

FOWEY FABLES NO.39

Back in the 12th century AD a helpful scholar first divided the Bible books into chapters and verses and added punctuation to make it easier for us to understand, find our way around and compare scriptures. Originally the entire text of a book was written in capital letters with no breaks for sentences, paragraphs or chapters. We are grateful that the books were split up because study is definitely easier but it can cause us some problems. One of the most exciting aspects of Bible study is to see how every idea in a Bible book is built on the last idea and leads on to the next one.

I was recently struck by how important this approach to study is when looking afresh at the best known verse in the entire Bible, John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.' As most of you will know this statement summed up Jesus' answer to Nicodemus about the need for us to be born again. Nicodemus struggled at first with the concept of a repeat of our original birth from our mother's womb. Gradually he began to grasp the principle of a new birth which was spiritual rather than physical. As I thought about how Jesus introduced him to spiritual birth a light suddenly switched on in my brain. As natural birth is meant to be the fruit of real love between a husband and wife committed for ever to each other so spiritual birth is the consequence of God's eternal love for us.

Then my journey of discovery jumped the mental barrier of chapter divisions to look again into the previous chapter. John chapter two is a major challenge. It contains two extraordinary stories both of which seem at first sight out of place in the story of Jesus. In the first account the Lord miraculously transforms about 600 litres of water into high quality wine for wedding guests who had already been drinking a rather inferior vintage. Wouldn't just a few litres have been enough to demonstrate His power without putting temptation in the way of the guests who may have had trouble knowing when they had had enough? In the second story Jesus travelled south to Jerusalem to the Temple which had become a market for those selling animals for sacrifice. Instead of asking the traders politely to take their businesses outside the sacred area He made a heavy whip, stormed in, upsetting their counters, spilling their money and driving the business men and their would-be sacrifices out of the Temple, demanding that they leave never to return.

Another light bulb lit up in my head. Surely it was entirely appropriate to put the story of Jesus at a wedding right before the idea of a baby being born out of love. And didn't it fit perfectly between the wedding and the birth to remind us how a newly married couple would be looking for a home to live in before they started producing babies? The Bible often uses the picture of a wedding to describe the relationship between Christ, the bridegroom and us, His bride.(Eph.5; Rev.21) Water symbolise the Holy Spirit, (Jn.7:37-39) and wine the life blood of Jesus which represents His death to cleanse our sin and His new life within us. (Matt.26:27,28) The Temple describes first the body of Jesus, (Jn.2:21) and then our bodies in which God wants to live.(I Cor.3:16; 6:19)

One more surprise was waiting for me. John chapter 1 is a catalogue of introductions in which people who would become His disciples were able to meet Him for the first time. Some of the introductions were made by John the Baptist who later in chapter 3 is described as the friend of the bridegroom. He makes the first few introductions but then the disciples begin to introduce their friends to Jesus. Traditionally in most cultures the bridegroom waits to be introduced to his future

bride rather than hopefully greeting every girl he sees in the street. So introductions can lead to weddings which are followed by house seeking as the future setting for conception, birth and bringing up children. I will leave you to look at chapter 4 and the account of a woman who had had 5 unsuccessful weddings and the secret she needed to discover for her life to be different in future.

Life for the Hanne family continues to be an adventure of discovery. We have hugely enjoyed the new students the Lord has brought to us over the last year, each on a unique journey but hungry to discover how Jesus walks with them on the path, when they let Him. As always we have deeply appreciated those who have been prepared to be part of our team whether as teachers or in a whole host of practical ways. Teaching is meant to lead on to living and then to a new hunger to learn more. It has long been our conviction that God wants to move us from being entirely dependent on others to explain the Bible to being able to learn from the Lord Himself. Being taught by God does not mean that we will no longer appreciate being taught by others. On the contrary we will learn more of lasting value from our human teachers when we are able to review everything they tell us with the Lord as we study with Him.

At times the Lord gives us the great encouragement of hearing how what was taught long ago has continued to bear fruit beyond all our expectations. We recently had a knock on the front door from someone who had attended a summer holiday programme at the Lodge in 1967 and wanted to come back 50 years later to say how what he had learned at that camp had affected and shaped his life ever since.

Prof. Andy McIntosh was here for a return visit last month after 17 years. His calling has been to research and teach not only the evidence for a literal creation as in Genesis but the vital implications of creation for faith and daily life. He has written some excellent books on Genesis which we would recommend. Talking of books, Dick Park has written a delightful book on the Lord's Prayer which we could obtain for you if you are interested.

Nick is now in his first year as a school teacher at his old college, St Kentigern. He loves it and comes home every day with a big smile on his face. As is so often the case his experience in school is spilling over into his Bible teaching which thrills us. Tracey is a lovely support to him, Eva – our beautiful granddaughter – and to us. Pete and Christal are now back in Turangi in their own home, enjoying the fire service and looking for future challenges. They made a great difference to Fowey Lodge and the medical practice last year with their superb practical skills.

In June/July we are expecting another visit from John Wandera from Uganda. His ministry in evangelism, pastor training and orphan care continues to flourish and we are still deeply committed to supporting him. Jampani in South India and Habib in Pakistan have similar ministries in which we have a continuing profound concern. Let us know if you want to help them all.

All of you to whom we send this letter have a very special place in the journey we have travelled. You also represent the commonest way new students find their way to the Lodge. Please continue to pray that the Lord will show you who might benefit in future. I recently read a slogan at the gym which said 'Don't look back into the past – it is not the direction you are going!' No, but it

does explain how we got here, and what we have to build on for the future above all in a Christian sense. Let's keep building!

We always love to have news from you and to know how we can help and encourage you.

Our love in Christ

Tony and Christine

PS – After finishing this letter we received some exciting news. John Wandera from Uganda will be visiting us from 26-30th June. We would be delighted if you would join us on Tuesday 27th June from 7pm to share dessert and coffee and to hear from John. As most of you will know John was a student with us nearly 20 years ago. Since that time the Lord has used him to establish and lead a group of churches in Eastern Uganda. The particular focus of our interest has been the support of a large number of orphans from AIDS who have been taken in by the Christian families under John's care. Many of you have been faithful sponsors of those children. John will have up to date news of their progress, needs and futures. It will also be an opportunity to know about a new generation of kids desperately needing help. Uganda is in the grip of a major drought and resulting famine this year so the timing of John's visit is critical. Please come that evening!