



**Jesus**

**The Sevenfold Commission  
of the Cross  
&  
the Marsh Arabs**

**Brother Samuel**



***There is no tribunal so magnificent, no throne so stately, no show of triumph so distinguished, no chariot so elevated as is the gibbet on which Christ has subdued death and the devil and trodden them under His feet.***

John Calvin (1509-1564).

**For TARYN**

## FOREWORD

I'm sure we've all been driving long enough to realize how disconcerting it is to find another vehicle on our tail, unseen because of a "blind spot" – that we could have been involved in an unexpected incident.

I believe that biblical theology and biblical interpretation are fraught with 'blind spots' when we fail to make proper application in our studies. It is said that a text without a context becomes a pretext. Even reading the Bible merely for its own sake as literature, or from a purely academic point of view, without applying it either to our lives, world view, or ministries as Christians is also a pretext. It may become our 'blind spot' in our Christianity.

So when Brother Samuel decided to equate the Seven Last Sayings of Christ on the Cross to his ministry with the Marsh Arabs of Southern Iraq, I was not a little intrigued. Surely the connection in application must be tenuous?

But as his proof-reader in this, his second book on the Marsh Arabs, I have been pleasantly surprised. You have to know where I'm coming from. As a pastor-teacher in various congregations in a missionary context, as well as recently a lecturer in biblical hermeneutics and homiletics, I have always emphasized the dictum of Observation, Interpretation and Application. But how does one *apply* the seven sayings of Jesus to the Marsh Arabs? Samuel does it very well without doing injustice to the text and theology.

He first of all covers the theological issues within their context. There are adequate references to others' evangelical work in this field. But what is unique here is the author's understanding of the Qur'an, the geographical, typical and historical contexts of

the Marsh Arabs, but especially their religious background as Shi'ite Muslims.

Then he ties all this together. He puts it succinctly, if not bluntly: the Marsh Arabs need *Jesus* who died for *them* – so far an unknown, unloved, unwanted and unreached people group. The Saviour's words on the cross are for them as well as for us. And this is *exactly* where the title of the book comes in: *Jesus: the Sevenfold Commission of the Cross & the Marsh Arabs*.

But one more thing needs to be said. This is no mere biblical treatment of a familiar theme with a modern application. Not at all! This is a cry from Samuel's heart. This is a missionary book with a difference. It is theologically sound and stimulating; but it is also a missionary challenge. For any who feel God's call to missions amongst the Islamic peoples of the Middle East, this is a must-read. Here is your preparation. This is your starting point, your homework.

But the author has done one thing more besides write another book. He has taken his own advice so-to-speak. Along with a few others, including his wife, he has formed a Section 21 Company, to fulfill his passion to *apply* Christ's words to the Marsh Arabs by going there as soon as possible.

May you too be stimulated and challenged, not only to read, but also to act.

*John White* BTh., Pastor-Teacher, Port Elizabeth

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## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is the section of the book when the author gets to 'talk' about himself, that is why he wrote the book, to whom he feels most indebted and more specifically what this book sets out to achieve.

Firstly, this book is dedicated to the *Gelvandale Baptist Church*, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. This little Church was the birth-place of the vision, where the 'Great Commission' intersected a busy programme and for the first time the thrilling challenge of extending arms to those “at the ends of the earth” became a reality. The *Marsh Arabs* were given to us as an 'adopted people group'. Other than His Son and His Word, God could not have given us a greater gift.

Secondly, but of equal importance is the enthusiastic support of John White who has read the text, made numerous suggestions and even loaned us his sermon-notes on the 'Seven Sayings'. The fruit of close to thirty-five years ministry was made available to us. Needless to say, anything of blemish is to be charged to our account. I also record my gratitude to John for writing the **Foreword**.

Then there is another 'trinity' that I cannot overlook. Willie, our good friend worked hard to get the book into computer format, Prof. Jean did the back cover write-up. Co-ordinator of 'Bless The Nations' in the city he has long been an enthusiastic supporter of the vision to reach the Marsh Arabs for Jesus. My wife Pat helped with endless typing and proof-reading. She also shares my life, is my love and supports me in all our labours – this is your book.

This little book concludes with 'Further Thoughts.' Here the author wants to roam further than the Marsh Arabs; so for instance if you

are a missionary to China or a church-planter in west- Mongolia, the reflections of these few pages will definitely include you.

Lastly, we need to tie up some technical details. The Scriptures used throughout (unless indicated otherwise) are the *New International Version* of the Holy Bible; ninth impression 1995. Also we have used the occasional Arabic word. Although we have transliterated it as closely as possible as one would speak it in the English language, we have decided not to provide guidelines of pronunciation. This is because no matter how carefully one may give guidelines on vocalisation, the end result is often a far cry from the real thing. Imprecision bedevils an exercise of this nature.

Then there is the 'Lord of the harvest...' He (i.e. Jesus) did say that we are to 'ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field' (Luke 10:2). The Marsh Arabs are definitely part of 'his harvest field' ...and we are to pray that workers will be sent out. This little book is a companion to that exercise. This little book helps prayer to be informed, and taking that a step further, informed prayer under the authority of Scripture.

So this little book says: we have done our part, all that is left is for God's people to pray. However, William Carey's shrewd words are helpful here, "We must not be contented however with praying, without *exerting ourselves in the use of means* for the obtaining of those things we pray for. Were *the children of light* but *as wise in their generation as the children of this world* they would stretch every nerve to gain so glorious a prize, nor ever imagine that it was to be obtained in any other way" (in Winter & Hawthorne, Editors. 1999:299).

Our book cover was originally a painting – we were told – by a



Marsh Arab. Little did he realise that in the future his painting would announce a gospel tract about his people...We acknowledge our indebtedness to our unknown friend and to our Living God Who inspired him and us.

*Let me burn out for God. After all, whatever God may appoint, prayer is the great thing. Oh, that I may be a man of prayer!*

Henry Martyn.

## INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

This modest little book seeks to bring together two “streams”. The one 'stream' is the well-known and highly cherished words of our Saviour on the Cross. The other – and less well-known 'stream' – is 'a people group' that have for centuries lived in the South of Iraq, known as the Marsh Arabs.

Let us return to the first 'stream'. In the four gospels, the Christian Church has long acknowledged seven clear statements that were uttered on the cross of Calvary. And who of us have not been to numerous services, especially over the Easter period when these 'words' were preached on at length. And of course Christian commentators have always been cautious to give these 'words' clear and compelling exegesis. To many such commentators we are more than indebted (the select bibliography at the back indicates especially helpful literature...less frequently used literature we have indicated in the text).

F.F. Bruce in his book *In Retrospect. Remembrance of things past* (Marshall Pickering. London. 1980:101) writes of the ministry of a certain W.W. Fereday. He writes that “For all his gift of lucid and incisive exposition, he was not an original thinker...” Alas! We too would confess that we are not 'original' thinkers. All we have sought to do – and hopefully as accurately as possible – is mirror the thoughts of others. And anything deemed 'lucid and incisive' ...we would gratefully attribute to others who have gone before us. William Barclay wrote of himself that he had “a second-class mind... I could at least be the pipe-line which brought the living springs to others...” (in *Testament of Faith*. Mowbrays. London. 1975:24, 25). We too would be more than grateful to God if we could in this way serve other Christians acknowledging that all we have, has been given to us.

But there is one matter that we have not been happy with. For all the 'lucid and incisive' exegesis that we, time and time again have come across regarding these *seven words*, nevertheless still felt that generally the expositions lacked a 'Great Commission' emphasis. Seldom have we come across commentators who, in looking at Jesus' words, have also made us feel that we should consider passages such as Acts 1:8 or John 20:21 etc. And if we are to declare the 'whole will of God' (Acts 20:27) then surely we cannot claim to do so if the 'final marching orders of Jesus to the Church' are overlooked.

But we are not trying to find fault. To be positive, we are trying to redress and draw attention to what we feel is an oversight of many exegetes ...and to take that a step further, we try and explicate obedience to the 'Great Commission' in a specific historical situation, namely the Marsh Arabs of South Iraq. This brings us to our second 'stream'.

The Marsh Arabs live in the South of Iraq. They are to all intents and purposes a group of people – divided into tribes and numerous sub-tribes – that have largely been overlooked by the Church. The acclaimed *Operation World 21<sup>st</sup> Century Edition* (2001:357) puts the issue starkly enough: “There is no known outreach to them.”

Now we don't want to dwell too much on the Marsh Arabs ...the seven sayings of Jesus will open windows, offer what we feel are relevant insights into their existence. But more than that, using the lens of Scripture, we believe, will help us to capture what is essential about them. Secondary issues will be excluded. The Scripture will tell us what to look for and therefore what is deemed important.

We will, therefore, in what follows bring together the two “loves”

of our lives – namely Scripture and the Marsh Arabs. Obviously our love for Scripture is primary – it takes pride of place. But in affirming that, there is no pride, no self-congratulations being implied; no, we would also be the first to affirm, like Paul, that there is much we understand “in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We have not 'arrived.' But we love Scripture.

But in talking about the Marsh Arabs within the perspective of Scripture also prepares us and increases our desire for the day when we can talk to *them about Scripture*, ...that is the primary message of Scripture, namely Christ and Him crucified. So in one sense the exercise we are employed in now will become the entrance and initial building blocks for relationships ...people will not readily reject Scripture if they can see how they feature or take part in it. People love relevance, or how this applies to my life! Rare is the individual who is happy with the abstract, who can thrive on theories and the world of ideals.

In our homiletics class it was continually drummed into our heads that every sermon must have application. These seven 'words' (and they were initially all preached as separate messages in various Churches) come loaded with Marsh Arab application – all that is needed now is for faithful messengers to take the “finished product” to the Marsh Arabs.

I seem to have strayed into preaching – please consider the quotations carefully – and let me conclude with some thoughts from John Stott. He quotes Ian Maclaren that 'the chief end of preaching is comfort' and Dr. Dale, 'people want to be comforted... They need consolation...' (in *I Believe in Preaching*. Gospel Literature Service. Bombay. 1988:314). Let us who know and rejoice in the 'comfort' of the word, seek to 'comfort' the hearts of our friends in Iraq. May God hasten the day.



*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain  
what he cannot lose.*

Jim Elliot.

*Anything that happens in the world, anything striking, any phenomenon, is something we should always take advantage of. I remember reading of an incident in the life of John Fletcher of Madeley ...I also remember reading how at just about the same time, incidentally, a number of those great preachers of that eighteenth century made use of the earthquake that took place in Lisbon ...they used the event to bring home to people the fleeting nature of life, and to enforce their call to repentance...*

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (in *Preaching & Preachers*.  
Hodder and Stoughton. 1971: 193, 194).

# 1. IGNORANCE

In any conversation, the word “ignorance” or ignorant is bound to arouse interest! To call someone *ignorant* is to call into question their moral and intellectual capacities. It is certainly not an innocuous word. It implies a deficiency and inadequacy with the overtone that the person in question is less than capable of exercising the necessary correct judgement. Now the Church has always been at the forefront of identifying ignorance as an unwelcome intrusion into God's world. It is an enemy that must be exposed and resisted. I am going to detail a few examples of how the Church has sought to resist this intruder.

I start with one example from the Church's missionary life. Bartholomew Ziegenbalg went to south-east India on 9 July 1706. He was only twenty-three. He died thirteen years later. He and Henry Plütschau faced incredible opposition. But they persevered.

Their first principle of work was that “Church and school are to go together”...he, i.e. Ziegenbalg set to translate the difficult language of Tamil into Scripture so that the people could read the word that was being proclaimed. This careful scholar set his face to fight the people's ignorance of Scripture ...he rightly saw that an enduring Church must be firmly grounded in the word of God (in Stephen Neill. *A History of Christian Missions*. Penguin Books. First published 1964:228, 229).

His worthy successor took the fight against ignorance even further. He (i.e. Johann Philipp Fabricius) not only completed the work of Scripture translation, but even set the people singing! Numerous Christian hymns were made available to the people so that with sweet melody further ignorance could be dispelled.

Dr Thomas Barnado (1845-1905) trained as a doctor so that he

could go to China as a missionary. He never left England. Instead God catapulted him into the world of destitute and despised children. He cared for them in their thousands. His labours and his love were inexhaustible. He became a legend in his lifetime. These children had been relegated by an uncaring society to the backwaters of ignorance and indifference. No doubt England at large would protest that their ignorance was real, not feigned, nevertheless God used Barnado to put the children on the country's agenda. No longer could people cry 'we didn't know' – Barnado unmasked the cancer.

But God was not finished with England yet. God also raised up two politicians. The first was Anthony Ashley Cooper (better known as Lord Shaftesbury : 1801-1885), the second was William Wilberforce (1759-1833). These two politicians fought the ignorance and indifference of the English people at two different levels. That is, a common problem with two very different manifestations. Two different expressions. The manifestation that Wilberforce fought was essentially the outward, namely England's involvement with the slave trade. He campaigned ceaselessly against this till it was overturned and declared illegal. Lord Shaftesbury fought the inward 'manifestation' – namely that England had become a harsh and uncaring society. The poor and the destitute were ceaselessly ground down. The advent of the Industrial Revolution gave rise to a veneer of ignorance that Lord Shaftesbury would soon expose. He was tireless in seeking to pass parliamentary bills that would ameliorate the anguish of living in a harsh society (details about Thomas Barnado, Lord Shaftesbury and William Wilberforce in John Stott. 2001:140-144; 158-163).

'The Lady of the Lamp', Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) single-handedly lifted nursing and hospital care to the highest echelons of respect and gratitude.



Nursing was not regarded as a noble profession. Nurses seemed to have been recruited from society's lower rungs – but the eruption of the Crimean War (September 1854) would soon expose the ignorance that shrouded hospital-care in general, and nursing in particular. Florence rose to the challenge.

Her labours were legendary. Her compassion an inspiration to countless numbers. It has been recorded of her that “Modern nursing and hospital routine are the blessings which we owe to her actions and ideals” (in *100 Great Lives*. Odhams Press Ltd. No date: pages 446-453). She, more than any other woman in history exposed the ignorance that hindered any welfare to the wounded that various governments should have supplemented and supported because of their ceaseless wars.

In 1973 J.I. Packer wrote a book that became incredibly popular. It was simply called *Knowing God* (Hodder and Stoughton. London; page 6). He wrote that “the conviction behind the book was that of ignorance of God – of his ways and of the practice of communion with him.” He went on...this ignorance was “at the root of much of the Church's weakness today” (Ibid.).

So we have come a far way from ignorance of the heathen to ignorance in the Church...and this surely is more than a sufficient reason for entrance of the first cry of the Saviour upon the cross.

In Luke 23:34 we have the first statement of the Saviour upon the cross '...Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

It is a statement that astounds us. In an atmosphere charged thick with hate and fear, He prays in love against the ignorance of His tormentors. But the 'context' in which the Saviour prays is still

broader...it in fact reaches back, deep into the Old Testament.

Isaiah was written approximately 700 years before Christ. But as Jesus utters these words on the cross, He is consciously and deliberately fulfilling the words of Isaiah "...He bore the sin of many; and made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12). But we go back even further in the Old Testament. Jesus knew that the Old Testament made mention of sins committed in ignorance. Passages such as Leviticus 4:2, 13, 22, 27 etc. come to mind. Even the solemn, annual 'Day of Atonement' (Leviticus 16) made provision for sin for which no previous sacrifices had been offered. Notice the all-comprehensive words of v.16 "...whatever their sins have been." Jesus is, as we would say today, "praying a Scriptural prayer."

Our Saviour in His prayer sets His face against so much of the 'wisdom' of our world that is for instance deeply entrenched in many of the clichés that clutter our minds and litter our speech. We trot them out mindlessly: "ignorance is bliss" or "spiritual ignorance means innocence." Samuel Johnson was certainly nearer the truth...

"Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate, Roll darkling  
down the torrent of his fate?"

As children we enjoyed the nursery rhyme 'Three blind mice.' However, the rhyme continues that "they chased after the farmer's wife who had cut off their tails with a carving knife..." Perhaps we should have learnt that inherent to blindness is a wrong direction. Jesus certainly taught that in this prayer.

