

Because

...for anyone who's ever asked, 'why?'

March 2015

www.because.uk.com



by James Henderson

I wonder – what will world leaders discuss at this year's G8 summit in Germany?

When they met in Northern Ireland in 2013, the plan was to address tax evasion and transparency issues, but unfolding events in Syria dominated the talks. They came up with an agreed strategy to tackle the Syrian conflict. In 2014 the scheduled meeting in Russia was cancelled due to the crisis in the Ukraine, and the G7 – that is *without* Russia – met in Brussels. Since then, what with the continuing Ukraine and Islamic State crises, the world is much less safe than it was. Will everyone attend in 2015? Will some refuse to get involved or get excluded again by the others, or walk out early as Vladimir Putin did at February's G20 meeting?

Whatever happens when they sit around the table together, for those who lead us there is, as writer Robert Louis Stevenson put it, “a banquet of consequences”. “Sooner or later everyone sits down to a banquet of consequences” is the quote!

At this time of year Christians reflect on a meal that was without doubt a banquet of – and with – consequences. It involved leadership and treachery, and, according to the Bible, it's worth remembering because it changed everything.

It began with something bizarre. Usually, due to the Middle Eastern dusty roads and to the fact that most people wore sandals 2000 years ago, the custom was that servants would wash the feet of guests who came to talk and eat. In this instance, however, the leader of the group, Jesus Christ, told his colleagues to sit down while he washed their feet. The leader became the servant. Christ explained what he was doing. This, he said, is something you all should do for one another: to lead is to serve. Can you imagine the host of this year's G8 or G7 summit telling the others to sit down while she gets out a basin of water and begins to wash their feet? What if one of the other politicians, let's say the President of a well-known democracy, volunteered to do it? It would be quite a way to start their meeting! Would there be a press release beforehand and lots of photo shoots, plus a few leaked selfies?

Photo: istockphoto.com

What happened next was also quite unusual². They were sitting down to eat when Jesus rather dramatically announced that one of his twelve companions would betray him. Can you imagine the scene? How electrifying those words must have been. Immediately there is a climate of suspicion. Who is it? Again I think of the G8 summit – what if someone is a traitor and wants only to pursue his or her own agenda? Of course, we know our world leaders are better than that...or do we? Could one of them be two-faced, a bit like Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*? What intrigue! "Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"³

During the meal Jesus began to talk about sacrifice – his sacrifice. "Take this bread we are sharing", he said. "It is my body, which is about to be broken for you". What was he talking about? His disciples did not get it at first, but later they understood. Jesus was telling them that he was going to lay down his life so that the whole world would be saved. The brokenness that results from sin would be healed as the direct result of his sacrifice.

Then Jesus passed around the wine. By the way, another of Stevenson's well-known phrases is "wine is bottled poetry". Jesus himself was about to make a statement that was poetic in its content and simplicity. This red wine, he continued, is "my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"⁴. As he died on the cross Jesus bled so that everyone everywhere and from every time might find peace in God. The consequences of our individual and collective sins were about to be overturned by the consequences of Christ's crucifixion: it would be everlasting life instead of separation from God forever. Again, to continue the reference to how the world is today, what if one of our world leaders offered to sacrifice his or her own life so that people may live? Would any of them do this? Would they be taken seriously? It would be a Christ-like act.

Paul, a follower of Jesus, referred to that final meal

Jesus had before his death as "the Lord's Supper"⁵. Christians today also call it communion, from the idea of sharing together, and the Eucharist, from the Greek word for gratitude. This was a sacrificial meal to remember, Paul told believers, one to celebrate with compassion and joy. Why? The reason is that the Lord's Supper is a banquet with eternal consequences. It explains the act of God's self-giving for us. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed the course of history. No longer is humanity like some one who has been kidnapped, but rather we have been freed and set at liberty in Christ. When Christians take the bread and drink the wine it is a participation in this freedom.



Get involved in this meal, Paul exhorts Christians, thus echoing Jesus' own thoughts: "Drink of it, all of you"⁶.

