

Clifton News

299 January - March 2023

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Emma



Nathalia



Happy New Year!

2023

We would like to wish all our readers a very happy new year. We give God thanks for answered prayers during the past year. Vipul and Olga gave birth to baby girl, Emma. Rejoy and Feba gave birth to a baby girl, Nathalia. Sylvia was finally able to get her spouse visa and join her husband Will here.

We were very sad to say goodbye to Norman and Mary Gibbons as they moved away to be nearer family members due to Norman's deteriorating health. They need our continual prayers at this time.

Devender travelled back to India to bring over his wife Poonum and three children, Ashrith, Zyira and Khushi. We look forward to meeting them all when they arrive in the New Year.

The Carol Service went well with around 35 present including some visitors. The children took part with Sarah Jim playing and singing "The First Noel" on the violin, the Seekers children singing "Mary's boy child Jesus Christ". John Aston gave a very clear gospel message using a present as an object lesson. The Christmas morning service also went well with Alastair giving the gospel message and some visitors were present.

On a sad note, our sister Kathrine Alcide went to be with the Lord on Christmas Eve. She was 83.

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Meetings

Lord's Day

Breaking of Bread 11.00 am
(During outreach at local community events it is earlier at 10 am so please check our website before coming)

Young People's Bible class 12.15 pm
Family Service 4.00 pm

Monday

Prayer and Bible Teaching 7.45 pm

Wednesday

Seekers 6.30 pm
(Term time only for under 10s)

Friday

Friday Club 7.30 pm
(Term time only for those over 10)

SUNDAY AFTERNOON FAMILY SERVICE

January

1 Clifton young people
8 Nitish Patel
15 Jonathan Varghese
22 Richard Catchpole
29 John Aston

February

5 Clifton young people
12 Thomas Taylor
19 Andrew Hall
26 Thomas Taylor

March

5	Clifton young people
12	Mike Surry
19	Alastair Rodger
26	John Aston

MONDAY PRAYER AND MINISTRY

January

2	No meeting (Bank Holiday)
9	Nitish Patel - Titus 1.1-9
16	Nitish Patel - Titus 1.10-16
23	Alastair Rodger - Titus 2.1-10
30	Alastair Rodger - Titus 2.11- 15

February

6	Richard Catchpole - Titus 3.1-15
13	Timothy Miller
20	Timothy Miller
27	Timothy Miller

March

6	Daniel Rudge
13	Daniel Rudge
20	Paul Miller
27	Paul Miller

Our Monday night ministry meeting and Family Service is broadcast on Zoom. If any of you would like to listen to God's Word, please enter the following on the Zoom website to join in.

Meeting ID: 756 5533 4423 Passcode: 186868

(Please note Monday meetings will be on Zoom only on January 9, 16, 23, 30; February 6 & March 6, 13)

Question Box

What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?

This is an oft asked question and one the writer himself struggled with in young days especially when members of one's own family and ancestors died without hearing the gospel. We can only be saved by believing the gospel so what about those who never heard? Is it fair of God to condemn them to hell forever?

We are thankful that the Bible does give an answer to this question and it is found in the Psalms and expounded in Paul's epistle to the Romans.

The Scriptures teach that God has already revealed about Himself to all mankind through Creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." (Psalms 19:1-3)

This revelation from Creation is so clear and universal that all are without excuse. All know that there is a God who created all things (Romans 1:20); all know that there is a judgment for sin (Romans 1:32) and all know that they are sinners for their conscience bears witness of this (Romans 2:15).

Abraham said, "... Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25)

God will never judge unrighteously and no one will be able to say that they never knew anything about the true and living God. All need to believe the gospel to be saved (Romans 1:16) but if any are lost they have no excuse before God for their sin and idolatry.