One of the most beautiful chapters in the New Testament is 1 Corinthians 13. Now in the first three verses Paul establishes the primacy of 'love'. Even in the midst of miraculous events and

more than supernatural phenomena, love must be controlling, superintending and supreme. Love is the *sine qua non*: that is “an indispensable condition” (in Carnell. 1948:368). As we would say, a non-negotiable. An absolute prerequisite. So, if this is so, then we turn to verse 3 “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.” The Scripture is crystal clear or more precisely if we impose this text on Luke 23:34 how do we fare? Does this text sully or cause Luke 23:34 to soar?

“Soar” is the word. Jesus more than honours 1 Corinthians 13:3... He more than exemplifies and illustrates (and the crucifixion was infinitely worse than being burnt) the power of love – He prays for His persecutors. Not many years later Stephen (Acts 7:60) would do the same. He was a good student of Jesus.

But we are not yet finished with the words of Jesus. He did pray 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' Now the two key-words are 'forgive' and 'do not know' or ignorance. These crucial words are given their counterpoint in Matthew 28:19, 20. Embedded in the prayer of Jesus is Luke 24:46-48. The words of Jesus are pushing us forward, earnestly grasping at John 20:21. Acts 1:8 is straining to escape Luke 23:34.

Looking at Luke 23:34 under the magnifying glass of 'Great Commission' texts suddenly thrusts its relevance at the door of the Church. Exegesis there must be in unbundling the text in the immediate circumstances of Jesus and the early Church – but it dare not stay there. The words of our Saviour are highly relevant for today! To put it bluntly, if Jesus is praying against spiritual ignorance, the 'Great Commission' texts give us the remedy, supply the answer!

It is time we made the switch to the Marsh Arabs. We remind ourselves again that they are Shi'i Muslims...approximately ten to fifteen percent of the world's Muslim population is Shi'i . The rest are Sunni. The Sunni Muslims regard themselves as orthodox. To affirm that the Marsh Arabs are Shi'i (literally of the party of Ali: he was the fourth Caliph) is to know that they believe the initial leadership for the Islamic community should run along hereditary or family lines. Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad. Ali married Fatima the only daughter of Muhammad and his first wife Khadija. Some Marsh Arabs would believe that Fatima is an intercessor before God.

So the Marsh Arabs are Shi'i. They are divided into tribes and numerous sub-tribes and have always been a troublesome people. Fellow Iraqis do not hold them in high esteem...this will be elaborated on later in this book.

Now the Lord Jesus cried out against spiritual ignorance – and this *is* precisely the spiritual status of the Marsh Arabs. This is their existence...this is the primary truth we must understand about them.

To our knowledge – after intensive research and contact – there are no known Christians among them. There is no known mission organisation seeking to “reach” them.

From our observation they are nominal in their belief but that does not mean they are 'near' the Kingdom. And as poor as their knowledge of the Qur'an is, they will know that surah 4:157 teaches that Isa (the Qur'anic name for Jesus) did not die on the cross. The thought that Allah would allow any of His prophets to suffer the ignominy of a death upon the cross is an anathema. The apostle Paul prepared us for this in 1 Corinthians 1:23 “...a



stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

These people are spiritually blind and barren of any faith in the Lord Jesus. But their ignorance is more than dangerous – it is not just that they don't know the truth, but in their ignorance they have been further misinformed by teaching from Islam that has set itself as the final revelation from God. Muhammad is referred to on numerous occasions as the 'seal of the prophets.'

The Marsh Arabs don't just live in an empty spiritual vacuum. In a vacuum yes, but heavily polluted by the fumes of a religion that denies the 'fundamentals' of the Christian faith, namely the Trinity, the Sonship of Jesus and His crucifixion on the cross.

Perhaps I can just digress for a minute and anticipate a question that may be surfacing in the minds of some of our readers – namely how do we regard or understand Islam?

Our answer is, we feel, correctly encapsulated in two portions of Scripture, but with a strikingly similar message. Jesus in speaking to the Samaritan woman (John 4) says to her in v.22 “You Samaritans worship what you do not know...” and Paul at Athens (Acts 17) says in v.23 “...Now what you worship as something unknown...” Both Jesus and Paul combine two elements that are significant to me in my appraisal of Islam. First there is the element of respect. We notice both Jesus and Paul speak of 'worship' and then there is the element of 'ignorance', both Jesus and Paul clearly affirm this.

So here are two 'ingredients' that are clearly in the mix as we seek to reach the Marsh Arabs. Respect must be in place...at face value we are dealing with sincere people but for all their piety their 'world' is dark, distracting and deadening.

We return to the words of our Saviour 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' The knowledge of forgiveness cannot co-exist with an awareness of spiritual lack, in fact it would even seem intolerant of it. Or to re-cast that into our twenty-first century, how many Christians are concerned that vast tracts of humanity are spiritually barren of any saving knowledge of the Christ Who died for the world...see John 3:16.

Open Doors issued a work document on the 5 September 2005. It was called *On The Cutting Edge* ([Opendoors.org.za](http://Opendoors.org.za)). It is a searing statement on the spiritual status of the world. However, despite the wealth of information in this work document we will only concentrate on information that pertains to Iraq. Of Iraq we are told that “since 'liberation' Islam is growing at 2.9% per annum...Christianity is at -1%!” (page 20). On page 29 we have the religious census of Iraq. “Muslim 97% (Shi'i 60-65%, Sunni 32-37%), Christian or other 3%.” And since the Allied Invasion in 2003, what are the prospects for the Church? Here is Open Doors' assessment: “Iraq is definitely one of the countries with the largest crisis, in terms of the future Church. The doors will probably close again and it's a matter of 'use it or lose it' for the Church in the West” (page 53).

So some are predicting bleak prospects for the Church. For our part we re-affirm our confidence in the words of Jesus. Jesus prayed for forgiveness in the face of ignorance and hinged that to expected 'Great Commission' obedience, so we are confident that His word will yet rule. His kingdom will triumph, no one is as opposed to spiritual ignorance as the Saviour. It is the enemy. He will overcome. His light will penetrate what at present seems spiritually pitch dark.

The author – if I may indulge in a little nostalgia – can remember how as children we would be taken to the dentist. Normally on the assumption that we were merely going to town – we suddenly found that our destination was not some harmless distraction but in actual fact the dentist! Our parents kept our real destination a secret, and understandably so. Had we known where we were going, there would have been much protesting – we were kept ignorant of the truth!

Jesus worked entirely on the other end of the spectrum. Ignorance was to be exposed so that forgiveness could be appropriated.

The Marsh Arab lives under a hard taskmaster, the law. He, i.e. the Marsh Arab must establish his own righteousness. He must secure his own salvation. His rituals and religious requirements are endless. His unending and unsatisfying quest to please God casts him back into the ocean of fatalism...

This is the thin edge of the wedge. No knowledge of sins forgiven forces its adherents into a 'straitjacket' as it were...and it boils down to this. 'If I cannot know then God must know' and since He cannot possibly be anything but right and proper in His dealings, I therefore resign. I surrender to fatalism. I succumb benignly to "it's all above me and beyond me but I trust it will all work out well" attitude. What will be will be, as it is commonly stated.

If spiritual ignorance is the enemy of forgiveness, the very denial of hope, then the author prays for God's forgiveness in that for far too long we have been happy to co-exist with the ignorance of others! Readily we have and do confess 'by faith alone' by 'grace alone'... but we have misconstrued the word 'alone' to mean selfishness. We confess our shame. Easily the word 'alone' allows for a concentration on self to the exclusion of others.

***If you preach the Gospel in all aspects with the exception of the issues which deal specifically with your time you are not preaching the Gospel at all.***

Martin Luther (in Ronald J. Sider. *Rich Christians in an age of Hunger: A Biblical Study*. Downers Grove. Inter-Varsity Press. 1977:58)

## 2. PARADISE

“Paradise” is a living word. It is a word straining to burst the narrow constructs of our minds. It wants to run and grow and energise. Again we re-affirm it is a living word. This sentiment we will soon clarify – the use of the word paradise may be infrequent in the English language, but its influence is everywhere. Many were the times our English teacher told us that 'words have meaning' but we were also cautioned to remember that 'meaning has words'...it is this latter and also correct nuance that guides us.

Now we are not sure if Kevin Rushby claimed too much when he entitled his recent book *Paradise. A History of the idea that rules the world* (Constable & Robinson Ltd. London. 2006) but he certainly approximated the truth. Think of the magnificent poetry of John Milton and his especially exquisite 'Paradise Lost' and the later 'Paradise Regained.' Or to range even further the popular musical: 'Sound of Music' featuring Julie Andrews (Rogers and Hammerstein). The climax (if my memory is not leaving me in the lurch) is the beautiful song 'Climb every mountain'. In part the lyrics are... “climb every mountain/ford every stream/follow every rainbow/till you find your dream/a dream that will need all the love you can give...” Surely here we are talking of paradise otherwise re-named.

Or at a more serious level we think of Buddhists and Hindu Vedantists. Robert Brow (in *Religion. Origin and Ideas*. Tyndale Press. First edition; 1966:77) writes that none of them believe in a Creator. In fact they do not believe “even in a beginning. They do believe in a meaning, and therefore a goal for man, which makes them religious.” In other words they believe in a paradise of their understanding without naming it as such.

It would seem that in these two religious examples if origin is

unimportant, destination is not – in every person's horizon there is a focus. Alexander Pope put it like this: “hope springs eternal in the human breast.” Every living being aspires after paradise – some call it 'meaning', others a 'dream' and so on. The concept – the idea – is everywhere. The content to the concepts differ...the true content and concept is only to be found with Jesus. This we will approach later.

The Second World War will forever brood in the memory of humanity. We go to the notorious concentration camp of Auschwitz: Poland. There, David Pawson writes “thousands of Jews, gypsies and other 'undesirables' were suffocated with deadly Zyklon-B gas. Their hair was cut off to stuff cushions, gold teeth were extracted and sent to the bank, tattooed skin carefully removed to make lampshades, fat melted down to manufacture soap, the skinny remains finally cremated and the ashes sold off as fertiliser” (in *The Road To Hell. Everlasting Torment or Annihilation?* Hodder & Stoughton. London. 1992:4). Here in this hell-hole was a man called Viktor Frankl who went on to become Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology in the University of Vienna. Drawing on his experiences of Auschwitz he postulated a teaching that is neatly encapsulated in three words 'will to meaning.' This he saw as the 'primary motivational force' of people. His teaching, counselling and books deplored the lack of meaning that hamstrung so many lives (details in John Stott. 1992:230). In other words Frankl probed the paradise need...he sought in his patients, however dimly, that which Jesus most clearly held out on the Cross.

It is time that we moved to the heart of this chapter, namely, the words of the Saviour to the criminal, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:43).

In v.42, the criminal asked 'Jesus, remember me when you come

into your kingdom.' In Mark 15:32 we read that initially he was a mocker. In Luke 23:42 we now have him as a believer. John 19:32, 33 tells us that he continued to believe, i.e. John would have recorded it if the man wavered in his faith. If he expressed doubt. So even though he died after Jesus there is no hint of regret on his earlier confession, Luke 23:43. To put this even more bluntly – he continued to *believe in a dead Jesus*. We can be sure that some of the onlookers must have thought a bloody corpse is hardly an endorsement for belief in paradise!

The thief did say 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus replied with paradise...hardly what the criminal asked for! Now we cannot speculate why for 'kingdom', 'paradise' was offered. Either word would have been correct. But this we know, grace gives the best, reaches the deepest and proffers perfection.

Commentators tell us that the Greek word for 'paradise' is *paradeisos*. We are told that it came into the Greek language from the Persians (Iranians proudly refer to themselves as Persians) and it is a word that suggests a garden or park. It is a word of leisure. It comes associated with ideas of ease and comfort.

Of course we are curious. How much did the criminal know of Jesus prior to Calvary? After all Matthew 21:10 tells us that “when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'who is this?'” So if we may suppose a little, our criminal friend probably heard of events but on his cross, closely observing Jesus, realised that this 'who' was sufficient for *where* - that is, a King who rules a kingdom. It is 'your kingdom.'

Some anonymous poet must have been thinking of the criminal – and perhaps numerous death-bed conversions when he penned the

words:

'Between the saddle and the ground  
Mercy was sought and mercy was found.'

Augustus Toplady's immortal 'Rock of Ages' has scenes that may have been flashing through the condemned man's mind...

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyelids close in death,  
When I soar to worlds unknown,  
See Thee on Thy judgement-throne,  
Rock of ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

*(The Baptist Hymn Book. London.  
First published 1962, hymn no. 458).*

Now while this word paradise is rare in the New Testament, it does occur again in 2 Corinthians 12:4 and Revelation 2:7. The first has to do with Paul's 'thorn in my flesh' (v.7) and the latter is the church at Ephesus. In both cases we are not given further understanding of this word.

But we are curious. Does the Scripture not somewhere give us a clue of what it will be like for believers who die and therefore go to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:21) before the resurrection? This criminal who believed and 'died in the Lord', is there not somewhere in Scripture a hint of his present existence? Is he maybe a disembodied spirit or is He recognizable? We do believe Scripture has some hints – faint – but nevertheless discernible.

In Mark 9:2-13 we have the 'Transfiguration of Jesus.' We are told



'there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus' (v.4). So the kind of existence Elijah and Moses enjoyed and were experiencing, would be true of the criminal as well.

So Elijah and Moses were present with Jesus and in 'talking' Jesus probably used their names so Peter, James and John would know who was in the company of the Saviour. But more than the facts that they were recognizable and talking with Jesus is that the same core truth of paradise is evident both here and in the words of Jesus on the cross. Here the two 'were talking *with Jesus*' (our emphasis). In Luke 23:43 it is '*with me* in paradise' (our emphasis). This is the core truth of paradise...it is 'with me.' So, in all probability this man knew very little of what paradise meant, or he may even have misunderstood it – but that it is adjacent to a greater reality, namely 'with me' clearly then places it in a realm all of its own. Never was there a word made so rich by the company it kept.

So in the New Testament the word is rare. But in the Qur'an it is the exact opposite. In Arthur J. Arberry's translation of *The Koran* (Oxford University Press. Oxford. First published in 1955; 674 pages) the 'Index' lists pages “4, 29, 63, 112, 200, 224, 244, 300, 307, 374, 409, 457-8, 515, 527, 547, 559-60, 603, 621-2, 627” where it appears. The Arabic word is *Jannah* (often written as *Jannat* as well). It is an Arabic word that every Marsh Arab would know. Every Muslim reveres this word. In fact it would be one of the first words a missionary to Muslims would have to learn. So this is not by any means an insignificant word. It looms large and prominent all over the Qur'an.

Now when a Marsh Arab talks of *Jannat* (you don't pronounce the “t” although it is often written like that) we want to ask what

primarily is in his or her mind?

Recently Mufti Zubair Bayat issued a book (details in bibliography) entitled *Maidens of Paradise*. The back cover reads as follows: “The temporary life of this world is a great test for man. Temptations are many and man is weak. The possibilities of faltering and sinning are not remote.

In this book, some of the rewards of the life Hereafter, especially those relating to the gorgeous, celestial, wide-eyed beauties – the *Hurs* (Maidens) of *Jannat*, have been set out in a clear and concise manner. By reading and pondering about the bounties of *Jannat* and its beautiful virgins, the youth will feel a renewed vigour to fight the carnal desires and strive for the pleasure of Allah by doing righteous deeds. Furthermore, the beauty of the women of this world will appear pale and insignificant before the beauty of those stunning damsels of *Jannat*.”

The above paragraphs clearly intimate sensitive issues...therefore to refrain from intruding on the author's text or imposing our own ideas we have quoted copiously from this little book. It has 65 pages.

Now unfortunately we need to digress and clarify two words that are extremely important for anyone wishing to enter and understand the world of Islam. The two words are *Qur'an* and *Hadith* also sometimes written as *Hadis*.

The Qur'an is a book of 114 surahs (or chapters) which every Muslim believes the angel Gabriel revealed to Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years. He was born in 570 A.D. in Mecca and died in 632 A.D. in the same city.