All of us hope and pray that, whenever our leaders meet, there will be changes for the good. We can see how world crises have led to the need for our leaders to talk about ways forward, and how the consequences of their meeting could lead potentially to a breakthrough for peace.

Is the only way forward for them to join in Jesus' approach of service and sacrifice? Maybe it's time to live and share the Lord's Supper.

Our church conducts the "Lord's Supper" at various locations around the country, and we also lead a

foot washing service. If you would like to attend one, let me know by emailing me at james.henderson@graceom.org.uk

1. Attributed to RL Stevenson and said to be adapted from his essay, *the Old Mortality*.
2. If you want to read the whole account, go to John 13 and to Matthew 26:20-29.
3. From Chapter 1, *the Old Sea-dog at the Admiral Benbow*, in Stevenson's *Treasure Island*,
4. Matthew 26:28
5. 1 Corinthians 11:20
6. Matthew 26:27 ESV

And the Oscar goes to...

by Cliff Neill



Once again the Oscar Ceremony has come and gone. This is always a very exciting evening, especially for those who have been nominated for an award.

The statuette was designed and introduced as an Academy Award on the 16th of May, 1927, and is the figure of a man leaning on a crusader sword and standing on a reel of film. For four years it was simply known as “The Statuette” but in 1931 the academy librarian—who eventually became the executive director—Margaret Herrick, observed that it looked just like her Uncle Oscar and since then it has been an Oscar. Since that time actors have striven, laboured, agonized and fought to gain this special award – for the best performance, for the most realistic portrayal of some character from fiction or history.

Actors spend time studying a character with the intent of giving as accurate a portrayal as possible. For example, Dustin Hoffman spent two years studying autistic people so he could actually become one of them in the film “Rainman”, for which he received an Oscar. Tom Cruise played the part of a crippled marine in the film “Born on the Fourth of July”, for which he spent long hours with the actual person he was portraying, even confining himself to a wheelchair for weeks prior to making the film. More recently, a young actor, Eddie Redmayne, so beautifully acted the part of Stephen Hawking in the film “The Theory of Everything” that he received the coveted 2015 Oscar for Best Actor! He

successfully became Stephen Hawking!

When this happens the character, even though he or she might be dead or fictional, comes to life and is captured on film with all the mannerisms, thoughts and words expressed for everyone to evaluate. Incredibly, the actor has to project a character, learn to think as he or she thinks, reacts as he or she reacts, live as he or she lives: in short to have the same mind.

Surprisingly perhaps, there is a link here to the Christian faith. Paul, one of the New Testament writers, exhorted Christians to emulate the mind of Christ¹. That’s why Christians today emphasise following Jesus. What would Jesus say? How would he react? Paul also said to them, “you received Christ Jesus, the Master, now live him.”² To really live Jesus requires spending a lot of quality time with him, always seeking to understand: how would he handle this?

This would involve treating others with the same kindness, compassion, tenderness and love as Jesus did. Thus in observing Christians who do as Jesus did, it is as if others can watch Jesus in action. There’s no Oscar, of course – because for Christians it’s not an act, rather being Jesus is a way of life.

1. “Have this mind in you, which was in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2: 5 Williams)
2. Colossians 2: 6 Message.



APPRECIATING BAPTISM

by Joseph Tkach

We watch spellbound as the magician, wrapped in chains and secured by padlocks, is lowered into a tall tank of water. The top is then closed and the magician’s assistant stands on top, draping the tank with a shroud of cloth, which she lifts above her head. After only a moment or two, the shroud is dropped and to our surprise and delight, the magician stands on top of the tank with his assistant now inside, chains securing her. This sudden, mysterious “exchange” happens right before our eyes. We know it’s an illusion, but how the seemingly impossible was accomplished is not revealed so that this act of “magic” can be repeated to the surprise and delight of other audiences.