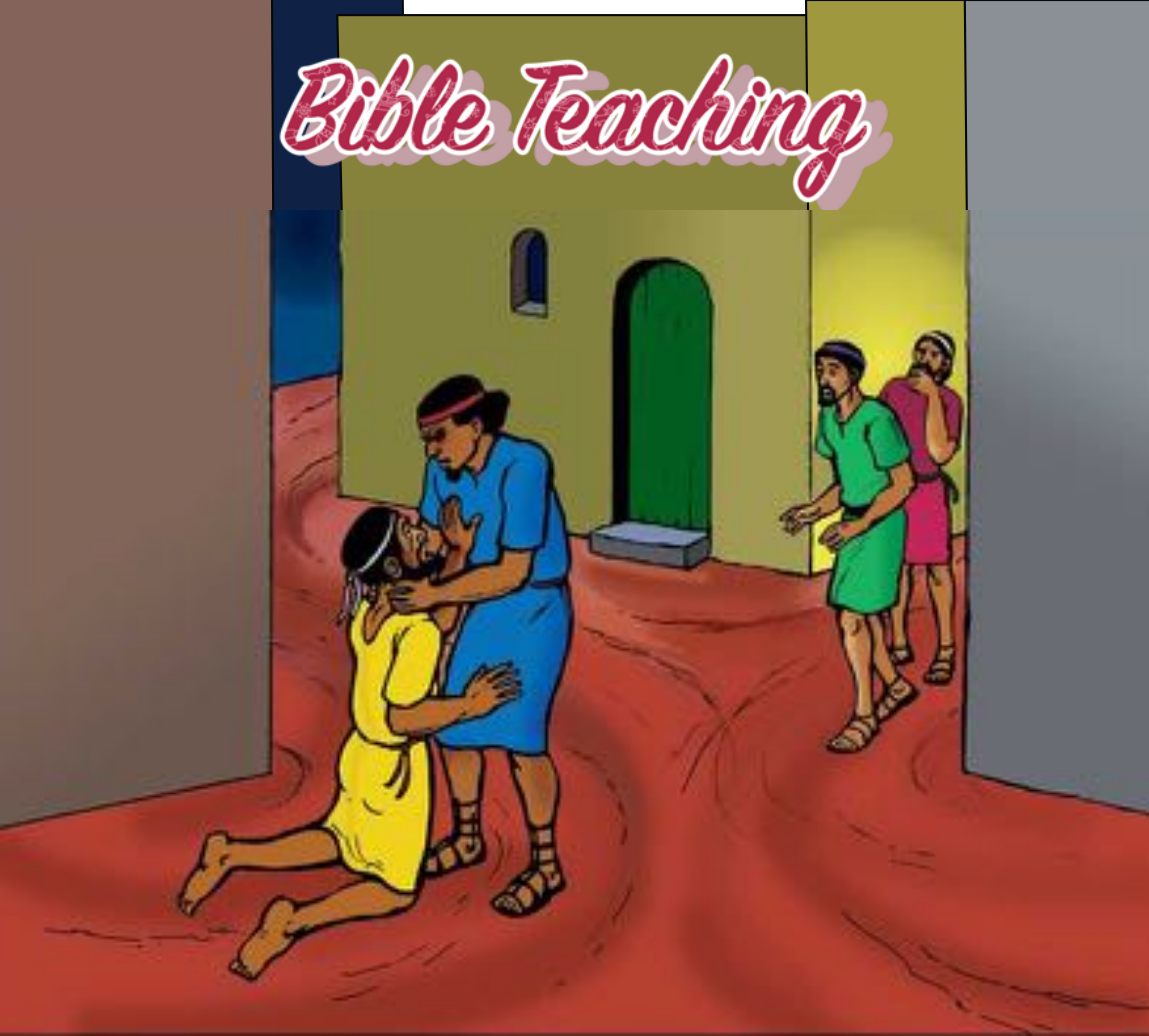
There are many stories of those who have been saved through the witness of Creation who went on to seek the true God and the Lord sent someone to them with the gospel.

One example is the story of an African man who lived in Chad, Africa. The Emmaus journal relates the story reported by a pioneer missionary in that area, F. W. Rogers.

