

Chapter and Verse

A word during the Covid-19 season

Since my teens I have always tried to remember the references of my favourite Bible verses.

In 1990, I heard a tape of a talk by Paul Cain in which he referred to his tendency to wake at night and see that the time on the digital clock at the foot of his bed was 3:33. "After a while, I got to discover what that meant," he said. "Jeremiah 33 verse 3, 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know'."

I was intrigued, and started relating numbers that I saw around me to Bible verses. An offering at a church I was visiting totalled twenty-one pounds and thirty-three pence. The subject of the talk had been that you either rip up the Bible, or you let the Bible rip you. I later found that Luke 21:33, the collection total, contains the words of Jesus, "Heaven and earth will pass away: my words will never pass away." This related to the theme of the talk.

On another occasion, at a time when our TV news bulletins showed desperate people landing in unseaworthy boats on the shores of Greece and Italy day after day, I was at the counter of a traditional shop, buying food. "That will be nineteen pounds thirty-four" the assistant said. The number had a biblical ring to my mind. At home, I found that Leviticus 19:34 instructs people to love the alien living with them as one of their native-born. "Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

What could be more appropriate to our attitude towards the flood of humanity that was on everybody's mind?

There is a similar emphasis in this passage about the importance of the word of God. There are those who would rip chapters eighteen and twenty out of Leviticus because of what they contain regarding human physical relations. Leviticus is outdated, they would say. But if you want to rubbish Leviticus eighteen and twenty, then logically you need to throw out the command in chapter nineteen to love your neighbour as yourself, which Jesus quoted, to my mind. You can't ditch one without the other.

Scripture is like the garment of Jesus. When they crucified him, the soldiers cast lots for his clothing rather than tear it, because it was seamless. Love for the alien is eternal. We can't pick and choose.

This look at the lasting importance of the whole word of God fills me with awe. I have just taken my sandals off, as I feel I am on holy ground here.

Now for our current situation. Since the start of 2020, I have found myself waking in the night so often and seeing the clock standing at 2:23 that I thought, this must be a word from God. I have searched my Bible on more than one occasion. Genesis 2:23 perhaps? No, Psalm 22 verse 3? No again. One of the gospels or Revelation? It seemed not.

I gave it up. Perhaps I was imagining things.

I have been praying during the pandemic that I would know God's will, and be in tune with it at this time of crisis. I created www.turntojesus.co.uk as an attempt to help people crying out to God, but after six weeks of working at it, there appeared to be little interest. I wondered why. I had drawn the attention of perhaps 200 people to the website, and only received a handful of replies to my emails.

Despite the crisis, the nation was not seeking God as far as I could tell. We were all pinning our hopes on the government. I began asking God that our country might experience the spirit of supplication found in Zechariah 12:10.

Then this morning, I stumbled on the answer to 2:23. I have been feeling for some days that the crisis has hardly begun. Our attitude of 'things will be back to normal before long' recalls the mistaken hope in 1939 that the war would be over by Christmas. The so-called phoney war.

I remembered that the people in Egypt had cried out to God under Pharaoh's brutal regime. Why weren't we crying out in the same way?

I turned up the passage, and there it was – Exodus chapter two verse twenty-three. 2:23. It reads, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God." Verse 24 continues, "God heard their groaning... and was concerned about them."

The tremendous events of the book of Exodus were to follow their earnest plea.

You see what you think, but I believe God has drawn my attention to Exodus 2:23 and that it is therefore relevant to our current situation. I believe that even though things are dire now, they are going to get a lot worse. The day will come when we will be brought to our knees, believers and unbelievers alike, and cry out to God.

Thank you. David Pennant, Woking, 11.05.2020