Some Christians view baptism as if it is an act of magic—at the moment one goes under the water, sins are washed away and the person is made new. But the biblical truth about baptism is far more exciting. It’s not the act of baptism itself that accomplishes salvation—Jesus does that as our representative and substitute. Nearly 2,000 years ago, he saved us through his life, death, resurrection and ascension.

It’s not in the act of baptism that we trade places with

Photo below: wikicommons



Jesus—exchanging our filth and sinfulness for his righteousness. Jesus doesn’t take on the sin of humanity each time a person is baptized. He did that once, for all, in his own baptism, life, death, resurrection and ascension. The glorious truth is that our baptism is a sharing, by the Spirit, in Jesus’ baptism! We are baptized because Jesus, our representative and substitute, was baptized for us. Our baptism is a sign and pointer to his.

We put our trust in Jesus’ baptism, not our own.

It’s important to realize that salvation is not about what we do. As the apostle Paul wrote, it’s about Jesus—who he is and what he has done (and continues to do) on our behalf: “It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord’” ([1 Corinthians 1:30-31](#), NIV).

In his vicarious humanity, Jesus is the last Adam. As a human being like us, he was born, lived, died and was resurrected with a glorified human body and ascended into heaven. When we are baptized, we join Jesus in his

Photo above: istockphoto.com

baptism—his baptism applied to us by the Holy Spirit. In other words, when we are baptized, we are baptized into Jesus.

This baptism is fully Trinitarian. When Jesus was baptized by his cousin John the Baptist, the Trinity was present: “As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” ([Matthew 3:16-17](#)).

Jesus was baptized in his role as the one mediator between God and humanity. He was baptized on behalf of humanity, and our baptism signifies our participation in the full and vicarious humanity of the Son of God. Baptism has a basis in the hypostatic union through which God draws near to humanity and humanity draws near to God (*hypostatic union* is a theological term derived from the Greek word *hypostasis*, which describes the inseparable union of Christ’s divinity and humanity—making Jesus fully God and fully man at the same time). As Christ is fully divine and fully human, by his nature he draws God near to us, and us near to God.

Here is how T.F. Torrance explained it:

“For Jesus, baptism meant that he was consecrated as the Messiah, and that he, the Righteous One, became one with us, taking upon himself our unrighteousness, that his righteousness might become ours. For us, baptism means that we become one with him, sharing in his righteousness, and that we are sanctified in him as members of the messianic people of God, compacted together in one Body in Christ. There is one baptism and one Body through the one Spirit. Christ and his Church participate in the one baptism in different ways—Christ actively and vicariously as Redeemer, the Church passively and receptively as the redeemed Community”.

When Christians think they are saved by the act of baptism, they are misunderstanding who Jesus is and what he has done as Messiah, mediator, reconciler and redeemer. I love the answer T.F. Torrance gave when asked *when* he was saved: “I was saved about 2,000 years ago in the death and resurrection of Jesus”. His answer articulates the truth that salvation is not in the experience of baptism but in the work of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. When we talk about our salvation, we are transported back in time to the moment in salvation history that had little to do with us, and everything to do with Jesus. It was the moment

when the kingdom of heaven was inaugurated and God’s original plan to elevate us was sparked in time and space. Though I did not fully understand this four-dimensional reality concerning salvation when I was baptized, it is no less real, no less true. The sacraments of baptism and communion are about Jesus uniting himself to us and us to himself. These grace-filled expressions of worship are not about our timing, but about what occurred in God’s timing. So whether we were baptized by sprinkling, by pouring or by immersion, the reality is what Jesus did for us all in his atoning sacrifice.