So, to every Muslim the Qur'an is the Word of God inscriptured

– the Arabic (not the translated language) are the actual words Allah spoke to Muhammad. Further, it is believed that since Muhammad was 'unlettered' he could not possibly have written the Qur'an himself. The Qur'an is about 80-85% the size of the New Testament. Also in our Bibles we speak of verses; the Qur'anic equivalent is *ayat* (*aya* singular).

The Hadith according to every Muslim is the records or traditions of the prophet Muhammad. So the Hadith would, for instance, in the words of Robert Morey “record the words and deeds of Muhammad according to his wives, family members, friends and Muslim leaders which are not usually found in the Qur'an” (in *The Islamic Invasion. Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion*. Harvest House. 1992: 177). Now the reason why we have made this digression is because Mufti Bayat quotes extensively (but not entirely) from the Hadith. This short digression has helped us to a better understanding of the authority that supports the Mufti's quotations.

In the following six quotes I have only left out the Arabic calligraphy.

- Page vi. “Similarly, Allâh has placed in every person the natural desire for the opposite sex, and out of all the desires found in a person, the greatest test for a Muslim is how he fulfils this desire. He can either fail this test by spending all his energy to unlawfully satisfy this desire, or pass this test by remaining chaste and fulfilling this desire lawfully through marriage. Rasulullah (i.e. Prophet of Allah, namely Muhammad...our words) said regarding the severity of this test, 'I have not left a more harmful and severe temptation for men than women.'” (Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim – Hadith literature).

- Page 16. “And they will have fair females with big, lovely eyes who will be like hidden pearls.’ The women of Jannat will be like fresh pearls because of their cleanliness and fair skin colour” (quoting from the Qur'an 56:22 and a commentary).
- Page 21. “The breasts of those women will be round like pomegranates and they will never sag down because these women will never become old” (quoting Hadiyul Arwah 267).
- Page 37. “The person of Jannat will also have 72 wives from the hurs besides his wives from the world, and one of them will have the width of one mile” (quoting Ahmad, Abu Ya'la).
- Page 37. “Abdur Rahman bin Sabit said, 'Definitely, a person in Jannat will marry 500 hurs, 4,000 virgins and 8,000 previously married women. He will have sexual intercourse with each one for as long as he lived in this world” (quoting Bayhaqi).
- Page 37. “The inhabitants of Jannat will be enlarged in size in order to gain maximum pleasure from the luxuries of Jannat. This hadith also proves that one's wife in this world will remain his wife in the hereafter” (Mufti Zubair Bayat).

So, the aforementioned six quotes – fairly representative of the whole book – have sufficiently prepared us for Muslim and Marsh Arab thinking with regard to paradise.

But the thrust of this chapter is that Jesus told the man – and he believed him – that 'today you will be with me in paradise'. Does

Islam offer to the Marsh Arab comparable assurance? Does the Marsh Arab know, even in the context of his/her own religion, that should all requirements be met, all duties fulfilled, all prayers offered that paradise is a certain result? To put it simply, do “good” Marsh Arabs go to paradise?

The answer is a sad and resounding no! Let us clarify: 5 texts from the Qur'an (in Taqî-ud-Dîn Al-Hilâli & Muhsin Khân. Madinah. K.S.A.: no date).

Surah 7:8, 9 And the weighing on that day (Day of Resurrection) will be the true (weighing). So as for those whose scale (of good deeds) will be heavy, they will be successful (by entering Paradise).

And as for those whose scales will be light, they are those who will lose their own selves (by entering Hell) because they denied and rejected Our *Ayât* (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.).

Surah 14:4 And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allâh misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

Surah 16:93 And had Allâh willed, He could have made you (all) one nation, but He sends astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. But you shall certainly be called to account for what you used to do.

Surah 21:47 And We shall set up balances of justice on the Day of Resurrection, then none will be dealt with unjustly in anything. And if there be the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it and

sufficient are We to take account.

Surah 55:7-9 And the heaven: He has raised it high, and He has set up the Balance.  
In order that you may not transgress (due) balance.  
And observe the weight with equity and do not make the balance deficient.

G. Nehls and W. Eric (2005:164) translate the Arabic word *Mizan* as “great balances (scales) to 'weigh' a man's good deeds against the bad at judgement.” This is an Arabic word that every Marsh Arab would know.

Therefore, every Marsh Arab will know that while details of *Jannah* are not lacking in the Hadith literature, *Mizan* firstly looms large and menacing in their horizon. The way to paradise runs directly along a path calculated to instil paucity of hope. Their paradisiacal chimera promises plenty but *Mizan* reduces to penury.

The Lord Jesus did say 'today you will be with me in paradise.' And human beings, because they have been made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1:26, 27) have by virtue of creation a longing for paradise. That is, humanity has been instilled with a longing for 'home'...a longing for ultimate rest, ultimate and final satisfaction. Philosophers coined the Latin phrase *Summum Bonum* – now freely used in the English language – to speak of 'the highest or supreme good' (in Carnell. 1948:368).

So, if human beings, bearing the personal touch of a living Creator God, do therefore long for their ultimate, their supreme – finding again and again that all the world offers is subject to 'rust and decay' – yet they will not cease, indeed they cannot, until only

their deepest longing is filled with the truth. And since God has made them for Himself, nothing will satisfy but the living Christ.

The Marsh Arabs are a living illustration of the above paragraph. They remind us that our talk is not mere theory and high-sounding thoughts. They concretize our chapter. But there is still one thing left. One thing that is more than needful – that is if we want to be delivered from being mere spectators – it is to capture the reaction of William Booth (1829-1912) as he surveyed the misery and plight of people in London in two graphic words 'The (or my) blood boils...' (in John Stott. 1992:348). This is the missing piece the Church needs to bring to all written thus far.

For our final paragraph, we return to the immortal hymn *Rock of Ages*. We quote the third verse...

Nothing in my hands I bring;  
Simply to Thy cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly,  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die!

These words, we feel express the criminal's closing moments. He had no one. He was going nowhere. He had no prospects in his future. He simply had nothing...and it was that absolute brutal nothingness that was offered to the Saviour. Grace embraced him and positioned him for entrance to unsurpassed glory. What an exchange – for nothing, he got everything! This, is the beauty of God's grace in Christ our Saviour.

*What attitude are preachers to take up towards the issues of 'macro-ethics'? They press upon us from every side – human oppression and the cry for liberation; poverty, hunger, illiteracy and disease; the pollution of the environment and the conservation of its natural resources; ... The list seems almost endless. These are the questions which fill our newspapers and which thoughtful university students debate all day and all night. How then can we ban them from the pulpit?*

John R W Stott (in *I believe in Preaching*.  
Bombay. Gospel Literature Service. 1988:162).



### 3. FAMILY

In Genesis 2:18 we read 'The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone...' Calvin saw this as having “a wider reference than to marriage” (in John Stott. *The Living Church*. Inter-Varsity Press. Nottingham. 2007: 91, 92). He was correct. Right at the beginning of Scripture God expresses His concern about a member of the human race being alone or lonely. But we go further. Humanity since then has made great strides in technological and materialistic advance yet despite this, loneliness still haunts many of its members. It persists. Our ever expanding shopping malls madly trying to keep pace with sprawling metropolises cannot erase the loneliness that weighs heavily on many as they immerse themselves in a cacophony of credit and confusion. The 'bright lights' mesmerise but remain a mere mirage. Humans are very much like moths who are drawn to the light, only to mindlessly circle till the inevitable collapse and death.

Entertainment promises much but delivers little. The ache of loneliness will not be healed by a veneer of gaiety. Bacchus still beckons many; the ligaments of loneliness are easily reined in.

Never was anyone so alone as Jesus on the cross. Therefore to reflect on His concern for “Family” makes it all the more striking when we bear in mind *the* situation from where He utters these words. As He “saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing near by, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son', and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother...'” “this disciple took her into his home” (John 19: 25-27).

Let us unravel the text as we journey to the Marsh Arabs. In v.25 we are told that at the cross stood four women, namely “...his

mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.” The second is called 'his mother's sister' or as we would say today, His aunt or aunty. Jesus would have been her nephew. Now if we piece together Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40 with John 19:25 then we find her name is Salome.

At the commencement of Jesus' ministry, in Mark 1 we read in vss. 19, 20 that He calls James and John, both sons of Zebedee to follow Him. It is these selfsame brothers whose mother comes to Jesus in Matthew 20:20ff and asks that her sons be seated at the right hand and left hand of the Saviour in His kingdom. A mother who is spiritually ambitious – would that there were more such mothers – is not reprimanded, instead the implication of her request is taken to a deeper level. There is teaching given. They mistakenly were reaching for power and position. Jesus says in the kingdom service, even death, determines status.

This “ambitious mother”, is none other than Salome the sister of Mary, Jesus' aunt. Therefore when Jesus entrusts Mary to John – the son of Salome – He is putting Mary into the care of someone she already knew very well and loved. His home would have been known to her. In all the agony of the crucifixion of her son, her new home would not have added further sorrow or discomfort. It would not have been strange to her.

Jesus was Mary's eldest son. Jesus had younger brothers – see Mark 3:31, 32 and John 7:1-5. Mark 6:3 tells us that He had sisters as well. But Christian commentators have always felt that opposition to His message even in His own home was severe, that Jesus knew it would be better for her in the home 'of the disciple he loved.' John 7:1-5 clearly hints at the antagonism of His brothers, particularly verses 4 and 5. In fact verse 4 is perilously close to Matthew 27:42, Mark 15:30-32.

Of course with Jesus entrusting Mary to John we wonder where Joseph was? Here we have to fall back again on Christian tradition that has always assumed – and we feel rightfully so – that Joseph had probably died. So if Joseph had died before Calvary then this would have meant that Jesus, Mary's eldest son for a time would have carried more than His normal load of responsibilities.

We are sure that in conducting His itinerant ministry, the knowledge that His mother was captive to a hostile household must in and of itself have caused a lot of grief. More often than not, He would not have been available to help Mary and this probably only increased the scorn of His siblings.

Jesus, in the hour of severe trial clearly thinks of and is concerned about His mother. We are humbled and amazed but in looking at these words the Christian also faces a danger. A temptation. It is that in looking at these events, we may *leave* these words at the cross. It is so easy in looking at John 19:25-27 not to make the *shift* from the *there and then* to the *here and now*!

The apostle Paul helps us to make that “shift” from the cross to the Christian lives we are living now. Paul helps with application and it is found in his magisterial 1 Corinthians 13. In verse 7 we read that “Love always protects...” Paul is able to help us 'see' how the words and events of John 19:25-27 can be honoured by Christians today.

In Galatians 6:12 we are told 'the cross of Christ' is the magnet for persecution. It is impossible to cling to the former without experiencing the latter. Now even in our day there are many who, aware of these specific events and words try to undermine or slur the intentions of the Saviour. So it will help us – and the Church

always welcomes the honest question: it is in the nature of truth to seek expansion and dispel darkness – to assess some difficulties people have with these specific events. Let us look at three.

Jesus called Mary, 'woman' and not 'mother'... was this because He was careful not to implicate her further in the presence of Roman soldiers? In other words – and we use this word with reluctance – was He intimidated by the presence of Roman soldiers?

This is an interesting question but easily answered. In the rest of the New Testament we never find that Jesus ever called Mary 'mother.' When the word was used, it was used by others and not by Jesus. And also when He called Mary 'woman', He was using a pronoun of respect. So when Ahmed Deedat (in *Combat Kit. Against Bible Thumpers who attack Islam & Muslims*. Dubai. 2006:20) accuses Jesus of addressing His mother – 'woman' – with the same word as when speaking to a prostitute (John 2:4; 8:10), he shows a complete misunderstanding of the word. In the time of Jesus it would be a word affirming dignity and worth...His words would always be true to form. As He was, so He spoke. There was no contradiction between life and lips.

We are aware that there are people who accuse the apostle John of using these events to draw attention to himself...after all people remind us, this is the only gospel to record these words of Jesus!

But we must let John speak for himself. It is true that of all the gospel-writers he alone records these words but as to his motive, that is why he recorded what he did, he must be allowed to speak for himself.

In John 20:30, 31 we read “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this

book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” This is why John wrote his gospel, not to promote himself but exalt Christ...and even though John does use himself, it is justified because his end focus is clearly in place. And it is not himself, but Jesus.

It is a rare soul who has not seen or been made aware of the film *The Passion of the Christ* by Mel Gibson. It was astoundingly popular. The author, on numerous occasions, saw the film and wept. The emotional charge was high and draining. Anyway the film had a heavy emphasis – some say too much – on the suffering and anguish of Mary. And the question is then asked – why was John so restrained about recording the suffering of Mary? We infer it from the words but it is an inference nevertheless. John doesn't as it were come out and tell us how Mary suffered...was John a little callous, maybe indifferent?

The answer is near at hand. Luke (1:1-3) tells us of his “approach.” What he does not say is that his approach is unique to him, that he of all gospel recorders *only* uses this method! So we can safely infer that this manner of consulting others would also have been used by John. Specifically, he would have been aware of Luke 2:34, 35. “Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: 'This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.'”

Simeon is delivering a compressed prophesy of the whole Christ-Event but central to the Christ-Event is the crucifixion and it is referred to by indicating the sorrow that Mary will suffer. Scripture, even more brutally than the film tells us how Mary will

and did suffer at the crucifixion of her Son.

We note in passing that in verse 34 Simeon spoke to Mary – he knew by the Spirit that Joseph would not be present at Calvary. We can but wonder if Mary and Joseph later on spoke and pondered on Simeon's omission of Joseph, not to mention the 'sword.'

As we enter the world of our Marsh Arab friends, we soon encounter many dark shadows. For a start we remind ourselves that as staunch Shi'ite Muslims, the book of Islam – the Qur'an – exercises an exacting and precise authority. It brooks no rivals and only the Hadith may enter into its presence. However, the Qur'an is clear and unambiguous. A man may have up to four wives. In *surah* 4 (this chapter in the Qur'an is called 'Women') *ayat* (verse) 3 we read:

If ye fear that ye shall not  
Be able to deal justly  
With the orphans,  
Marry women of your choice,  
Two or three, or four;  
But if ye fear that ye shall not  
Be able to deal justly (with them),  
Then only one, or (a captive)  
That your right hands possess.  
That will be more suitable,  
To prevent you  
From doing injustice.

(A Yusuf Ali. *The Holy Qur'an*. Lahore. 1946:179).

So a Marsh Arab man may have up to four wives – and many

wives are a status symbol – and all these marriages are normally arranged within the same tribe, or blood-related family.

Of course we wonder if this is a happy situation, for many protagonists of the “happy situation” like to quote surah 2 (The Cow) and a part of ayat 228 that reads as follows “...And wives shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; ...” *but* what is not quoted is the continuation of the text namely “...but husbands have a degree (of advantage) over them...” (Ibid.).

No, the fact is multiple marriages are a source of much unhappiness. A woman in such a marriage has no recourse to a divorce court – we have heard of Marsh Arab women publicly burning themselves in protest rather than enter into such a marriage relationship. Tragically, it is the only way they can 'escape' from such an unjust situation.

The situation of Marsh Arab women is symptomatic of the whole of Iraq. The country, if we go back to as recently as 1980 and up until the present, we see that the whole nation has a history of pain and pathos. From 1980 till 1988 Iran and Iraq were involved in a bloody war, until sheer exhaustion alone called a stalemate. Then in 1991 Iraq invaded Kuwait – only to be repelled by the Allied Forces. Iraq retreated and soon the infamous 'Intifada' (uprising) commenced in the country – in the north the Kurds and in the south the Shi'tes rose to try and topple Saddam Hussein. Hamid al-Bayati provides us with careful details here, he writes, “During the Gulf War, U.S. planes showered leaflets over Iraq urging the population to topple the Iraqi dictator with slogans such as 'Act Against Saddam Now.' The Americans also broadcast radio messages to civilians in southern Iraq urging them to overthrow the tyrant. But, when the uprising started, the Allies' response was

incomprehensible. They watched from secure positions on the edge of important towns in southern Iraq while Saddam's forces brutally crushed the *intifada*” (in F. Hazelton. Editor. 1994:142). Initially it seemed the uprising would succeed, but Saddam's forces prevailed. Then Saddam's forces conducted an intensive war of attrition with the intention of annihilation most notably against the Marsh Arabs, till the Allied invasion of 2003. Even as this paragraph is being written, Iraq is still racked by low-intensity warfare and guerilla insurgency.

