

# the presbyterian banner

July 2017

*All the earth bows down to you; they sing praise to you,  
they sing praise to your name.*  
Psalm 66:4



**CONTENTS**

Editorial 2

Letter to Ephesus; letter to us  
*Revelation 2:1-7* 3

The World in the Banner  
*News and Views* 7

The Miracles At Calvary  
*The Open Tombs* 9

Children in the Banner  
*Daniel 5* 12

Prescribed Search Work 13

Reviews in the Banner  
*The Case for Christ* 14

Churches in the Banner  
*Youth Camp, Maclean* 14  
*Ulverstone* 16

ISSN 0729-3542

# Editorial

“You must be a really nice person to do that for her,” the pleasant bank teller commented.

She was saying this after I had come in to change payment details for a lady in my former congregation for whom I had power of attorney. The teller had asked about my relationship with the elderly lady and, when hearing that I was a friend helping out because she had no children or other family nearby, had made her remark.

In a manner distinctly different than the usual patter you get in your local financial institution, she expressed her appreciation.

A simple transaction at the bank with a row of other customers lined up behind you is not the place to go into the church connection, I being the elderly lady’s minister, and things like that. That’s why it struck me. I am a really nice person. But not for who I am or for what I have done. It’s because the Lord Jesus Christ has won.

That’s why when the elderly lady commented about having no children of her own, I reminded her of the story of John Calvin when he was taunted about having no surviving physical children. Because he replied to his accusers that he had many spiritual children. And, man, doesn’t he have many! I’m one of them too! And then I would say to her that I am her son – a son in the faith.

She smiled at that. She who has loved so many through years of service in her church, Christian ministries, and the community, is my mother in the faith. And she smiled every time I reminded her of that.

*Therefore, as we have opportunity,  
let us do good to all people,  
especially to those who belong to the family of believers.  
Galatians 6:10*

*Cover Photo credit: Grasstree flower spikes ('Blackboy tree'), by Alex Steel*

Was this space for your church news and photographs?

*Ask your minister or elder how your congregation can be part  
of this positive promotion of the denomination,  
as well as keeping the rest of us up with what's happening!  
Camps, special events, youth news, seniors, engagements, marriages,  
births, anniversaries, obituaries... the list goes on and on!*

*Perhaps you could volunteer to send in some news and photos?*

**The Presbyterian Banner** is the official magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The PCEA was established in 1846 and adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) as its doctrinal standard. Literary contributions are welcome. Submission by email is preferred. The opinions expressed in signed articles are those of the authors - not necessarily of the editor or the PCEA and may not be reproduced without permission. Articles written by the Editor may be reproduced without asking for permission, although with appropriate acknowledgement. This magazine is available as a pdf file on the Church Website: [www.pcea.org.au](http://www.pcea.org.au)

Editor:  
Rev. Sjirk Bajema  
44 Prospect Hill Road,  
Narre Warren, VIC  
AUSTRALIA 3805  
Ph. (03) 9705 1505  
Email: [sjirkb@gmail.com](mailto:sjirkb@gmail.com)

Subscriptions for 2016  
11 Issues per year  
*Within Australia:* \$40 [Bulk \$35]  
*Overseas:* AU \$50 Airmail.

Direct Credit :  
NAB (BSB) 083-802  
A/C No. 98 473 8955

## Letter to Ephesus; letter to us

### Revelation 2:1-7

We like to think of the New Testament churches, especially as they are described in the book of Acts, as places where there was life and vitality and the spirit was working mightily as the apostles moved amongst the people and taught the scriptures and performed miracles and there was daily growth. We compare the church then to the congregations of Christ's church in our denomination and we become discouraged. We see troubles in our respective congregations. We see things that we are scrupulous to avoid, and we guard against them, but others can be so easily overlooked. One fire of controversy is extinguished and another erupts. It is always and only "a day of small things".

But as so many of Paul's letters show and as we shall see in the letters that the Lord Jesus sends to the churches here in Revelation 2 and 3, no church was completely free from some trouble, or infighting, or lack of grace, or desire for Christ Jesus, even from the beginning, even though they lived in such a time of the great growth and movement of the spirit. This visible church is often such a mess.

Our *Confession of Faith* says this: "The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will."

Calvin allowed that even those in the Roman Catholic church who followed Christ rather than worshipped idols were part of the church of Jesus Christ, and Christians. So, as we commence our Synod, we are going to look at the first of seven examples of Christ's

### Retiring Moderator's Sermon

church on Earth, and see some good and some bad. We are going to look at the letter to the church of Ephesus and, perhaps in that, see a letter to us.

Each of the seven letters at the beginning of revelation follows a pattern: The Lord Jesus Christ, via John, first gives the good news about the church – what they are doing right. Then he delivers the bad news – a rebuke for something, or some things they are doing wrong. Then he gives a warning as to what will happen if they continue doing evil. And finally, an exhortation and mention of part of the reward for endurance and faithfulness. These will be our headings then as we look at the church in Ephesus, and in turn, look at ourselves.