In Grace Communion International, we follow Jesus’ example and typically baptize by full immersion. However, that is not always possible—most prisons, for example, do not allow baptism by immersion. Also, many infirmed people cannot be immersed, and it’s appropriate that infants be sprinkled. Some humorously refer to Jesus’ encounter with the thief on the cross as



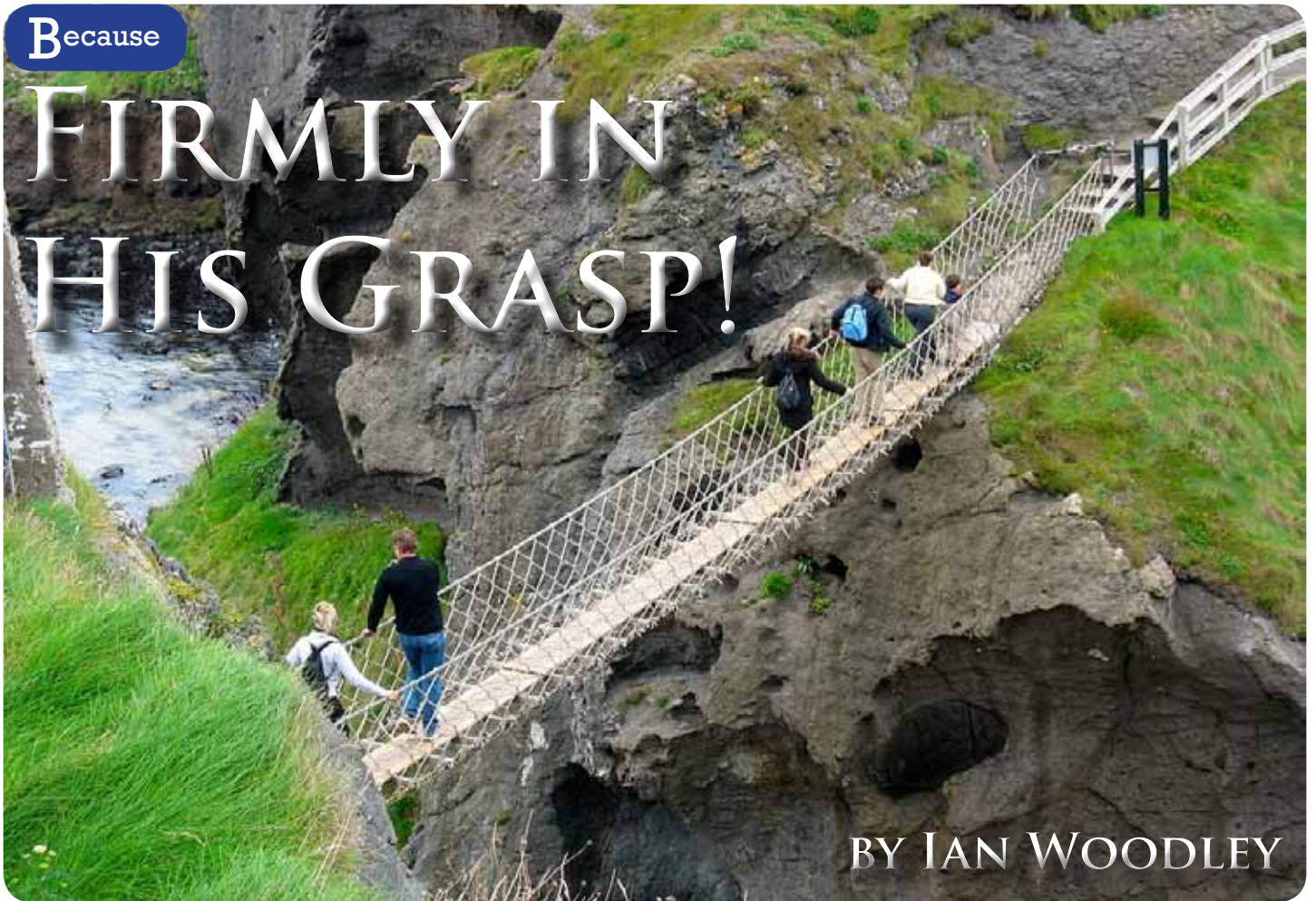
baptism by “dry cleaning.”