It is a history saturated in blood. This once proud and sufficient nation – prior to 1980 obesity was regarded as the main problem – is struggling and stumbling. Hope there is in droplets, but doom and destruction are proud in the streets.

Deborah Meroff wrote a courageous book called *True Grit* subtitled *Women taking on the world, for God's sake* (details in the bibliography). On page 183 she spells out for us how these wars impacted on Iraq. She writes “This country's population is 60 percent women, and as many as 300,000 are war widows.” Now of course we wonder how these women – and it would include Marsh Arab women – economically survive?

The Shi'ites have a particular doctrine that is unique to their belief-system. Within their theology they have a belief in *Mut'a* (temporary marriage). A Muslim scholar explains this 'belief'. It is “Marriage for a fixed term and usually for a pre-determined financial arrangement... The marriage may be for any length of time, even for a matter of hours... Sunnis do not hold temporary marriage to be allowable and indeed consider it to be mere prostitution but Shi'is maintain it was a practice that was allowed during the Prophet's lifetime and only later prohibited by the second Caliph, 'Umar” (in *Moojan Momen*. 1985:182). Meroff



takes us further... “Since this practice has official religious approval it is not considered sinful. Nobody has to have a guilty conscience... In Iraq, the practice was banned under Saddam Hussein but has now returned. Huge numbers of widows see it as the only way to survive. Clerics who support *mut’a* say it offers them sexual and financial freedom” (2004: 135, 136).

Jesus honoured His mother. He loved and respected her. Marsh Arab women live in a state of dishonour. Many, if not all are illiterate. Health care is minimal. Their culture assigns to them their work. And work they do. Hard, mindless and menial sources of income are assigned to them. The girls get married exceptionally young and the first wife is introduced into marriage in the home of her mother-in-law. This is hardly a welcome prospect. The young bride will be schooled into how the son must be looked after – and bear in mind, the bride enters into a relationship where her opinion is of least consideration.

The Marsh Arab culture strongly emphasizes the segregation of the sexes with the hardly unsaid assumption that men are superior to women.

And of course if the Church is going to befriend and win their confidence (Matthew 28:19, 20) it will require a more than large component of women being available to do so. Marsh Arab women are so psychologically scarred and scared that a friendly word and a kindly smile will soon open a torrent of pain, expose a heaving heart that is more than ready to find rest in the feminine hands that if looked at closely will bear nail-prints of Another, Whose hands are irradiant with strength and gentleness.

The author has found the commentary by R.V.G. Tasker (details in the bibliography) on John's Gospel to be very helpful. He writes

“Part of the work of Jesus the great High Priest is to create a new fellowship of the redeemed, and to unite human beings one with another by virtue of their common loyalty to Himself. So while He hangs on the cross He bids His mother and the beloved disciple find in their attachments to Himself the basis of a new spiritual relationship to one another (26, 27). Beneath the cross Christian fellowship is born, a fellowship wholly different from all purely human fellowship based on natural kinship, mutual sympathy, or a common outlook upon human affairs. The great and distinctive characteristic of this new fellowship is that all who enjoy it are drawn to one another by the consciousness that they are all brothers (and sisters) for whom Christ died” (1960: 210, 211).

It is a long but beautiful quote. It especially helps us to thread together the Marsh Arab need and the Christian Church. Briefly, if we may restate the quote for our context, we are reminded that Jesus is the Uniting Saviour. He brings people together in a new community – and His authority for doing so is the cross. Calvary is from where He beckons people and Calvary will always remain their focus. The Crucified Saviour will forever be their 'boast' (Galatians 6:14).

In John 19:26, 27 Jesus is making a missions statement. It is the 'Great Commission' in microcosm...it is a small part that explains the whole. It is the thread taking us to the larger tapestry.

John and Mary were told by Jesus to support and love one another. They were brought together in a relationship of serving love. They would serve the Saviour together...so in Genesis 2:18 we have the statement 'It is not good for the man to be alone...' Jesus provides the answer – and to all loneliness – by uniting two disciples under the cross in service to Him.

But a question remains. If the 'Great Commission' is clearly about '...going and making disciples of all nations...' (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:8, etc.) then do we *read* this in the events of John 19:26-27? Is John 19:26-27 not a loving concentration of Jesus on two of His disciples to the exclusion of the world?

The answer is most definitely no! John who penned these events would have done so mindful that we remember the backdrop of John 3:16 and for instance John 15:17. So the events that unfolded in John 19:26-27 is not an unfolding of love that excludes the world but in fact is a teaching, an event illustrating how the Saviour's love is to be seen in His community as they *reach* the world. So John 19:26-27 is only partially an event. It is more correct to call it an event as a means to an end – namely how the sacrificial love of the Saviour is to be seen as His people will seek to include others.

The author was challenged by the book *The Cross of Jesus* by Leon Morris (details in bibliography). He raises an important reminder that we felt is relevant to our point. On page 100 he writes “I am simply drawing attention to a fact of life, that whether we give way to it or not there is always a temptation to let our judgement be coloured by our own self-interest” (1994:100). In our case not to yield to temptation is not to see John 19:26-27 as only applicable to the Church. John 19:26-27 illustrates how the Church will enter the world (a world characterised by crosses and Roman soldiers) and in this hostile world unite people to the uniting One.

John 19:26-27 will not suffer short-sightedness or selfishness.

John 19:26-27 is about Jesus putting people into His family...so that they may remember this is what He continues doing today.

***'Indifference in the world', claimed Dr. Campbell Morgan, 'is largely the result of passionlessness in the pulpit.'***

A Skevington Wood (in *The Burning Heart*. John Wesley :  
Evangelist. The Paternoster Press.  
Exeter. 1976:13).

## 4. FORSAKEN

The little chap was screaming at the top of his voice. His tonsils were even red and angry. All around people were scurrying in consternation, then suddenly round the corner came his mother, her face a picture of pity and petulance.

Of course none of us thought that the little fellow had been reflecting on Eunice Tietjens', *A Plaint of Complexity*, more specifically...

I have too many selves to know the one.  
In too complex a schooling was I bred,  
Child of too many cities who have gone  
Down all bright cross-roads of the world's desires,  
And at too many altars bowed my head  
To light too many fires.

(in H. Richard Niebuhr. *The Responsible Self.  
An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy.*  
Harper & Row. New York. 1963:137).

But if Tietjens was lamenting questions of existence and self-understanding, the little boy was also of the same mood, but just more basic – where is my mother? Everything for him was contained in the presence – perhaps doting – of his mother. She was out of sight, for him being alone or feeling forsaken (and we don't think the little friend would have split hairs), was much of a sameness.

Jesus cried out a clear statement of forsakenness. We read “From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi,

*lama sabachthani?*' – which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of those standing there heard this, they said, 'He's calling Elijah.'" (Matthew 27:45-47). These words are also recorded in Mark 15:33-35.

These are words that hardly make us feel comfortable. There is a rawness about them. We feel as if we are in the presence of a gaping, open wound. And if we try and pin down why this acute feeling of uneasiness, it perhaps comes down to Matthew 27:43, Jesus seems to come very near to reproaching God. If His accusers tauntingly bait Him with 'let God rescue him'... Jesus seems to provide the counter-point: *it is true You have abandoned Me. You could have intervened, but You didn't.*

We are undoubtedly dealing with what theologians call, 'a hard saying'. There are many of them in the gospels, but this one must surely rank as high on the agenda of statements Jesus made and not easily understood.

Our Muslim friends are aware of this verse. In fact *The Noble Qur'an* (no date: 904-913), is taken up with questions regarding certain verses in the Bible.

Matthew 27:46 did not go unnoticed. We quote "This is according to their (Christians') assumption that Jesus cried in a loud voice saying the above words while he was being crucified. This is a great insult as such words could only come from unbelievers in Allâh. Further, it is incredible that such words should come out from a Prophet of Allâh because Allâh never breaks His Promise and His Prophets never complained against His Promise" (page 908).

So, if Christians have found this a *hard saying*, our friends just

quoted say they won't have it or that it is recorded, to them again reinforces their view that our Scriptures must be corrupted! A prophet in their understanding cannot speak like this – but the Christian surely then has the reply: if our Scriptures are corrupted, then it stands to reason that this verse would have been taken out! Surely an embarrassing verse such as this would have been removed. So, its embarrassment actually enforces its authenticity – we are dealing with the real words of Jesus.

However, we return to the text. We note that Matthew and Mark both record that the bystanders did not understand. Wrong conclusions were formulated. We will see in a minute that even since then, little has changed. Who really brought this to my attention was John Stott in his magnificent book *The Cross of Christ*. I gladly confess my indebtedness to this book and gratefully admit that I have read through this book on numerous occasions. However, now we turn to 'wrong conclusions' in our own present day. His pages 79-81. Details of this book are in the bibliography.

Firstly, he writes that some have interpreted the cry of Jesus as that “of anger, unbelief or despair.” He goes on “Perhaps he had clung to the hope that even at the last moment the Father would send angels to rescue him...”

Carefully John Stott turns aside this explanation. It would be “denying the moral perfection of the character of Jesus... (He was not) guilty of unbelief on the cross (nor) of cowardice in the garden.”

Surely there is unanimous agreement amongst Christians in affirming what John Stott further writes “Christian faith protests against this explanation.”



Another understanding or explanation of these words is that they were “a cry of loneliness... (in that) Jesus only felt forsaken...but actually he wasn't.” To put this another way, Jesus was struggling with the *ideal* (the Old Testament on numerous occasions makes it clear that God never forsakes the righteous) and the *actual*, in His very real situation Jesus felt unsupported and alone. In His experience the 'actual' crumbled.

This view, too is rejected by John Stott. These words of Jesus come from Psalm 22:1 and according to Stott, they “express an experience of *being*, and not just *feeling*, God-forsaken.”

The author is also unhappy with this view. It makes Jesus guilty of make-believe or exaggeration or fantasy. He who had said a little earlier to the criminal ‘...today you will be with me in paradise’ obviously had to be in control of reality. We dare not explain the words of Jesus that in any way dilutes truth... He has to be in control all the time, even to the point of absolute truthfulness in His speech on the cross.

The third view John Stott refers to is “the popular interpretation...that Jesus was uttering a cry of victory.” Stott goes on “...although Jesus quoted only the first verse of Psalm 22, he did so to represent the whole Psalm which begins...with an account of appalling sufferings, but ends with great confidence, and even triumph...”

This understanding, John Stott calls “ingenious...but far-fetched. Why should Jesus have quoted from the Psalm's beginning if in reality he was alluding to its end?”

The author was inclined to go along with John Stott's reasoning till he came across the book: *The Hard sayings of Jesus* by F.F. Bruce

(details in bibliography).

On pages 248-250, F.F. Bruce also deals in depth with this verse. He particularly turns his attention to this 'ingenious' interpretation. He writes, "So it has sometimes been thought that, while Jesus is recorded as uttering only the opening cry of desolation, in fact he recited the whole psalm (although inaudibly) as an expression of faith.

This cannot be proved, but there is one New Testament writer who seems to have thought so – the author of the letter to the Hebrews... [he]... more than once quotes other passages from Psalm 22 apart from the opening cry..." So the matter is far from cut and dried, perhaps at best we confess sanctified reticence...what is not clearly spelt out is humbly left to mystery and personal sin-riddled reason.

Now we come to the "fourth explanation (which) is simple and straight forward." He goes on, we are "to take the words at their face value and to understand them as *a cry of real dereliction*...Jesus had no need to repent of uttering a false cry...now (he was) also God forsaken."

This has been well said. In our humble opinion, since Jesus said '...I am the way, the truth and the life...' (John 14:6), plain facts mean that what Jesus said, Jesus meant. However, we would add, while it was 'a cry of real dereliction' ...it was not *final*. Matthew 27:46 is incomplete without Luke 23:46. Luke 23:46 stands not only as the glorious climax of all the '7 Sayings', but essentially as the counter-point to the previous six. However, we will elaborate more on this in the seventh saying of the cross.

This cry of forsakenness...how we but faintly grasp its

terribleness. Its bitterness. We almost ask is this really the same man who said “The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him” (John 8:29).

Incidentally, the 'enemies of the cross of Christ' (Philippians 3:18) tell us that there *is* a contradiction between John 8:29 and Matthew 27:46.

They claim a discrepancy...a wedge must be driven between these two statements. Either one or the other is correct, that is assuming that one of them may be correct!

The reasoning is faulty. Instead of having to choose between the 'either...or' scenario, we claim it is 'both...and.' Both statements are true. The Father never left Him alone. The unity of the Trinity was never broken. Jesus remained the incarnate Son of God...who even on the cross pleased His Father. So as Christians we maintain 'a real but not final forsakenness'... Jesus would in Luke 23:46 gloriously substantiate that. 'A real but not final' understanding precludes friction between John 8:29 and Matthew 27:46. 2 Corinthians 5:19 is clear '... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ...' The chapter goes on, v.21: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...”

This fourth cry opens up to us the horror the Son had to endure – 'the cup he had to drink' in 'bearing our sin' on the cross. The punishment He bore to atone for our sin...surely we can pause with Charles Wesley awhile and take a minute to reflect on one of his most popular, much-loved hymns:

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?

For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me.

*The Baptist Hymn Book.*  
No. 426 v1. Psalms and Hymns Trust.  
London. First published 1962.

This cry of Jesus pierces our complacency. It disturbs our comfortable Christianity. It rebukes our half-heartedness and calls us to fresh courage for the fight. But this call to “courage”, is the very thing Jesus seemed to lack! Did our Saviour perhaps succumb a little to fear – after all, the world's landscape is full of men and women who died courageously for their cause. Many went to death without as much as a whimper...there was no respect given to their enemies. No acknowledgement.

But Jesus cried out...it was a terrible cry, but nevertheless a cry that marked a very special death. Herein lies the difference. In every sense of the word unique: one of a kind. No other human being has or ever will actualize Galatians 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’” Oh, yes the world does have its gallery of heroic souls, brave spirits that faced death without flinching or faltering. But when it comes to comparing such as these with the Saviour, immediately any thought of comparison is shattered. G.C. Berkhouwer puts his finger on the reason why this death in fact defies any hint of comparison... “In this central event of all of history we see definitively, and in clearest relief, how deep the antithesis is and how wide the distance between God and man's sin, as manifest in the God-forsakenness of the Man of Sorrows (Matthew 27:46)” (*Studies in Dogmatics. Sin.* William B. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids.

1971:41). To further probe this idea of a comparison we think of Job. His friends failed him. Everything railed against him, but finally God Himself manifested His presence to Job. The very event that would support and sustain Job, is the very reality denied Jesus. Job's complaint was that he thought "God...had denied him justice..." (Job 27:2). Jesus was not denied justice, He exemplified it. He the just, bore the injustices of the world and suffered the just judgement of God. And yet, this just judgement was an expression of the love of His Father.

When we write of the Marsh Arabs we want to reiterate what we already have stated, namely that we are loathe to make any comparisons of any human being and their sufferings with that of the Saviour. His was the suffering of securing our salvation. He was the substitutionary Saviour, the only sacrificial Lamb, the 'Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.'

Yet the Marsh Arabs have suffered. This particular people group faced an onslaught that was calculated to remove them and their habitation from the face of the earth. This prolonged attack – and we will provide details shortly – was sustained and savage. They have a history of forsakenness that cries out for connexion with the 'Sympathetic Jesus.' They have a history that Jesus understands, He more than any other can relate to, because His history is likewise steeped in suffering – the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). The Marsh Arabs do not obey Jesus. This is because they have not been told. But a 'Suffering Jesus' is a "common ground" that can be profitably pursued.