“His name was Dubari and he had broken his wooden idol. He was busy carving another when the thought occurred to him, “If my hands are carving this idol, my hands must be greater than the idol.” His reasoning continued, “If my head is telling my hands what to do, then my head is greater than my hands.” He continued, “If my head is able to think in this way, then there must be a god who made me. If there is such a god then I should know who He is so that I can worship him.” Dubari then made a daily habit of climbing a tree on the edge of his village and calling out asking the God who made him to reveal Himself After some time Mr. F. W. Rogers, an assembly missionary arrived in the village to bring the Gospel. He was soon told about Dubari who came down from his tree, listened to the Gospel, and put his faith for salvation in Jesus Christ, Son of the eternal God. Dubari subsequently grew in his faith and eventually there was a church in his village and he became an active elder for many years. The point of the story is that when Dubari sought the truth, God orchestrated the circumstances for him to hear the truth so that he could put his trust in the Saviour.”

Nitish Patel

Bible Teaching



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE?

By Alastair Rodger

In Matthew chapter 18:15-20, the Lord Jesus explains how to deal with one person sinning against another within churches.

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto

thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:15-20)

Firstly, if you’ve sinned against, you’re to bring the fault up between the two of you alone. If that doesn’t resolve things, you’re to then take one or two others as witnesses. And then finally, if it’s still not resolved, the issue is to be brought before the whole church and the person removed from the church if they still refuse to repent. Immediately following this, Peter asks the Lord how many times we should forgive the one who sins against us?

“Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” (Matthew 18:21-22)



Generously, we might say, he suggests seven times. Jesus replies that it should be seventy times seven – not literally four hundred and ninety times, but that there should be no limit to our forgiveness. To illustrate this, He tells a parable of man who owes a massive amount of money to his king and has that debt cancelled. But then he refuses to cancel a far, far smaller debt owed to him by one of his fellow servants. The king hears of this, describes him as wicked, condemns him for his lack of mercy and hands him over to be punished. From this parable we see that if we have been forgiven a great debt, we then ought to be willing to forgive lesser debts.

What then does it mean to forgive? At its very basic level, it’s the cancellation of a debt. In our parable, there was a literal, financial debt, but it can also be a metaphorical debt, a charge held against someone who has hurt us in some way.

Thinking about it biblically, all of us need forgiveness. We all have a debt of sin; we stand guilty before God. While we sin against one another, lying or stealing for instance, all our sin is ultimately against God.

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.” (Psalms 51:4)

And God Himself provided the means for us to be forgiven. Jesus Christ in dying on the cross paid the debt for our sins and now God, the one we have sinned against, can forgive us. Who can forgive sins but God alone (Mark 2:7)? Forgiving sins was an authority that Jesus claimed for Himself, being God (Mark 2:10).

Based on this we can expand our definition; forgiveness is the cancellation of a debt by the one it's owed to.

Who then is forgiven? Those who are sorry, who repent for their sins. We see that in the Bible examples of those who are forgiven, for instance Joseph's brothers sorrowed over the way they had mistreated him, and Judah was willing to take Benjamin's place in prison so as not to distress their father. They were aghast at their sin as they sought Joseph's forgiveness. David confessed his sin to God, as we have seen, and threw himself upon God's mercy.

True repentance is not just being sorry for being caught sinning or trying to get back in someone's good books. It's a sorrow over the sin itself and then turning from it. So, if the repentant are forgiven, what are the results of forgiveness? Taking the example of the forgiveness we receive when we repent from our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus, it results in reconciliation.

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

The bringing together of two opposing parties. As we are forgiven, we enter a new relationship with God, no longer are we His enemies, but now His children. We can expand our definition again, forgiveness is the cancellation of a debt by the one it's owed to, resulting in reconciliation.

Coming back to our starting point, we can start to see how forgiveness ought to be practiced by us. Paul writes in Colossians 3:13, that we should be "bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." The way we forgive ought to be to reflect the forgiveness that God shown us.