Let me wrap this up with another quote from T.F. Torrance:

“All this helps to make it clear that while baptism is both the act of Christ and the act of the Church in his Name, it is to be understood finally not in terms of what the Church does but in terms of what God in Christ has done, does do and will do for us in his Spirit. Its meaning does not lie in the rite itself and its performance, nor in the attitude of the baptized and his obedience of faith—even the secondary reference of baptism, by its nature as a passive act, in which we receive baptism and do not administer it to ourselves, directs us to find its meaning in the living Christ who cannot be separated from his finished work and who makes himself present to us in the power of his own Reality” (*Theology in Reconciliation*, p. 302).

Because

FIRMLY IN HIS GRASP!



BY IAN WOODLEY

The rope bridge was 100 feet high - that's what I was told. Whatever the true height, it was clearly a long way from the ground! Not having a great head for heights, I fell to the back of the group attempting the challenge. I was determined to cross the bridge, but didn't want to get in the way if I felt unsettled.

Well, that was the plan. A family turned around and asked if they could go last as they were concerned that their young son would refuse to cross. How could I say no? So I set foot on the bridge, ahead of the family.

It was great! I found myself crossing the bridge with no trouble at all - but that didn't last long. The little boy behind me wasn't daunted by the bridge. Instead, he bounded along making the floor weave up and down. Suddenly, I felt the surface beneath me move - and I froze to the spot.

Later, my wife told me that I looked terrified - that's because I was! The fear flowed through my body and seemed to fill all my joints, paralyzing my legs. There I was, 100 feet up, unable to move.

I attempted to rationalise with myself. The bridge was of excellent construction and was firmly fixed between two sturdy towers. There was no way that I could fall off - even if I fainted, there were no gaps to fall through.

I tried telling myself that there was nothing to fear as no harm could result from the bridge, even if the floor was moving!

Sometimes, life feels a lot like this. There we are, feeling quite confident in our plans and circumstances when suddenly something causes an upset. Losing our job. Falling ill with a serious disease or with cancer. The death of a loved one. A long term relationship turns sour. Events that make the world wobble, just like my experience on the rope bridge. Such trials can make us question our world view. Why has God allowed this to happen? Have I upset God somehow? Is God even there? Doubt and fear begin to flow, paralyzing our trust and belief in our Father.

When the world starts to shake and our confidence falters, it is only natural to ask God - "where are you?" Jesus responds to us with wonderful words of encouragement: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." (John 10:27-29, NIV).

Where is God? Right here with us. He hasn't wandered off, unaware of our problem. In fact, Jesus tells us

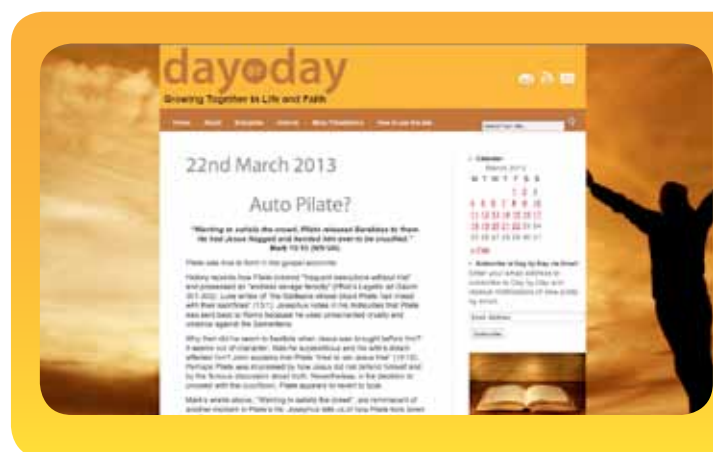
something quite fantastic: he has us firm in his grasp. We may well feel that the rope bridge of life has collapsed and we are clinging on for dear life! But the big picture is the complete opposite - Jesus has us in his grasp and nothing can interfere with that. He is holding onto us with such firmness that the great forces of nature - the chemical and gravitational bonds that hold the universe together - are put to shame.