Now we want to substantiate our previous paragraph's assertion

that the Marsh Arabs have a history of suffering. There are six other authors that we have tapped for their impressions.

Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk.

“The Iraq-Iran War and 1991 Shi’ite revolt reduced their numbers (i.e. the Marsh Arabs) in Iraq from 200,000 to 50,000. Their home habitat has been largely destroyed and many have been displaced to Basra and other parts of Iraq. There is no known outreach to them” ( 2001:357).

Hamid al-Bayati.

“The Mesopotamian marshes are the site of a human and ecological war of horrific proportions. To get rid of the Marsh Arabs who lived in the area for over five thousand years, along with the refugees and freedom fighters, Saddam Hussein is destroying their homeland by draining and poisoning the water and bombing the area...

International organizations such as Amnesty International and Middle East Watch have drawn attention to widespread human rights abuses in Southern Iraq. They have documented the placing of a tight army cordon around the marshes, the control of main access roads, and the imposition of a tight economic blockade. Food and medicines are not allowed into the area, and the inhabitants are not allowed to collect the basic food rations to which all Iraqis have been entitled since the imposition of sanctions in August 1990.

Amnesty International confirms that rat poison has been used...to pollute the water in the marshlands. Napalm has been dropped on civilian homes...(there are) widespread arbitrary

arrests and the torture or execution of detainees...

Those unable to flee often hide deep in the marshes and are surviving in primitive rush shelters. They have been forced to eat grass to stay alive. Many women and children whose menfolk were killed travelled through the night covering themselves with mud and hiding in fetid pools during the day” (in F. Hazelton. Ed. 1994: 141, 144 – 45).

Christina Lamb.

“Troops burnt down villages and set up military bases. What remained of the marshes was allegedly filled with toxic chemicals. Many of the Marsh Arabs fled across the border to Iran. This is where Emma Nicholson first saw them. 'There were thousand upon thousand coming across, maybe 80,000 – this seething mass of humanity full of anguish, many of them sick, she recalls. It was a bitter experience that I will never forget'” (in *The Sunday Times Magazine*. July 27, 2003:24).

Janine Di Giovanni.

“By mid-January of 2004, 270 mass graves had been reported. The Free Prisoners Society estimates that five to seven million people 'disappeared' in the past two decades, the majority of them Shi'ites...

More than 2,000 bodies have been dug up, most of them young men. Their deaths date to the aftermath of the 1991 gulf war when Saddam ordered troops to eliminate Shi'ites accused of rebelling against his regime” (June 2004:28-29).

Emma Nicholson.

“The Western World reacted fast to try and save the Kurds, but took no comparable action for the Shi’ites...where have the modern Iraqi torturers learned their ghastly ways? From what source do they draw and maintain their mental force to continue to cause pain deliberately day after day, night upon night? What impels them to pick up a baby and smash its head to pulp against a door, to kill by beating with iron bars two small girls aged six and eight and then to stuff their bodies in a bin and seat the watching mother on top, then stand and jeer as her poor reason flees and she becomes insane?

They recalled the smell of the bomb that had pulled out their insides through their mouths and bowels as resembling garlic. That meant it was a chemical weapon...” (*Why Does The West Forget?* Spire. London. 1993:108, 111, 112).

Christopher Mitchell.

“These 'amenities' were later described by the United Nations: 'Those who have accepted the offer [of money to leave their homes] have apparently had their livestock and their crops taken from them and have then been placed in controlled collective settlements (apparently called by the Government 'model villages') with no means of making a livelihood. These 'model villages' were described as being little better than concentration camps” (in Editors E. Nicholson & P. Clark. 2003 : 77).

Now we take leave of our six authors. Their comments clearly enforce one point overwhelmingly – the Marsh Arabs have a legacy of suffering. They entered a time of forsakenness. The heavens must have seemed as brass as they called out in prayer



(*du 'ā*). No doubt again and again the prophets' names were called out; the Imams were implored to intervene. The Sayyids were probably asked on numerous occasions to spiritually interpret events. Why did the Hidden Imam not do something?

Moojan Momen wrote a very helpful book called *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (details in the bibliography). Chapter 13 is entitled 'The Popular Religion.' He writes that "The theme of martyrdom and patient suffering is one that is very strong in Shi'ism" (1985 : 236). He goes on to say that since the Shi'ites have experienced so much persecution – often at the hands of their Sunni co-religionists – that this fact should "not (be) surprising." He goes on "The essence of this Shi'i attitude is summed up in the word *mazlūmiyyat* which means the patient endurance of suffering caused by the tyrannical actions of those who have power over you. All the Imams are considered to have displayed this virtue..." (Ibid.).

Now this is interesting. The Marsh Arabs have a history of suffering and severe deprivation at the hands of Saddam Hussein. But even at a deeper level, they have been schooled theologically almost to accept the rightfulness of a "persecution complex." Even the massacre of Husayn on the plains of Karbala has created the sad opportunity to repeatedly reiterate the refrain of suffering.

But what happens on the ground is often another matter. To be more specific...we have heard that they are actually atheists. If the theory is about glorifying suffering, the hard reality is that unrelenting suffering with no possibility of relief very often causes unbelieving hearts to deny the existence of God. After all, when faced with wave upon wave of evil and destruction, then rare is the spirit that can see a hint of light in the blackness of the skies.

John Stott in a chapter that touches on many areas of suffering in the twentieth century, writes “I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as 'God on the cross'...” (1986 : 335).

The Marsh Arabs have an existence synonymous with suffering. Whether they believe in God is debatable. Our answer is how can they believe in God if they deny Jesus? But this we do know, their history of suffering is an open-door, a point of reference to talk about the Saviour who at great cost secured our salvation.

*As I have affirmed at the beginning, the most important root of Spurgeon's social concern was the Bible. As he read, meditated upon, preached and practised the Book of books, his social concern grew and found expression in a network of Christian enterprises...*

*Spurgeon did not read his Bible as a pietist who separated religion off into a private realm removed from social and political life. For Spurgeon the Christian religion is a 'present religion' to use the title of a sermon he preached in 1858...*

*For Spurgeon, love of God and love of neighbour demolished the convenient distinction between the sacred and the secular which many make to justify a concentration on heavenly rewards to the neglect of earthly duties. In preaching upon Christians' calling to let their lights shine in the world, he declared; 'God grant that the day may come when the mischievous division between secular and religious things shall be no more heard of for in all things Christians are to glorify God...'*

David Kingdon (in *A Marvellous Ministry. How the All-round Ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon Speaks to us Today*. Soli Deo Gloria Publications. Ligonier. 1993 : 97, 98).

## 5. THIRST

We have always been avid readers of *Time* magazine. On October 16, 2006 the editors – to our thinking – produced one of their best ever. The cover had a photograph of a transparent jug of water. On the one side of the jug was a teaspoon of sugar. The other side had a dash of salt in a teaspoon...imposed on the cover were the words '*A Fistful of sugar plus a Pinch of salt plus a Jug of water*' and underneath the jug were the words "...is the simplest remedy for a miserable condition. So why does the illness still kill 1.9 million children under 5 each year?" This theme is continued in an article on pages 36-43. The heading is "*A Simple Solution*" and underneath are the words "Diarrhea kills more young children around the world than malaria, Aids and T.B. combined. Yet a simple and inexpensive treatment can prevent many of those deaths. Why isn't it more widely used?" The article is by Andrea Gerlin: publishing details are in the bibliography. Behind the words just quoted is a picture of young boys pumping a water pump in the Dhaka slum in India. The boys look happy. The article is not. It is sombre and seeping with sadness as it raises so many issues that the world community, and certainly the Church, must accept as dire need and damning accusation.

We were disturbed by this article and it certainly would be helpful to hover long over it...but we have lifted from it four levels of information, ranging from the mundane to the perhaps not known or overlooked.

Firstly, we were reminded from the publication that our bodies are so constituted that between 50-70% is water. This is how God made us. Much of what we are is water. God already, via our bodies, tells us that water is important. So, apposite to this, nutritionists tell us that on a daily basis we should drink between

8-10 glasses of water. For some so easy, for many others an impossible dream.

Secondly, the world in the year 2000 reached the 6 billion mark. That could almost be a meaningless or at least incomprehensible figure *but* of that number 1.1 billion don't have access to clean water. A further 2.6 billion lack a basic toilet, the problem being no access to running water.

Thirdly, the article continues “that diarrhoea (which is the result of a water-borne disease) kills more children – an estimated 5000 a day – in the developing world, than malaria, Aids and T.B. combined.” We can only guess at how deeply the heart of God must be disturbed. He surely groans over His creation.

As we take leave of the article we remind ourselves that there is a huge imbalance between wealth and poverty in our world. But the lines run even deeper...a “little thing” like having access to clean, regular water in your home means you are wealthy! To have access to this facility in your home – and you should see yourself as a member of the whole human race – means you daily experience, what to countless others would be a godsend, the very means of survival – perhaps even supreme joy on planet earth. Without a doubt water defines your status in society in the world. Are you powerful or powerless?

John Stott also forcefully brings this to our attention “Almost 2 billion people in the Third World are without access to proper sanitation facilities so that 'water-borne diseases...and a wide array of serious or fatal diarrhoeal illnesses are responsible for more than 35 percent of the deaths of young children in Africa, Asia and Latin America'” (1999:261).

Jesus cried out 'I am thirsty'...the words are preceded by a statement of authority, "Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said..." (John 19:28). This cry embodies His powerlessness, His weakness. But it also encompasses more as we shall soon see.

Now, when our Saviour cried out His thirst, which is the shortest of the 7 statements from the cross, Warren Wiersbe helpfully points out that "In the Greek New Testament it is one word of four letters" (1981:51).

William Hendriksen, an evangelical commentator, struggles to convey the agony these words convey...he writes of "his agonizing thirst"...a little further "to suffer burning thirst" (1954:434). The point is, no one has ever experienced thirst like this before or since. This thirst is more than the sum total of all humanity's thirst, past, present and future. It consumed Him. His whole body cried out in pained unison...this cry arose out of the center of His being. This statement, the first of the 7, made on His own behalf, came with no less earnestness than the other 6.

So, when Jesus cried out 'I am thirsty' there undoubtedly was a physical aspect, but the primary aspect was spiritual. Being the perfect 'God-man', we reason that there was a physical and spiritual dimension to His cry.

Let Scripture guide us here. The apostle John writes of Jesus '...knowing that all was now completed, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled': we reverently ask, which Scripture?

Now the question of which Scripture is not easily settled. The commentators, often close to one another are also in disagreement. However, we have found R.V.G. Tasker very helpful at this point.

He settles for Psalm 42:1, 2.

As the deer pants  
for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, O God.  
My soul thirsts for God,  
for the living God.  
Where can I go  
And meet with God?

(1960:211).

However, to this we would also add Matthew 5:6, i.e. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

So we return to our question, *which Scripture?* Our answer would be *specifically* Psalm 42:1, 2 and Matthew 5:6 and *generally* the whole of the Old Testament. Jesus is the Old Testament fulfilment, He is the one the Old points to in so many ways, be it prophet or priest or king, tabernacle or sacrifice or land... He is the fulfiller of the Old Testament. Gerhard Hasel quotes E. Käsemann: 'the New Testament actually wants to be understood as a whole as witness to Christ' (in *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*. Wm. B. Eerdmans. Grand Rapids. 1978:160, 161). The Old Testament is the invitation to consider the 'witness', to listen carefully to what the 'witness' has to say.

He is on the cross. He is experiencing physical thirst (here we disagree with Tasker who writes “the cry...was in the main prompted by acute physical need.” Ibid.), but spiritually these compressed words are uttering a cry of longing for God. It is a cry of spiritual thirsting and reaching out to His Father. It is a cry of spiritual craving. It is a confession that breathes love and hope to

His Father. Even as His life is ebbing away, He is acknowledging His need of His Father, His dependence, His desire, His driving desire to have His heart only fixated on Him. There is no whisper or hint of a love that is faltering or fading. It is a cry which mystifies us in that it follows the 'hard saying' of His previous cry but nevertheless reveals His fourth cry as free of bitterness or rancour. The fourth cry is firmly supported by the fifth in the unbroken realm of love and obedience.

We acknowledge His great thirst statement of the cross but we pursue a further question, does the Saviour still thirst? The answer is yes. We turn to Matthew 25:34-35 where we read “Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...'” These are the words spoken by Jesus to the righteous at His return at the end of the age to inaugurate His Kingdom.

So the issue of 'thirst' it seems (amongst other needs) will not be settled till He comes in glory. However, the 'thirst' of John 19 is markedly different to that of Matthew 25. The John 19 'thirst' is the 'thirst' of securing our salvation; the Matthew 25 'thirst' is the 'thirst' that is slaked by those already secured in salvation. If John 19 is root, Matthew 25 is the fruit. John 19 is God-ward. Matthew 25 is man-ward and Christ-ward.

I believe John 19:28 and Matthew 25:37 is neatly brought together in John 7:37-39. “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this



he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.” Calvary shows us that His thirst has been slaked. The resurrection is the glorious confirmation by His Father. He is authorized by His Father to give life-giving water. So to Him we go and go and gladly keep on going. We are to be continually drinking, partly because as D.L. Moody said of himself, but which applies to all of us, 'I leak.' Sin wages war against these glorious life-giving waters and since believers drink and continually drink, they seek those who don't. Those who drink, go to those who don't. Or in our context, those who have been to the cross (John 19) go to those who haven't (Matthew 25).

We cannot leave these words without going to v.34, “Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.” The shed blood signifies that salvation is complete (see Hebrews 9:22)...the water signifies new spiritual life. Here we remember when Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman...His words in John 4:14 are “but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

The needy and despised Samaritan woman gives us an entrance into the world of the Marsh Arabs. They too are needy and despised and they certainly are no strangers to water. For as long as anyone can remember, they lived in the South of Iraq. Their habitation was an area of 15-20,000 square kilometres between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the South of Iraq. It was an area of inter-connected lakes, mudflats and wetlands. This was an area that historically formed one of the oldest and largest wetlands on the earth. It often has been extolled by historians and adventurers alike as a place of exquisite beauty. Here the Marsh Arabs fished, carefully tended their water buffalo, while rice and dates were

cultivated. The people lived in reed houses on platforms that gently floated on the water, yet ever vigilant because fresh snow melting in the Turkish uplands plus strong seasonal rainfall brought the regular flooding and upheaval. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were like the people they served, unpredictable. These were a hardy people, fiercely independent and generally resistant to change or modernisation. Wilfred Thesiger in his famous book *The Marsh Arabs* gives us insights into their psyche that has yet to be surpassed. He writes “The desert Arabs had always been a people born to hardship. For them there was no ease or comfort, only the weariness of long marches and toil at well-heads... Stoical in pain, and often very brave, they lived for the raid and the counter-raid...” (1964:97).

People often speak of the early marshlands as the Garden of Eden. Everything appeared so tranquil. The people would only visit the nearest village if they had to sell some of their livestock, reed mats or hand-woven carpets. Milk and yoghurt would be sold at the local market otherwise they kept much to themselves. Almost imperceptibly a social barrier was being formed and a divide between the city and country dwellers was slowly raising a wall of suspicion, that Saddam Hussein would later exploit to his advantage. If the country and city people were allowing a social class distinction to slowly take root, this distinction always brought with it its equally iniquitous henchmen: perceived inferiority or supposed superiority. The city people did see them as different, or to put it euphemistically 'they are not like us.' If the Marsh Arabs saw the city people as different, it was because the city people seemed to have little or no regard for the marshes.

Now the city people distrusted the marshlands and you couldn't blame them. Every fugitive from the law fled into the marshes. Anyone trying to escape from Saddam Hussein would find

adequate hiding in the marshlands. Then of course there was the ongoing tribal feuds – someone was always fleeing from some tribe because in the past some honour had been slighted. Criminal elements were spawned here. This just wasn't the place where *civilised* people go! To those who knew a little, the marshes were certainly not for the faint-hearted... it almost seemed *right* that Saddam's propaganda should lambaste them as it did. The city people didn't know how to distinguish between fact or fiction.