As in the parable, just as we have been forgiven a great debt by God, so we should be ready and willing to forgive the repentant. And once we've forgiven the one who's sinned against us, we should be reconciled with that person. Not holding onto bitterness or still bringing the issue up afterwards but treating one another as brothers. On the other side, when we have sinned against someone else, we ought to be conscious about our sin and seek to be forgiven. Not offering fake apologies or blaming the one you've sinned against, "I'm sorry if you're offended..."

What if we find it difficult to forgive? Like the unforgiving servant, we need to realise how much we have been forgiven by God, and therefore be willing to forgive those who seek forgiveness from us. We should also see how by forgiving one another and being reconciled, we beautifully demonstrate the truths of the gospel in our lives. Seeing it from this perspective should not only motivate us to forgive, but to deepen our relationships with our brothers and sisters.

Good News



GP SURGERY CHRISTMAS BLUNDER

On Christmas Eve a doctor's surgery, Askern Medical Centre in Doncaster Yorkshire decided to send all its patient's a message of goodwill for the season. Instead of sending the intended message "We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year" they sent in error a message meant for one patient awaiting the results of a test for lung cancer. The message all received informed them that they had "... aggressive lung cancer with metastases". The terminal diagnosis caused one patient, property developer Chris Reed who actually was waiting for the results of such a test to be shocked and his partner to burst into tears. The surgery was unreachable by phone with all the lines now busy so he ran to the surgery to find out it was an error and

his results were negative. The surgery issued an apology within twenty minutes and wished all a very merry Christmas and New Year but news of the blunder had got out. Unsurprisingly, the surgery was unavailable for comment when journalists tried to contact them.

The Bible also has two messages, to be sent out to everyone not in error but in necessity. Firstly, a message of terminal diagnosis. We are told in no uncertain terms that, "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). There is not one person who has not been affected by sin. It is a condition inherited from birth. The Bible says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalms 51:5). Not only are we sinners by practice, we are sinners by birth and nature. The death sentence passed upon our first parents Adam and Eve was passed upon all. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" (Romans 5:12). The terminal diagnosis has been given, death has passed upon all men and hell awaits all who die in their sin.

Not only does the Bible send out this bad news which applies to all, it also send out a second message of good news for all. The Great Physician, our Lord Jesus Christ, has provided the cure for sin. He was the only sinless Man who ever lived for He was born of a virgin, Mary. He was God and Man in one person and the cure was His own precious blood shed as a sacrifice for us on Calvary's cross. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;" (Ephesians 1:7)

Reader, have you faced up to God's diagnosis of your terminal? There is hope! Turn from your sin in repentance and ask the Lord Jesus to become your Saviour and receive the everlasting life which He alone can give you. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Design in Creation



THE TINY HUMMINGBIRD

BY NITISH PATEL

The hummingbird is native to the Americas and given this name because of the rapid beating of its wings making a humming noise. There are over 350 different species of hummingbird from the avian family Trochilidae (from a Greek word meaning small bird). They are tiny beautiful jewel-like birds with their iridescent plumage.

Most hummingbirds are tiny weighing between 2.5 - 6.5 grams. The biggest is the giant hummingbird which is 23cm long and weighs 20g and the smallest is the bee hummingbird found in Cuba. This weighs only 1.6-1.9 grams roughly what one raisin, paperclip or 2" birthday candle weighs. Their nests are as small as half a walnut and their eggs are also tiny, about the size of a pea. Their young are the size of a coffee bean! They live around 3-5 years and some have known to have lived for 12 years.

CREATION'S HELICOPTER

Helicopter like, hummingbirds can fly forwards, sideways and even backwards and inside down, the only bird that can do this. They are very manoeuvrable and agile. They are able with their long beak to suck out nectar deep inside flowers. Their wings can beat around 60-80 flaps a minute or as much as 200 times when the male in courtship dives down and up towards the female.



Most birds generate lift when they beat their wings down but recover their wings in the upward stroke to get them ready for the next downward stroke. But hummingbirds are able to generate lift as they flap their wings upwards and downwards. Their tremendous agility is due to their ability to flap their wings in a figure-of-eight pattern. They can do this because their wings are connected only to the shoulder joint unlike other birds allowing them almost a 180 degree manoeuvrability. They can fly at speeds of 35 mph and during courtship have been measured at 45 mph when diving. Their muscles are very powerful and make up one third of their body weight.

