for them but delivering us from their evil. May we live in the fullness of that blessing so that we may be a blessing to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Saturday 26 February 2022

# God our Holy Father

by Pastor Noel Due

**Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the Lord our God is holy! (Psalm 99:9)**

Read Psalm 99

Psalm 99 is a song of praise to God, the Holy One. The holiness of God is his ‘otherness’, his complete transcendence and utterly incomparable nature. The psalm emphasises his holiness in three different ways.

He is holy because he is the Great King, ruling over all creation and nations (verses 1–3). He is holy because he establishes justice and justifies his people (verses 4,5). He is holy because he hears the prayers of his people, speaks to them, forgives their misdeeds, and gives them the gift of worship at his temple (verses 6–9).

The psalm thus moves from his transcendence to his nearness, justice to his mercy, exalted glory to his approachable presence. God’s holiness is not in one thing or the other but all of them.

And, when considered in this way, his holiness embraces us in every area of life. There is no circumstance or place over which he does not claim sovereignty. No injustice will not be put right in the end. There is no circumstance in which we cannot call on him in prayer. He is present with, and in, worship. He is forever the Lord who hears and answers.

God’s holiness is not just the quality of his being but an active reality in our lives. He is always holy, and as such, his every action is holy towards us – for our transformation. As we extol him, he remakes us, even if a lot of that is hidden from our eyes until we finally see him face to face.

We are indeed ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s precious possession – so that we may proclaim the mighty acts of God, who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light’.

**Most Holy Father, thank you for the active and eternal reality of your holiness. Thank you for the overarching embrace of your holiness in every area of life. Thank you that your purposes will be established in all creation. Thank you for the guarantee in Jesus that you love justice and have brought it on the earth. Thank you that as we worship you, you transform us into your holy likeness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Sunday 27 February 2022

# Transfiguration – see his glory!

by Faye Schmidt

**When they became fully awake, they saw his glory (Luke 9:32).**

Read Luke 9:28–36[37–43]

How often in Scripture do we read of significant events in the life of Jesus when the disciples are asleep. From being in the boat on the Sea of Galilee when a storm arose to the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion. And here we are again. Jesus goes to pray – and the disciples go to sleep.

Christ is revealed in his glory, with Moses and Elijah beside him ‘in glorious splendour’ – and Peter, James and John are asleep. They slept through it and didn’t see it.

But what about us? Are we asleep also, missing out on seeing God at work in his world through others around us? Are we not seeing God revealed in his glory?

In Matthew 25, Jesus speaks of the separation of the sheep and goats at judgement, and he tells those on his right, they will be blessed by his Father because, ‘I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink’.

The righteous then answered him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ (verse 37).

We do not see when we are asleep. But our text today doesn’t just say that the disciples woke up; they became ‘fully’ awake. It is not enough to just not be asleep but to be alive to what is around us, seeing with sensitivity, alertness and anticipation as to what we may see. Ready to see whatever God through Christ places before us at any moment so that we may see his glory, see the need of others and serve him.

**Dear Jesus, I am sorry for when I am asleep and am not seeing you. I pray that the Holy Spirit will open my eyes and heart to see you in the needs of others that I may serve you and see your glory so I may worship and praise you. Amen.**