Earlier we referred to Saddam Hussein – he became president of Iraq in 1979. In 1980 till 1988 he initiated a war with Iran that eventually ended in a stalemate. In this war the Marsh Arabs fought alongside Saddam's troops. In 1990 he initiated the invasion of Kuwait. U.S. Forces intervened and the Iraqi forces were quickly repulsed. The aftermath of this victory was that “George H.W. Bush encouraged the Shi'ites and Kurds to revolt against Saddam but withheld military support. The uprising was violently put down by Saddam's forces. Tens of thousands of Shi'ites were killed...” (in Janine Di Giovanni. June 2004:23). It was a terrible time for the Marsh Arabs.

Saddam Hussein unleashed an avalanche of hatred upon these poor people. All possible toxic poisons were poured out on the marsh water. The reed beds were burnt. The people were cut off and isolated as all possible roads or sources of supply were heavily guarded. Villages were endlessly bombed. Many Marsh Arabs were relocated and many of them not seen again. The intentions of Saddam Hussein could barely be concealed – destroy the people and their place. Remove them forever from the face of the earth.

In 2003 there was the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Saddam Hussein was captured on December 13, 2003. He has since been executed. But

the sad saga of the Marsh Arabs continues. Much of their water is still badly polluted. There is still a huge salt content and many, rusty, unexploded bombs in the marshes combine to make the water a danger, a poison that the people dare to drink at great risk to their lives.

The water is far from fit for human consumption. It is “sick” but the people have to drink, animals need water, babies need fluids but the tragedy is that, that which they have always known as their friend, has now become their enemy. As Dr. Iman al-Saady, a physician to the International Medical Corps reported: “Both bloody and watery diarrhoea is rampant throughout the populace, as over 70 percent of patients admitted...come from the marsh villages...” (in *International Medical Corps*. [imcworldwide.org](http://imcworldwide.org) 18/8/2006). It is commonly reported that the mortality rate in fact exceeds 50%...and we gasp, are we wrong, are we overemphasising the truth, when we say, surely rivers of tears and torrents of turmoil attend these facts? There is many a wounded mother even now looking at the marshes...those waters where children very soon learnt to swim. Those waters where children played and laughed. Those waters that gently lapped at fishing lines and on which bobbed slender wooden boats. Now those waters are as one “who comes to steal and kill and destroy.” A predator as awesome as Saddam's fury!

Every preacher knows that a sermon needs application, i.e. having heard what we have, how are we going to respond to the message? So we are moving to that part of the chapter that can be likened to the application. Surely this is true of literature as well – seeking both to inform and engage.

In this chapter, in line with the text – our point of departure – we have leaned heavily on the importance of water. Now let us for

argument sake say, the Marsh Arabs had no water as part of their existence, then would this text and chapter have been meaningless to them? To restate this, if they did not enjoy a water-based culture then would it have been fruitless to talk of 'thirst' and the association of water?

The answer is no. But let us prove how we can still talk in terms of thirst with reference to them even if they were strangers to rivers and lakes and so on. It goes without saying that we will come to the “no” answer only by using Scripture.

Firstly, the Marsh Arabs like us are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Paul at the Areopagus is emphatic – Acts 17:16-24 – that 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth...' (v.24). John 1:3 makes it clear that “Through him (i.e. the Word) all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” Hebrews 1:3 teaches us the same truth, i.e. Through Jesus, His Son, the universe was made. Colossians 1:16 teaches us the same truth. So the Marsh Arabs – despite all their sin and ignorance – have been created by God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

However, since God has created the Marsh Arabs, the Scriptures then tell us His fingerprints are all over them...God creates people with hints all over them and the world that Someone wonderful created them and desires that they seek Him. Let us see if Scripture can support what has been said thus far. The author of Ecclesiastes tells us of the huge hint the Creator leaves in the lives of men and women in that “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men...” (3:11).

Paul, in his powerful first chapter of Romans really lays out all the *hints* God bestows upon man. V.19 “...since what may be known

about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them, v.20 ...clearly seen, being understood... v.21. For although they knew God... v.28 ...worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God...” To put it in human terms, God certainly is not shy or modest about Himself...His product was made good, the Producer is goodness personified. Even Paul's defence before Agrippa (Acts 26) has the apostle recounting how Jesus told him “...‘It is hard for you to kick against the goads’” (v.14). So what are these 'goads'? Is it something unique only to Paul? Or if we take what he wrote in Romans 1, then to restate his words...he was guilty of resisting the truth of God as supported by the evidence of His 'hints' or 'fingerprints.' There certainly were factors in his life unique to him, he was present at the persecution of Stephen, launched attacks against the Christians, had a very rigorous and excellent religious training... but for all that, he shares our humanity and lived in the same world as we do. God parades His perfections for *all* to see. God is the very antithesis of a good crime story, He leaves so many clues around, the question is why can't humanity *catch the culprit*? The sad answer is, because they don't want to.

Now we come back to our friends, the Marsh Arabs. Thus far we have seen that God created them. Further, the good Creator has left clues all over for them and over the world... He is definitely leaving no one in the dark about Who is in charge, Who 'calls the shots' in our universe. So where does this leave the Marsh Arabs and in fact all unsaved people?

The answer – and using our chapter as a reference point – is that all those apart from Christ experience 'soul thirst.' This tormenting, haunting, must-be-filled, vacuum in our lives that demands that we worship. Paul said to the Athenians 'what you worship as something unknown...' (Acts 17:23); they had the right sentiment (thanks to God's 'hints' He bestows on us) but the wrong

theology... He certainly is not 'unknown.'

Yet there *is* a sense in which God is 'unknown'. He will remain hidden and will continue to do so in direct proportion to the Church's missionary obedience or lack thereof. The Marsh Arabs and countless other groups claim ignorance of the glorious gospel of God in the person of Christ the Saviour. They are being denied life-giving water. May it be that those who know the joy of having their *soul-thirst* slaked, remember those in the 'dry and parched land.'

***Interpreting the realities of our time is manifestly a task  
for theologians and preachers.***

HJC Pieterse. ( in *Preaching in a context of poverty*.  
University of South Africa. Pretoria. 2001:2).



## 6. COMPLETION

We have been waiting feverishly to get into this chapter. Almost everything written before has been suffused by this chapter. But let's first go to the rich soil from which we will harvest our thoughts. In John 19:30 we read “When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.'”

Our Saviour received the drink – clearly this gospel was written by an eyewitness – and He cries 'It is finished.' The Greek New Testament has one word *τετέλεσται* (*tetelestai*). Next to the Greek word for grace *Χάρις* (*charis*), it probably is the most famous, well-known Greek word among Christians.

This word 'tetelestai' is a cry of victory. It is a statement of triumph. The angels of heaven, in their countless throngs must have re-echoed and repeated the word endlessly. The courts of heaven reverberated with their joyous refrain.

Jesus is saying 'My mission is complete.' With flying colours the Saviour holds up the trophy – the salvation of “a great multitude, that no one could count” (Revelation 7:9). And when the Scripture tells us that 'no one can count', it means precisely that. These words are most certainly not the gasp of a tired worn-out life. This is no whimper. No tinge of a whine to them – these are words of a glorious declaration. Could we but see Him. He is manifesting His glory. The Church Fathers saw it and spoke of His reign from the tree (in Michael Green. *I believe in Satan's downfall*. Hodder & Stoughton. London. 1980:95). The cross, they said, is His throne. We certainly sometimes wonder how Scripture could record such wonderful words without catching alight...how Scripture can contain itself to words on paper and not burst out in a paean of praise.

Now we proceed further. He cried out 'it is finished.' We then ask – what is finished? To this question there is both good news and even better news. The 'good news' is that our sin, our disobedience He took upon Himself and He satisfied God. That is, the Old Testament tells us the “soul that sins, shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). He who knew no sin, took our sin and in our place, paid our penalty. He died our death for us. He did for us that which we could never achieve even if we were given a million lives.

But the even better news is He opened heaven for us. The curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. The sin-barrier that set God's face against us crumbled against the avalanche of grace. Access into the presence of God was secured – our sins were erased by the blood and our names were engraved in the wounds of His body.

He finished what we had started. We started with a contribution – our sin – He completed our contribution: He killed it. Nailed it to the tree and publicly humiliated, defeated, drove it back. Sin flees before grace. Recoils in horror at such holy love. In 1 Samuel 24:14, David in speaking of himself says to Saul '...Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea...?' Sin can regard itself proud even if such terms and language can be applied to it. Calvary has wrought such havoc in the quarters of sin and Satan that was signified not only by the cry of Jesus but also by the endorsement of the resurrection.

We were always glad for the Easter week-end, when we could hear thrilling sermons on the death and resurrection of Jesus. But what we often experienced was that the 'Good Friday' messages would emphasize the death and defeat of Jesus and the 'Easter Sunday' sermons an emphasis on His victory. So the cross was His defeat, and the resurrection a public victory.

It seems that preaching of this nature over the Easter weekend has largely stopped. The cross *is* His victory. The resurrection the endorsement. The cross *is* the achievement of salvation accomplished – the resurrection is the ratification that this is so. The public authentication. The confirmation. The cross is Jesus taking on the fight and winning. The resurrection is the Tri-une God preaching the victory.

Later on in his gospel, the apostle John would write of the resurrected Jesus, but there is no mistaking it, nothing John writes of the resurrection is as powerful and striking as what he has recorded of Jesus on the cross...the sweep of *tetelestai* is so all-embracing and large. It is the unrivalled word of Christ's victory (it certainly speaks of grace) – no wonder it will be paused on and pondered at, as long as the cross remains the symbol of Christianity.

We are really struggling to get away from this point of Christ's glorious victory before we move to the Marsh Arabs, but by now we feel the issue is clear – this was no pyrrhic victory, no, not a 'just-just win' victory, a by 'the skin of His teeth' victory. It was enshrined in glory. And even more, we are concerned that anyone should think of Jesus here as a martyr.

The *Chambers Dictionary* defines a martyr as “a person who by their death bears witness to their religious belief... Or a person who suffers for their belief.” This word 'martyr' is certainly not unknown to us. Many people have died for their beliefs, be it political, nationalistic or religious beliefs. Sadly, one of the traits of the twentieth century has been that many Christians have in particular been killed for their faith. And we are as concerned when for instance in India militant Hindus kill Muslims and vice

versa.

However, we have to draw the line and get our thinking and speech right...others died for a cause. Jesus *is* the cause that His death and resurrection would authenticate. Others had their lives taken from them, Jesus gladly gave His life with the approval of the Father and the Spirit. Leon Morris has a brilliant statement relevant to this point: “Salvation is not something wrung from an unwilling God by the desperate intervention of a compassionate Son who took pity on those subject to His Father's destroying wrath” (1965:154).

Many Christians died for Jesus but that was only because He first died for them. He, the victim became the victor, other Christians died and in their death also overcome “the accuser of our brothers” (Revelation 12:10) but their victory is rooted in His victory “by the blood of the Lamb” and then “by the word of their testimony” and the ensuing death they endured (Revelation 12:11).

At this point we want to make a huge digression to reach deep into Islamic history and from there work down to our Marsh Arab friends and finally we tie the knot by showing that this word *tetelestai* has huge significance when talking about them.

Islamic history starts with Muhammad. He lived from 570-632 A.D. in the country we know as Saudi Arabia. There is a little mystery about his death – the rumours that he was poisoned have never gone away. However, Muhammad never appointed a successor, although Shi'ites claim he did, namely Ali. We will come to this a little later on.

So after Muhammad died the Muslim community appointed Abu-

Bakr as Muhammad's successor or Caliph. He was an old friend of Muhammad's – one of his first followers – and also had been his father-in-law. Aisha, Muhammad's favourite wife – and also youngest – had been given to Muhammad by Abu-Bakr (the word 'Abu' means father of). He died in 634 A.D. He was followed by Umar who was Caliph from 634-644 A.D. An Iraqi slave assassinated him while he was praying. Historians tell us he was a brave man and like Abu-Bakr, had a daughter – Hafsah – who was also married to Muhammad. He is most notably remembered as the one who set in motion the process of having the Qur'anic fragments collected and brought together in one book.

After Umar's death, the 'faithful' appointed Uthman as Caliph. He was in this position from 644-656 A.D. This man was murdered and obviously in great disgrace buried in a Jewish cemetery. However, he is singularly remembered as the one who established the Qur'anic text. On his authority portions were included and other portions either ignored or even burnt. In 656 a new Caliph was appointed. Ali, the nephew and adopted son of Muhammad, assumed the Caliphate. Earlier it was noted that he had married Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad and his first wife Khadija. He was murdered in 661 by a disillusioned follower.

The Marsh Arabs are Shi'ites. That means that they believe that Ali should have succeeded Muhammad – that Abu-Bakr, Umar and Uthman should receive no recognition. Further they believe these three Caliphs were in fact hostile to Ali and that nothing good can be said of them. Sunni Muslims regard all four Caliphs as *rightly guided*. Shi'ites do not hold to this.

Coming back to Ali and his wife Fatima, they had two sons Hasan (lived from 624-669) and Husayn (626-680). Hasan, the elder inherited the Caliphate but abdicated at the suggestion of the

Syrian, namely Mu'awiya. He died later, popularly believed by poisoning at the hands of one of his wives. It is commonly believed that Mu'awiya was behind this although Norman Anderson believes he "retired to end his life in dissipation at al-Madína" (*Islam in the modern world. A Christian perspective*. Apollos. Leicester. 1990:15).

The younger brother, Husayn chose to fight against Mu'awiya's son, Yazíd 1. Muslim historians record that his party of approximately one hundred, including women and children were slaughtered (a few were spared) on the plains of Karbala – not far from the marshes – by a force numbering one thousand strong.

Now this massacre of Husayn (incidentally after the battle his head was sent to Yazíd) is celebrated annually by Shi'ites – Marsh Arabs included – at an event called 'Ashura.' This event that happened on the plains of Karbala imposed upon Shi'ites their identity. This event more than anything else would shape how they in the future would see themselves collectively. Their 'personality' and piety cannot be understood apart from the martyrdom of Husayn. Incidentally the shrine of Husayn – a place of pilgrimage – is at Karbala.

From what has been said thus far we need to make the transition to current beliefs and practices. We need to "earth" the present into their past history. Here are at least two matters that we feel are relevant:

Every time a Marsh Arab or any other Shi'ite says the *Shahada* (i.e. Their confession of faith or Creed) the words are: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger. Ali the Friend of God the successor of the Holy Prophets." To all Shi'ites Ali is regarded as a divine person. It is believed by Shi'ites that

Muhammad said “O 'Ali! When the Day of Judgement comes, we will be seated on the Path, you, Gabriel and I, and we will not permit anyone to pass who does not possess a writ of being guiltless with respect to your authority” (in *Momen*. 1985:159). The Shi'ites highly revere this man – all over Iraq you have pictures and posters of what popular legend portrays as the face of Ali. This is striking because the official policy of Islam is that the face of Muhammad and that of his successors are not to be shown. Many Shi'ite children have his name.

There is not a hundred percent certainty that he is buried in Najaf although most believe this is the site. So every Marsh Arab and Shi'ite would desire to be buried near to Ali's burial site, so he can intercede for them.

The other issue that is also important – very important – is the death of Husayn. This event, as we said earlier is commemorated annually in what is surely, even to them, a terrible commemoration. Needless to say outsiders are not permitted to the ceremony in which there is whipping of the backs, cutting themselves with knives and rhythmic beating on their breasts. In short, all is done by the men to the admiring gazes of the women; preening of debased masculinity in the guise of piety as the memory of Husayn is recalled and enacted.

However, Husayn is more than a striking memory – to the Shi'ites, he *is* the ransom for his people. He *is* the intercessor before God (in David Wells. *Turning to God. Biblical Conversion in the modern world*. Carlisle. Paternoster Press. 1989:108). How this paragraph should jar the Christian. He should feel stabbed in the heart as he begins to experience the horror that can be likened to what we feel at the atrocities in Sudan, the rape of Yugoslavia, the slaughter at Auschwitz, the memory of Hiroshima and

Nagasaki and other wounds of our world.