HIGHEST METABOLISM OF ANY VERTEBRATE

To fly like a helicopter, hummingbirds need a lot of energy. Their hearts beats at an incredible rate of 1200 beats per minute, more than 20 beats a second! They breathe in and out 250 times a minute. They get this from the sugar in the nectar of flowers on which they feed. They also feed on insects such as spiders for protein.

Getting to the nectar involves not just a long beak but a cleverly designed long tongue. The tongue of the hummingbird is designed to extract large amounts of nectar in one go. They can sip nectar 15-20 times a second. The tongue has a special design. It is split in two at the end and acts like a micro pump sucking out the nectar. The sword billed hummingbird actually has a beak and tongue longer than its body!

Hummingbirds need to eat constantly to supply energy for flight. They need to eat sugary nectar every two hours and can visit 2000 flowers per day in order to stave off starvation and stay alive. They can only supply energy to their body for 12 hours a day and can enter into what is known as a torpor, similar to hibernation, a deep sleep where they use very little of their energy for 12 hours.

THEIR BRAINS

Their brain size per body weight is twice the size of a human brain and they remember every single flower they have visited and where the best flowers are for nectar quantity and quality so that they feed in the most efficient way. No energy is wasted in looking for food.

THEIR MIGRATION

Many migrate in winter from the colder North America to Central America and return back for spring. Their migration is triggered by the position of the Sun in the sky and the length of the day. The Rufous hummingbirds have the longest distance to travel in their migration and travel more than 6000 km between Mexico and Alaska. The ruby throated hummingbird can fly 800 km nonstop across the Gulf of Mexico. It takes nearly a whole day to cross but is an incredible feat given how often they need to eat each day to survive. They are able to store up all the energy needed as fat in order to make this trip.

There is no evidence whatsoever that these or any other bird evolved by random mutations and blind chance over millions of years. All their functions had to be in place fully working or they could not survive. God's glory is evident in its design.

"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee." (Job 12:7). If only the godless would listen to what this bird is telling them about its Creator God!

Rufous hummingbird



REPORT OF VISIT TO INDIA

By Nitish & Ellen Patel

Apart from seeing our family again, it was a joy to see many of the believers after three years since the pandemic closed much of the world. We visited the same three assemblies as we usually do, Anand, Banduph and our home assembly at Borivali, Mumbai. Brother Shaji reported further encouragement with a new assembly work commenced in a tribal area in the hill station of Munnar which was once a retreat for the elite in the British Empire. Another testimony established in Bangalore amongst north Indian labourers who migrated there to find work. He and his wife travel extensively around the country amongst the several assemblies they have established strengthening the believers. Many have been saved and baptised this past year. Though the Banduph assembly is on top of a high hill it is worth the climb to meet those who have been newly saved and rejoicing in the Lord despite their poverty. We were introduced to a young lad whose grandmother was killed when she went into the jungle. It was probably a tiger that took her life and she was never seen again. The mother had come to the Lord and was so joyful at the change in her life since she trusted Christ as her Saviour. The family is very poor and the believers are caring for them.

We wish the same could be said of Gujarat where things remain much the same. The people are still unresponsive to the gospel and the anti-conversion laws make it hard to preach the gospel without much opposition. However, a work amongst children in a nearby village has recommenced and going on well. From time to time, Sanjay and the other brethren are able to visit nominal Christian colonies to preach the gospel. Preaching to anyone else in a public way soon attracts the attention of violent religious fanatics who will make false reports to the police and have the preachers arrested. Pray much that despite all this the Lord will work in a mighty way.

Our home assembly in India has commenced a new work amongst children in a slum and this is going on well. In most of the cities, the standard of Bible teaching is high with many gifted brethren but amongst the many towns and villages of the country there is a great need for those who can teach God's Word.



Banduph assembly, Mumbai

Anand assembly, Gujarat



Mount Tabor, traditional site of Jesus transfiguration