#### The Good News – What They Are Doing Right

Now Ephesus was the largest city in the province of Asia, with a population that would have been over 100,000. It was a port city, and so goods and traders would have passed over its docks and through its streets from all over the Roman world. It was also the end of the great road from the Euphrates in Persia and so Ephesus was a very rich place. But Ephesus was also the centre for the Roman cult of the goddess Artemis, or Diana, and her huge temple there was served by hundreds of pagan priests and temple prostitutes. The city was famous for magic and the occult. So-called "Ephesian letters" were charms that were supposed to cure sickness and bring good luck. Ephesus was a huge, culturally diverse, worldly city, sunk in depravity, idolatry and sin. So very much like the cities of our own nation today. Paul in his travels had spent some time there, helping to establish the church at

### David Kerridge

Ephesus, and using it as the hub from which others evangelised the surrounding region.

Ephesus would have been a hard place to be a Christian. There would have been so much temptation to indulge the senses, and seek after wealth, which was just on the doorstep. To be caught up in lust and even call that religious worship. Paul's letter to the Ephesians devotes much of its teaching to making sure the Ephesians knew how to live in the world and not to be seduced by it. As he says in Ephesians 5, from verse 1 to 8: **Eph. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**

**Eph. 5:3 But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them.**

**Eph. 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.**

Paul especially wants the Ephesians to watch out for sexual immorality and to live Christ-like lives but he also wants them to be aware and guard against

false teaching and heresy, as Paul carefully warned the elders at Ephesus on the beach before he left them to go to Rome in Acts 20 at verse 28:

**28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.**

But Paul's last contact with the church had been some years prior to his letter to the Ephesians, written around 60 AD. John wrote Revelation around 96 AD. How had the Ephesian church fared for those 36 years, living in a sinful city, and also having to suffer under the persecution of the Roman regime of Domitian which demanded that everyone worship him as a god? Let's look now at the good news that Jesus gives the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 verses 1 to 3:

**“To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 “I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name’s sake and**

**have not become weary.**

By the help of the Holy Spirit, and through the careful work of the Ephesian elders, the Ephesians had kept to the instructions of Paul. They had been faithful to work for the kingdom of Christ, and labour for the lord and patience with one another. They could not bear those who were evil, meaning they were rigorous in combating immorality and shunning the perversions that the city of Ephesus had to offer.

The Ephesian church had kept out false teachers – and this

strength of the Ephesians in their being so well taught that it was impossible for any heresy to get a hearing there. An example of their careful guard against heresy and false teaching is at verse 6 in our passage: **6 But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitians, which I also hate.**

Exactly who the Nicolaitians were, or what they believed, no one really knows, but it was obvious that they were a group that was ready to invade and change churches, creating per-



would have been high praise for the work of the elders of the church as they had oversight of the flock and had obeyed Paul's command to them to protect the people from the savage wolves.

Jesus commends the church in verse 2 for testing and rejecting the false apostles that plagued and infiltrated the Corinthian church and were such a problem there that Paul had to write not one but two definitely, and possibly three or four letters combating the heresies that the Corinthians had just seemingly let in without regard to the consequences. But not Ephesus: they had been faithful and careful in keeping to the traditions they had been taught. An early church leader – Ignatius, on his way to Rome to be martyred not long after John wrote Revelation, commented on the

haps a works-based faith common to all pagan religions then and now, or allowing for liberties that were really a return to immorality. No-one knows, but such a group was being shunned by the Ephesians who knew their true colours by being students of scripture and having the discernment given them by the Holy Spirit to reveal such heresies.

Then, to add to all that, the church at Ephesus was persevering and enduring the persecution of the Romans with patience, waiting for the kingdom and not becoming weary with that waiting. There were many positive things that could be said of the church at Ephesus, and this was good news to them. Encouragement from their Lord himself to carry on

the good work. What high praise!

### The Bad News – What They Are Doing Wrong

But there was a “but”. This is good... but... Now Jesus gives the Ephesians the bad news.

Look at verse 4:

**4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.**

The Ephesians seemed to be doing everything right. They kept themselves from immorality. They worked hard as a church and laboured for the kingdom of Christ. They were scrupulous to examine heresy and to maintain right doctrine. **But** they had one flaw, and it was a very serious one:

They had left their first love. So what does Jesus mean here, as he speaks via John’s writing – who is the Ephesians’ first love?

It must surely be Christ Jesus himself. They, as part of that the body of Christ, his bride, the church, had been betrothed to Him and were to love him with all their heart and soul and mind.

You see, the Ephesians had understood *all* of chapter 5 of Paul’s letter, *except* the first and most important sentence which said:

**1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**

The Ephesians had given up on the love that they first knew in Christ and the joy of that love, unlike any other, shed abroad in their hearts by faith. Love should have been what bound them together but that key ingredient had somehow been lost, no, even **forsaken**. It is a strong word that Jesus uses. The word “left” is translated in some other versions as “forsaken”. In the midst of their diligence for sound doctrine and good teaching, they had forgotten and left behind love, as if it were

nothing, and less than nothing. A piece of rubbish to be discarded.