But of late, if the previous paragraphs of Husayn's significance is not already enough, there is another way that the memory of Husayn functions. A more recent innovation has come to the fore. Since the 1960's, writes Said Amir Arjomand "A drastic change in the conception of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn set in with the clerical agitation" in the country of Iran. He continues... "(his) martyrdom is thus interpreted as a political uprising against an unjust and impious government, and thus the model for Shi'ite political activism... Khumeini himself has excelled in the glorification of martyrdom, at times attaining poetic and mystical heights. He has enjoined martyrdom for Islam as a religious duty incumbent on each and every individual. The youthful Guardians of the Islamic Revolution dutifully acknowledge their eagerness for martyrdom... This is done in a last will and testament which is published in the newspapers if they attain martyrdom" (in Said Amir Arjomand. Editor. *Authority and Political Culture in Shi'ism*. Albany. State University of New York Press. 1988:201). Of course, this sad development we may surmise probably did not "infect" Marsh Arab thinking, yet on the other hand, new radicalised ideas may have had rapid movement from one country that lies so close to the other.

On paper it seems as if we have drifted far from the glorious *tetelestai*. We mean how far at the other end of the pole is Ali, Hasan, Husayn or in fact *is* there a connecting truth? There is!

Let's put it like this. Let's say there was a supermarket of world religions, beliefs, ideologies...well we would certainly be flabbergasted at the wide array, not to speak of the enormity of religions in this supermarket. But for all the bewildering multitude that confronts us, for all the billions in the 'store'...there is *only*



one that says finished. There is only one that says complete. There is only one that says finalized – and this one we know as the Christian faith of the grace of God revealed in the Lord Jesus.

When Jesus cried *tetelestai*, He meant (slightly adapting the words of the great hymn *Rock of Ages* by Augustus Toplady) that there is nothing in our hands that we can bring. We are totally bankrupt of any personal righteousness. Every other religion in the supermarket is unfinished...the adherent has to do something and to continue doing something, adding something, adhering to something. Needs to bring something.

Now the supermarket has a neat divide separating 'finished' from 'unfinished', and we note a further truth. It is that with 'finished' we know certainty. With 'finished', we have a humble confidence... after all when our Saviour says 'finished', He means just that. With 'finished' comes assurance. Now, it may seem that we are under-emphasizing faith, that is our necessary response to the work of Christ our Saviour. No. We are certainly not under-emphasizing faith...it is that when Jesus secured our salvation, included in that glorious event, are the believers who will exercise faith. That we will exercise faith was incorporated in His great work. So there is no denying the crucial importance of faith, but that we exercise it, was given to us by grace... so we start by grace, continue by grace and that is how the Church will gloriously finish! So what we are saying is that Jesus did not simply provide salvation, He secured His Church in His great gift.

But there is still one thing needed. If we can return to our 'supermarket of world religions', then we noted a line between 'finished' on the one hand and 'unfinished' on the other. What is still needed – in fact commanded in Scripture – is that those who are on the side of *tetelestai*, those who know the security of this

great word *cross* the line to unfinished. If with knowledge, i.e. Christian knowledge, comes responsibility or those to whom much is given therefore much will be required, then those on the right side, i.e. by God's grace, need to cross to those who have not.

Sometimes theologians speculate on whether the 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28:19-20) was a command, a definite order given or was Jesus simply affirming what they would come to experience – a compulsion, a drive, an irresistible loving force. In this second view Jesus was more giving guidelines as to how their living life-force should operate. How the living water should flow.

Now of course the second option is more attractive and we think of times in the Church when love to Christ was free and unfettered and simply wanted to run and blaze and *be* Jesus all over the world. But the Church also needs to take cognizance of the first understanding of the 'Great Commission' – Jesus is the King and His subjects are to publish His fame throughout the world. The tragedy is that people – the unsaved – reason back from the unwillingness of the subjects to a most probably not such a great King anyway!

And we wish – and will pray – that this book could be issued where the 'spontaneous love' aspect of the understanding of the 'Great Commission' is prevalent – and in small pockets of the world known to us this is so, like parts of China, Africa – but by and large the 'law' understanding of the 'Great Commission' has to be preached. But whatever it takes, the Marsh Arabs are on the unfinished and uncertain side of the line...may this book be blessed by many line-crossers.

***Events transpiring in the world often give occasion for proclaiming one aspect or another of Christian doctrine. Jesus set the example. Luke 14:28-33 records two parables...***

J. Carter Swaim (in *Baker's Dictionary of Practical Theology*. Editor: Ralph G. Turnbull. Baker Book House. Grand Rapids. 1<sup>st</sup> Printing July 1967:29).

## 7. DESTINATION

As I was working through this book I also managed to read John Piper's *don't waste your life* (Crossway Books. Wheaton. 2003). A really brilliant and exciting book – it breathes life and worship and frontier missions. The last chapter in part takes the form of prayer and a call to commitment. On page 184 he quotes the scripture 'Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.' "Is this not because the most loving thing about your love is that it brings us home to you – with eyes and hearts and minds able to see the riches of your glory?" How wonderful – and also we felt a fitting and appropriate point of departure to launch into this particular chapter.

Scripture is very precise. We read "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this he breathed his last" (Luke 23:44-46).

In this final cry of the Saviour, He announced His 'Destination', He proclaimed His Father's association and identification with His work of salvation.

We have already noted that Jesus went voluntarily to the cross (John 10:18). As the moment of death came, He was in control. His own self-determined act of sacrifice in unison with the Father and the Spirit, He is now bringing to completion. He dies. This truly was a unique death...His cry 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit' was the cry of confident self-commendation. Jesus is His own authority. He alone of all humanity is able to commend Himself entirely on the merit of His own worth. He is

His own authentication. This must have made such an impression on Stephen that later he takes this cry to his lips and he addresses it to the Lord Jesus (Acts 7:59).

David Pawson writes of a time when Billy Graham was “asked by a B.B.C. interviewer what his first thought in heaven would be, instantly replied: 'Relief!'” (in *The Road to Hell. Everlasting Torment or Annihilation?* Hodder & Stoughton. London. 1992:63). Jesus' first thought – well we surely cannot stray from this text, we don't need to, these words few and pregnant with meaning imply joy and pleasure and wonder. In fact we wonder if Jesus didn't have a smile on His blood-splattered face...and what of the two thieves on either side? That only one believed in this private antechamber of God's glory sadly reminds us again of the power of sin. In the Presence of such majestic fullness that only one asked truly astounds us. God in His Son so clearly moved in triumph in this triangle and yet only on the lips of one was mercy sought.

When Jesus was on the earth, like us, He had one life and obviously one death. But Jesus in His death, didn't become what He wasn't in His life. He didn't become more spiritual in His death – all the way from His birth till His ascension, there was a consistency. There was a smoothness, a straightness that escapes all of us. If our lives could be plotted on a chart, there would be highs and lows and perhaps even blobs of blackness – but with Jesus, all of His life was an expression, an attitude that He would articulate as the last saying of the cross.

It is easy to think of this need of consistency as almost an unattainable...but the apostle Paul preached it and sought to honour it. In Philippians 1:21 he writes “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” This is the same straightness or

evenness that we see of Jesus...it certainly is not the rigidity of a dull and uninspiring life. It was a life that was fully engaged in the world. Jesus said 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit', He could have said that confidently at any time in His glorious life.

We are fascinated and enthralled by this last statement but there has always been one thing that niggled us. It is, what is the relationship between this statement and the previous six? It is all good and well to look at them individually, but is there an underlying spiritual unity – is there a linkage between them? We believe that there is. I believe the last statement is the counter-point to the previous six. The previous six all point forward to this last statement – this last statement, we believe was necessary to round off or culminate the previous six.

Now we know that the one criminal became a believer in Jesus. So he witnessed all 7 statements and nowhere do the gospels hint that he changed his mind. He remained a believer till he died. So let us reason from his vantage point – although he became a believer at the second statement, we are sure the remaining 5 only solidified his faith...simple as it was in very trying and brief moments.

First of all, he witnessed Jesus praying for forgiveness against *spiritual ignorance*. Then at the end he saw Jesus committing Himself into His Father's hands: this was proof that Jesus had such a confidence and love for His Father that must have underscored the truthfulness of Jesus' prayer. The seventh statement helped the criminal to see that the first statement spoke of a man that was more than worthy of his trust. The first statement was of a man praying for forgiveness for others, the last was clearly of a man who did not personally need forgiveness. The last only reinforced the first.

The second statement has the criminal calling upon Jesus and rebuking the other criminal. Jesus tells him '...today you will be with me in paradise.' The last statement made it clearer to the criminal what Jesus meant: it would be that which will be enjoyed with the Father.

The One that Jesus addressed in His first prayer, will be present in paradise. Not only the One Who promises access, but also the One towards Whom Jesus also looked forward to, for paradise. The criminal looked forward to a Father as well – maybe for the first time in his life.

Thirdly, Jesus made the statement about *Family*. Now let us assume this criminal had a terrible life, let us wonder if he had any family to care for him – the gospels certainly don't tell us of anyone identifying themselves with him at his crucifixion. The crowd certainly did not call for his release. Anyway, the criminal sees Jesus making a statement over His family – the seventh statement speaks of such trust and love that will under-gird all healthy families. Jesus speaks to His Father in such sweet speech that all families should aspire to, as their members move and converse with one another.

Jesus cried out in His terrible thirst. Now in the seventh statement the criminal saw this thirst being slaked, satisfied as Jesus prepares to return to His Father.

The criminal no doubt was shocked at the fifth statement. It may have seemed such a contradiction to what Jesus said in His first statement...it may even have lessened a little the confidence that resulted from the second statement, but the seventh statement would deal any doubt a fatal blow. The seventh statement shows

that the fifth statement was indeed true but temporal. The seventh statement exposes the fifth statement as brutally honest but not eternal. The fifth is helped by the seventh to be seen as momentary. And we don't use the word "momentary" to in any way slight the depth and enormity of Jesus' fifth cry.

When Jesus cried out *tetelestai* the little that the criminal understood of Jesus, it must have seemed that here Jesus is at His climax, the full-throated cry of victory – but the criminal must have wondered after this cry, where does He go from here? What is the next step, so to speak? The next step – the seventh – is Jesus reaching His *Destination*. If the sixth statement was that of the cry of glorious victory at the door – the seventh is the door opening and the victor welcomed in. The sixth was the announcement – the seventh the reception fit for a King. The criminal was not to know that the sixth statement would later be authenticated by the resurrection – but until then Jesus utters His seventh statement. The seventh statement gives us visible proof to the sixth statement...the sixth statement was uttered by pure lips, the seventh statement a glorious further follow-through. This movement was continued and taken up by a new life in the resurrection.

So as glorious as the first six statements are, the seventh is the seal, a culmination of what went before. The seventh statement enhances the first six – if we dare say that. The seventh is as application...in the counsels of God, Jesus made seven statements on the cross. There is an underlying unity to them. They are not only connected by the cross. Their glorious crescendo cascades out in the seventh.

Now before we visit our Marsh Arab friends in this chapter, is it not possible that we are overstating the seventh, if that were



possible? Are we not perhaps a little unbalanced here – putting too much emphasis on the seventh? No, we don't think so. To us it seems the seventh statement is also a statement sealed by God...we read in v.47 “The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” We believe the centurion's salvation is God's outward confirmation of the truth and reality of what Jesus said in v.46. We realise that the 'centurion, seeing what had happened' may refer to the whole crucifixion and the supernatural phenomena of verses 44, 45; nevertheless that the centurion's response is directly after the words of Jesus which is placed after the events surely is significant...we feel Luke wants us to see the centurion responding to the last words and actions of Jesus. That is, not to the exclusion of the other events, but primarily to focus on Jesus' seventh statement.

It is time we brought our Marsh Arab friends into the discussion. Let us start with God – they would speak of Allah. To all Muslims, Marsh Arabs included, Allâh is *transih* (Arabic for “aloof in His majestic glory, and detached from all else” in *Dear Abdallah*. Gerhard Nehls. Page. 36. No publishing details and date). So Allah is exalted and distant. He has no personal contact with mankind. The only contact that He had is through the prophets – Muhammad being the 'seal of the prophets' – and of course the Qur'an.

But we go further. Jesus in Luke 23:46 spoke to His Father. This word *Father* is foreign to Islam. It does not even appear in the Qur'an. As much as Christians love and find comfort from this word, to our Marsh Arab friends it has physical connotations and therefore is repulsive.

What our Marsh Arab friends may not be aware of is the

controversy between their forebears and their contemporaries.

Sunni Muslims regard the Qur'an as the eternal, uncreated word of God...this, said their Shi'i counterparts, is nothing less than a belief in two gods, hence polytheism. The Marsh Arabs will understand that the Sunni theologians took their position precisely because they wanted to honour both Allâh and the Qur'an. And for them *honour* meant equality. And included in this equality understanding would be length of time. That is both the Qur'an and Allah are eternal. The Shi'i theologians also wanted to honour the Qur'an and Allah – but it was felt that the same honour could not be attributed to both for the same length of time – there had to be a distinction made. Honour could not associate equality. There had to be a distinction made with reference to time. And of course what vexes the question even further is, who is right – the Sunni or the Shi'ites? Jesus in His final cry on the cross unites honour and equality. That He makes His statement is Him honouring His Father – it is 'your hands' and that His Father receives 'His Spirit' speaks of closest equality and worth. Besides in Luke 23:43, the criminal is promised paradise with Jesus, it is 'with me.' In v.46, it is 'Father into your hands', the “honour and equality” of Jesus is clearly seen.

Every Marsh Arab and every Muslim will in fact tell you that Allah has 99 names or attributes...so for instance He is referred to as The Merciful, The Compassionate, The Creator and so on. But sadly we again note that Father is not one of the names.

Our Marsh Arab friends will know at the core of their faith is the belief that 'there is no God but Allah!' (Abd Al-Masih. *Who is Allah in Islam?* Light of Life. Villach. No date: 17, 18). Al Ghazali, one of Islam's greatest theologians, spent a lot of time meditating on “The 99 Excellent Names of God.' He wrote that

these names can mean everything and yet nothing. One name of Allah can negate another and the content of one may be included in the next. No person can understand Allah” (Ibid. 23).

This is the deep tragedy of Islam and of the Marsh Arabs, in seeking to resist the Father of Jesus acknowledgement and entrance, they have had to settle for emptiness. Because they have resisted everything, they have ended up with nothing. Our Marsh Arab friends are labouring under Islam's great denial, indeed theft – they have been robbed of the great teaching of the Fatherhood of God received in His Son.

But if this were not tragic enough, there is another greater harm that they suffer and will continue to suffer lest the Church of Jesus do something. In short they have been murderously robbed: they do not know the love of God! They haven't even begun the journey that for all of us starts at John 3:16. Let us substantiate this statement from the two other authorities. John Gilchrist quotes surah 3:31 – 'Say: if ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you, and forgive you your sins' – and continues “Significantly, however, one does not find in this verse (nor in any other in the Qur'an) the command to love God with 'all your heart, soul and mind.' The reason is fairly clear from the verse itself. The hearer is exhorted to love God so that he may thereby obtain God's love and forgiveness” (in *The Love of God in the Quran and the Bible. Jesus To The Muslims*. Benoni. 1980:10, 11). To put it even more forcefully, the Muslim is first to love God then God will love him. In Islam it is first the Muslim then God. Christianity is the direct opposite – first God then the believer. This is the clear, grace-filled message of John 3:16.

Sh. Talieb Baker edited a booklet of 66 pages on *The 99 Beautiful Names of Allah. Their Qualities, Values and Significances*. On

page 14 we have the Name '*Al-Wadood*. The Most Loving'. This is explained briefly as “He is the One who loves His good servants. He is the Only One who is worthy of love” (Arabic Studies Department (Icosa) no date). Brief as these words are, it is 'servants' that are loved – here we are writing of love earned. To put it crudely, those who perform will be paid. No hint or suggestion of “...a righteousness from God, apart from law, (that) has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...” (Romans 3:21, 22). No glimpse in *Al-Wadood* of preceding, pre-eminent grace and love...no thought of a Fountain that would first know our thirst, no Living Bread that was prepared to fill our deepest hunger...