This statement of Jesus is a bold one! What proof do we have that he has such a hold on us? His friend, John, who recorded these words, backs up Jesus' claim with striking evidence: the resurrection from the dead. Death unwinds all that we seek to achieve in life - is there anything more destabilising than this great enemy? However, Jesus defeated death. He lives today!

Nothing can unpick Jesus' hold on us. The true reality within our circumstances is not the shaking rope bridge of life. Instead, it is the hold that Jesus has on us.

I eventually did get across that rope bridge - with a continuous prayer asking for the strength to make every step on the way. I would love to be able to tell you that, after my initial fear, I bounded over the bridge! But, no, it wasn't like that. I found myself carefully placing every step, allowing my trust in God to win each small battle. I did feel foolish, having to ask God to do something that a young boy could do with ease!

And so it is with life. Every now and then, the "floor" beneath us becomes uncertain and feels very unsafe. But our Lord has us in his tight hold - every step of the way. With that in mind, we should take every fearful - and possibly painful - step to God in prayer. Whatever happens, we can rest assured that his grip on us will last throughout all eternity.



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Were you there?

Have you been there when something historic took place?

If so, would you like to let us know?

Perhaps you witnessed a memorable event such as the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, or the funeral procession of Winston Churchill, or heard Mahatma Gandhi in person, or were there when the Berlin Wall came down.

We are planning a feature entitled "I was there". It will appear in an edition of *Because* during the second half of 2015.



Submissions can be e-mailed to info@because.uk.com, or posted to **PO 7703, Market Harborough, LE16 7ZG**. They should be between 50 and 200 words and mention the event in question, and describe any feelings or thoughts you had at the time or since. As a guide, this article is 165 words. Please also think of sending in some related pictures, preferably electronically.

The deadline date is the 30th June.

Thank you for thinking about this, and we look forward to hearing about how you were there!

Speaking of Life:



Homeless Jesus

Last year a small church in North Carolina placed a statue of Jesus out in front of their building. The only problem was that it portrayed Jesus as a vagrant sleeping on a park bench. And while the installation has spurred a variety of reactions from a lot of different groups, I think it highlights one of the central aspects of what Christ's incarnation is really about.

Let me explain...

Over the centuries, artists have depicted Jesus in a variety of ways. Early Christians painted him as a humble shepherd leading his flock, while later generations enthroned Christ in a position of power on the clouds as transcendent Lord and Savior over all creation—having the whole world in his hands. Now, modern artists have painted our Lord with more ethnically accurate features based on digital DNA recreation. All of these expressions of Christ are part of a complex mosaic that reflects our human perception of who God is.

More often than not, we like to cast Jesus based on our own experiences. We shape him to reflect certain aspects of change that we would like to see in our community. Prophet, best friend, healing physician – he was all of these things and much more. Here, the artist has created the image of a homeless Jesus to remind us of Christ's words to his Disciples:

“Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

What I find so interesting about this statue is how it does turn our image of Christ upside down. We remember him as the King of Kings, the Son of God who performed miracles and dazzled the learned religious leaders of his time. But we also need to remember that he was born in a humble stable, worked with his father in his family's carpenter shop and probably helped his mother make breakfast. He dwelt among us, suffered with us, and I'm sure on at least one occasion, was forced to sleep under a tree just like any common vagrant. But that truth isn't anything we should shy away from. Instead, like this statue, it serves as a way of reminding us that Christ came among us to bring forgiveness and redemption to all – from the greatest leader to the very “least of these.”

I'm Joseph Tkach, Speaking of LIFE.

Speaking of Life is now on TV! It is used by UCB (United Christian Broadcasters) in between longer programmes and is aired on UCB and on SKY channel 584 on Thursdays and Fridays between 7.15 - 7.30 am and between 1.45 and 2.00pm, on Saturdays between 6.45 and 7.00 am., and on Sundays between 1.45 and 2.00 pm. These timings may vary.



Because is an in house publication of Grace Communion International (UK), 9 the Point, Rockingham Road, Market Harborough, LE16 7QU, UK



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