Jesus said: 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit...' (Luke 23:46).

Jesus died. We all will die (Hebrews 9:27). In fact that we know 'man is destined to die once' surely is a missionary motive. What we mean is that since we know that in this way all men are equal – we will perish – surely this is incentive enough and more than enough to really seek a life that is set on serving His kingdom.

Since we know we all face the last enemy and Him who has killed the last enemy – this should be the trigger that spurs us to keep our hand to the plough and not look back (Luke 9:62). Death soberly positions one to look at life's priorities. It certainly should. The old Puritan preachers lamented that in their day if there was more preaching on death, Christians would know how to live!

But the Marsh Arabs will die and already are dying. And without any knowledge of Christ at that. But to us who know – and death in our horizon should keep us spiritually alert – much will be

required (Luke 12:48). Judgement will begin at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). With Christian knowledge comes responsibility – to him whom much is given, much is required. Jesus is indeed coming for those who are 'waiting for him' (Hebrews 9:28) – and this does not mean inactivity, but those whose lives are consumed with Christ. Those who seek to bring every thought under the sway of the knowledge that the master of the servant will return and settle accounts with Him (Matthew 25:19).

It is sad that there is so little emphasis on death today (and we are not pleading for an undertaker mentality). M. Luther said “we should learn to view our death in the right light, so that we need not become alarmed on account of it, as unbelief does...” Hugh T Kerr (in *A Compend of Luther's Theology*. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia. 1943:242) – but then as a friend said to us recently: if you want to kill a conversation, just introduce the topic of death into it! It almost has acquired for itself a 'sanctity' of being the unspeakable. The unmentionable... the media loves to spout their heroes and their blasphemous language. But even in this backstreet, death is 'sacredly' avoided. Death is never the main actor, the primary emphasis. It is studiously avoided – unless it is the hero giving the villain his well-deserved deserts.

Francis Nigel Lee brings out another aspect of death that we feel we should consider as we reflect on life – fleeting as it is – and that of the Marsh Arabs. We have both come from the hand of the same Creator and the same dark forces of evil and sin have afflicted us. He writes, because we are sinners, we suffer “a slow, agonizing, lingering death...what the Heidelberg Catechism calls 'this valley of tears', and what the Baptismal Formula calls 'a constant dying' or 'a slow death'” (in *The Origin and Destiny of Man*. Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co. United States of America. 1974:60).

Our humanity is weak. We live in “the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). Romans 3:23 is clear “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And unless the Lord comes in our lifetime, we all will die. This is a huge missionary motivation. But should the Lord *tarry* – we will suffer *a slow death* ...our lives wind downward, our steps grow feebler and generally our strength decreases. But yet again – what another mission motivation: to make everyday count for our King. What an incentive – realising that we will not have yesterday again – to pack in as much as we can, while we can. The increasing enfeeblement of the body should go with an ever increasing resolve to live for Jesus. He will prove faithful.

Because all our days and moments are His, we can never for one moment give the impression that missions is only after the young-bloods! Important as they are – because on the law of averages they should be able to go further and longer – time and the tenuousness of our days demands that all take up the challenge.

The Marsh Arabs are lost. The Church – after much research and enquiry – has made no contact with them...the sad comment, quoted earlier in *Operation World* still stands! Here Jesus is Lord. On the marshes Jesus is Lord. In Iraq Jesus is Lord... O that the Lord will thrust out workers into His harvest field. Jesus had just said, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.' (Luke 10:2). Can we ever even begin to imagine how Jesus must have felt saying that – hardly with a smile on His face, we are sure! The issue – the Glory of His Name – and the further issue, who is concerned about the primary issue? “Please Lord, let many who read this cry out to You for the privilege of taking Your Name to the Marsh Arabs.” Amen.

***Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
And publish abroad His wonderful name;  
The name all victorious of Jesus extol;  
His kingdom is glorious, He rules over all.***

Charles Wesley. (in *Ye Servants of God*.  
Hymn 147. Baptist Hymnal. Nashville: 1956).

## 8. FURTHER THOUGHTS

Now we come to that part of the book where you probably think “honestly what else can still be said?”

Well there are three veins just below the skin of the book that we want to draw your attention to. Three strands running just below the surface that need to be exposed – they are integral to all else that has been written so far.

### **Firstly, the 8 quotes.**

Each chapter started with a quote that emphasized two key ideas; namely preaching and the world. Or if you like, the Word and the world.

So this book, apart from talking about the Marsh Arabs comes with a plea that the pulpit and the world unite. That the pulpit in all its exposition show a sensitivity and passion for the mass of humanity that may never cross the threshold of the local Church. Even more pointedly, that our pulpits go to the world with a magisterialness that enunciates the majestic mission of John 3:16.

The author has been blessed by the many excellent homiletical books that are available to Christians. This is certainly not a 'corner' of the Christian market that has been kept in short supply. However, I also felt the need to share my *two bits* worth at this point.

To our understanding, preaching always involves three persons. The first person is the preacher, or more correctly Christ preaching through the pastor as he seeks to faithfully open up and apply the Word. This is no light matter and will require much prayer and



careful preparation prior to preaching.

The second person involved in the preaching event is the congregant or member of the worship service within earshot of the sermon. Of course it goes without saying that the hearing of sermons involves responsibility. It at least requires the necessary pen and paper to make notes, an alertness that the previous night's appropriate sleep affords and of course an attitude that indicates earnestness and teachableness. Those who come hungry, will be fed and spiritual thirst will be slaked.

The third person in the preaching event is the person who despite being outside of the church walls, is nevertheless dependant upon the second person obediently responding to the word. And of course the second person will not respond to the preaching with a third person in mind-awareness unless the first person – the preacher – makes this crystal clear. So from the first person there should be a spiritual ripple effect, a progression that embraces and reaches all the way to the third person.

Now the third person may be your unchurched neighbour. Or a work colleague. But it may be that the third person is the desperate children of Thailand or the Muslims of Hyderabad, India or the many illegitimate children in Panama or radical Hindus in Nepal. So if the Triune God is involved in the issuing and overseeing of the sermon, then we remind ourselves that a trinity of persons is also involved in the reception and obedient response to the message.

At this point we need to underscore what we have said so far from Scripture. We will look at two Scripture portions. Both are well-known. In other words, we don't want to try and prove a point on an obscure portion of Scripture. We want to make sure that what is

known, *is really known*.

Acts 1:8. Jesus. 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

This much loved verse is normally quoted emphasizing 'power' and places like 'Jerusalem', 'Judea', 'Samaria' and 'ends of the earth'. But this verse can also be used to show the progression of God's Word. John Stott in his commentary: *The Message of Acts* writes "that approximately 20% of the text is devoted to addresses by Peter and Paul; if Stephen's speech is added, the percentage rises to about 25%" (Inter-Varsity Press. Leicester. 1990:69)... in other words the Christians were preaching with all their heart and soul. They couldn't wait to get the living word to the third person.

1 Thessalonians 1:7, 8. Paul. 'And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.'

These two verses easily divide into our three persons of the preaching event. The first is Paul (v.5). The second person is obviously the Thessalonian believers. The third person is in fact too large to quantify...Paul, with sheer joy writes 'your faith in God has become known everywhere.' One can only guess how much further the preaching event was extended.

## **Secondly, missionary communications.**

Missionaries are good communicators. Or they should be. They want to stay in contact with their sending and supporting

constituencies for a myriad of reasons. And this is good. Clear communication keeps the lines of contact open, raises and sustains interest and keeps the levels of commitment high.

But we are perhaps a tiny minority who, while cherishing genuine love and even admiration for many who take to the mission field, nevertheless are a little perturbed.

It was said of Martin Luther that he would at times overstate something, to state it! And if with all due diffidence in associating myself with this great man, I confess that I am probably also going to run the same risk, however I want to add that a measure of reluctance colours this second point.

Anyway, here is my concern. I want to see more of Scripture in missionary correspondence. I want to understand your work in the framework of Scripture. I want to enter your world on the supreme authority of Scripture.

Let me flesh this idea out. Let's say you are involved in Mongolia in an N.G.O. job-creation enterprise. Perhaps you are encouraging yoghurt making or something of that nature.

And you want to communicate with those back home that are interested in your work. How should you proceed?

Firstly, select a grid or framework of Scripture. In this book our grid was the '7 Sayings.' You may use the 'Great Commission'; at least 4 aspects will yield fruitful development. Let us start with Jesus who gave the 'Great Commission.' Perhaps an overview of how Jesus is perceived in other religions in Mongolia...is there common ground? What of religious education in the schools? What religious outlets are there in the country and so forth?

Then we were told 'to go to all...the nations.' Now the missionary can describe Mongolia, scenery, history, economy...these would all be huge assignments, but the missionary can 'unpack' each of them over many months. All these aspects will serve to keep the attention and interest at a healthy level.

A further aspect is the words of Jesus 'making disciples.' Here the missionary can communicate personal experiences in witnessing or leading people to the Lord. What other Christian activity is there in the country...what theological education is in place, the growth of the Christian Church and other related issues.

The 'Great Commission' climaxes with the great stirring words 'And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.' Here the missionary can dwell on personal provision, answers to prayers or prayers awaiting an answer, miraculous interventions, personal devotions, etc.

Yes, the perimeters of Scripture will help and guard missionary correspondence from just being subjective. The framework of Scripture – the sword of the Spirit – may even be the means of leading supporters into depths of spirituality that missionary correspondence can only rejoice and marvel at.

We realise that often 'a text can simply be a pretext' as many offending pulpits can testify to, nevertheless we are confident, people at the rock-face of missions, by the sheer reality of their work and calling will see many shafts of light that the Word affords and that sadly eludes the sluggish, suburban Church.

### **Thirdly, Ludwig van Beethoven.**

We are told that “Beethoven wrote on the score of his Mass in D (Missa Solemnis): From the heart it comes, to the heart may it go”

(in Stuart Briscoe. *Fresh Air in the Pulpit*. Baker Books. InterVarsity Press. First published 1994: 185).

The author feels that these words of Beethoven adequately sum up how he would have you read and assess this book. It is a book that was crafted with one design only – to possess your heart.

In fact in this book we have brought together the '7 Sayings of the Cross' as the overshadowing, overarching central truth that calls for Marsh Arab obedience. There is no more eloquent call to the Marsh Arabs to embrace the Crucified Saviour than His cross. The cross is about missions and in our case, reaching the Marsh Arabs.

Now we want to flesh this out. We are going to call upon others to say this, we believe, even more clearly than we do.

**Andrew Murray.**

“While acknowledging the supreme authority of the Great Commission, the Moravian Brethren have always emphasized as their chief incentive the inspiring truth from Isaiah 53: 10-12; making our Lord's sufferings the spur to all their activity. From that prophecy they drew their missionary battle-cry: '*To win for the Lamb that was slain, the reward of His sufferings.*' We feel that we must compensate Him in some way for the awful sufferings which He endured in working out our salvation” (*Key to the Missionary Problem*. Christian Literature Crusade. Pennsylvania. 1979 : 44).

**Josef Tson.**

“This is the wisdom of God which the world considers utter

foolishness: that He sent His only Son to die on the cross. However, the manifestation of God's wisdom in this world did not end with Jesus on the cross; it is continued in His children when they obey God's commission to go into the world and to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Christ. As they conquer by dying, God's children demonstrate His wisdom to the whole cosmos. Moreover, by their witness and death, Satan is discredited and defeated” (in Ralph D Winter & Steven C Hawthorne. 1999 : 1840).

### **R.B. Kuiper.**

“If Christ's death spells universalism, then that death may well be the central theme of the universally proclaimed evangel. So it is. The great missionary apostle wrote to the Church at Corinth: 'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Corinthians 1:23) and 'I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2)” (*God-Centred Evangelism*. The Banner of Truth Trust. London. 1966 : 74).

### **John Stott.**

“The Christian Church is called to mission, but there can be no mission without a message. So what is our message for the world? It centres on the cross, on the fantastic truth of a God who loves us, and who gave himself for us in Christ on the cross” (*Evangelical Truth. A personal plea for unity*. InterVarsity Press. 1999 : 98).

### **José Gallardo.**

“If the full meaning of the cross penetrated our missionary

methods and message we would take more seriously the ethical demands of the life and teachings of Jesus.” (*Anabaptism and Mission* in Wilbert R Shenk. Editor. Herald Press. Scottdale. 1984 : 142).

### **The Lausanne Covenant.**

“Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and people. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent.” (Paragraph 3. *The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ* in Ralph D Winter & Steven C Hawthorne. 1999 : 760).

### **P.T. Forsyth.**

“The conscience cries for forgiveness, and history brings us to the cross.” (*The Cruciality of the Cross*. Paternoster Press. Carlisle. 1997 : 65).

### **Leon Morris.**

“Jesus knew that He would die. But He was in perfect command of the situation...His triumph does not cease. It continues in the mission of His followers. The eschatological discourse of Mark 13 envisages struggle and difficulty for Christian men until the end of time. But the dominant thought is not difficulty. It is the final triumph of Christ.” (*The Cross in The New Testament*. Paternoster Press. Carlisle. 1995:59).

### **John Stott.**

“Toyohiko Kagawa...(saw) 'the cross (as) the crystallization of love.' That is, it exhibits both God's love for us and the measure of love we should show to others. 'As in a single word, Christ's love—movement is summed up in the cross. The cross is the whole of Christ, the whole of love'” (2001:147, 149).

### **Alister McGrath.**

Sing my tongue the glorious battle!  
Sing the ending of the fray!  
Now above the cross the trophy,  
Sound the loud triumphal lay!  
Tell how Christ the world's redeemer,  
As a victim won the day!

*(Understanding Doctrine. Its Purpose and Relevance For Today. Hodder & Stoughton. London. 1990: 152).* The hymn *Panga Lingua*.

### **Iain H. Murray.**

“And it was love that led Jesus first to undertake his sufferings, and then to invite all men to enter into the love which his death proclaims. It is the Puritan Thomas Watson who quotes the words of Augustine, 'The cross was a pulpit in which Christ preached his love to the world.'” (*The Old Evangelicalism. Old Truths For A New Awakening. The Banner of Truth Trust. Carlisle. 2005 : 110*).

The cross is its own beauty. It is the pearl of priceless value, the burning sun in the firmament of God's grace. In the words of John



Piper, it is “the blazing center of God's glory” (*don't waste your life*. Crossway Books. Wheaton. 2003 : 62)...in its fire we have cast light upon the great need of the Marsh Arabs. But more than that – who can resist the irresistible urge of its love that compels us to stake the cross in the spiritually unclaimed territory of those people?

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When the church “loses” the core truths about Jesus, we too will lose our passion for missions. It’s only when we have a humble appreciation of the blessing which the crucified and resurrected Christ is to us, that we will want to go out and “Bless the Nations”!

A “Bless the Nations” mobilizing movement, started in Port Elizabeth in 1988, celebrates its 21 anniversary, June 2008. Within this fraternity, *The Marsh Arab Team* is widely acknowledged for their total dedication to this unreached people group in Iraq. Their energetic and often innovative strategies to make the local church – and the church worldwide – aware of the Marsh Arabs cannot go unnoticed and serves as an inspiration to all. Brother Samuel, waiting for the first opportunity to “go,” has written his second book on the Marsh Arabs. This one, much more theological than the first, is a contrast in themes. It deals very biblically with the Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross – a much neglected topic. But at the same time the author has interwoven the Marsh Arabs into this as a secondary issue. It’s an intriguingly fresh approach, fully applicable to the evangelization of the Marsh Arabs – and totally in keeping with the Bless the Nations charter of “Prayer, Revival and Missions.” I fully endorse Bro. Samuel’s work and trust that many missionaries – those who go and those who send – will read it.

***Prof. Jean Greyling,  
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***About the author:***

Brother Samuel (a pseudonym) and his wife long for the day when under the hand of God they will bring the Gospel to the Marsh Arabs of South Iraq. Apart from researching, creating awareness, speaking at churches, promoting the vision, they are also closely involved in cross-cultural ministry.

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