Such a terrible thing that had happened at Ephesus can be a problem, especially in Reformed Churches like ours.

We concentrate on doctrine, and this is vital. It is so very, very important to keep ourselves from falling for false teaching and heresy and ideas that can also take us away from keeping Christ Jesus at the centre of our life.

But, in so doing, we can so easily turn Christ Jesus into a series of propositions, or a figure-head for our system, rather than the head of our body, our elder brother, our Lord and Saviour. The very lover of our souls.

It was a problem that I was warned about at Bible College, as we daily studied and dissected the Word and fitting that truth into helpful, systems of theology to maintain our orthodoxy. (We have the Westminster Confession as such a great document to help us in this). This is a constant danger for ministers who deal in the word daily: In studying so much about the Bible, that it becomes a textbook, instead of a fountain of truth and the very God-breathed, Word of our Lord.

It can be a problem in our congregation when love is forgotten and we stand up for our convictions no matter what the cost to our brothers and sisters. We should *never* abandon the truth, don’t get me wrong here – I’m not saying as some do that unity and togetherness comes before sound doctrine, or even without it. The Ephesians laboured long and hard over sound doctrine and were commended by their Lord for it. But we can still speak the truth **in love**.

To have forsaken the love of Christ, the love that showed itself in His ultimate and wonderful sacrifice for us, to turn our backs on Him and His love for his people, which should be the first and cen-

tral part of our Christian life, just so as we can be right, is horrible. We end up proud, and we bicker and fight over the smallest points. We split over personal differences rather than over the truth. We must be so careful to be sure that love, the love of Christ mirrored in our lives, is the guiding principle of our lives, and not cold facts. We must ensure, as the Ephesians did, that we are concerned with maintaining purity and keeping from sin - concerned with keeping the discipline of the congregation, but not without love.

### A Warning About What Will Happen If They Keep Doing Wrong

Christ has saved us out of his love: he leads us in love by his spirit and to forget that makes us just members of a strict club with rules and regulations, with knowledge but no heart. We end up as worse than Pharisees. So there is a warning to the church in Ephesus, and a warning to us if we have done this. Look at Revelation 2, verse 5:

**5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.**

The Ephesians had sinned, even without knowing it. Perhaps they had gradually ebbed away from the living spirit of love to the dead letters on orthodoxy without a cause, and not noticed such a fundamental change. They thought that they were doing so well in fighting the good fight, that they had lost sight of the captain of the army, and the one who had already won the victory: Christ Jesus himself.

They had sunk so far and now they were in terrible danger. The Ephesian congregation had to think back to where they had come from, repent and humble

themselves, and return to working in love for the glory of their Lord and the good of one another. Or else the horrible consequence: Christ Jesus would come and remove their lampstand. This is a reference to the vision that John sees at the beginning of the book of Revelation. There Christ is glorified, surrounded by seven lampstands – one for each church. The danger for the Ephesians was that they were ready to slip away, to be no real church of Christ any more, and Jesus would come and cut them off.

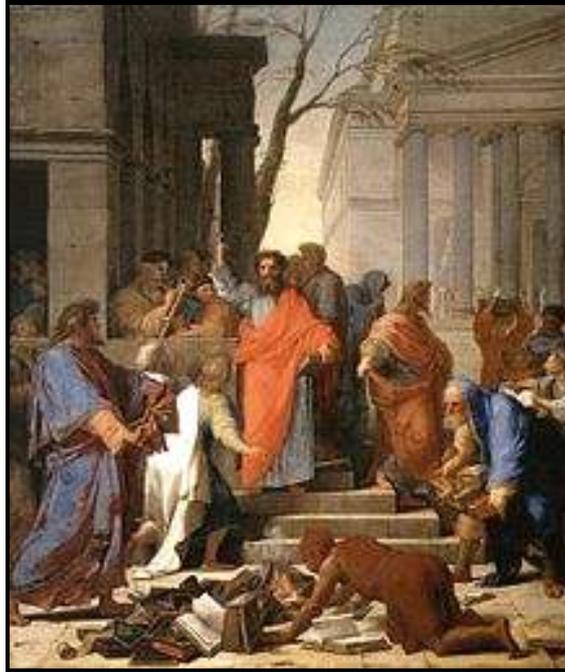
Here again, we need to remember that there is a difference between the eternal, victorious, complete, universal church of Christ, and the visible church to which we all belong. Parts of the visible church are part of the invisible church, but there are parts of churches and even whole congregations that never were and never will be real churches of Christ Jesus – Synagogues of Satan in which the love of Christ is horribly absent. Such a church's lampstand may seem to be a light for Christ, but their candle may never be lit, or it sputters and dies.

We in the PCEA need to look at ourselves as a church, as congregations within the denomination, and make sure in each place where we worship that love is the central guiding principle of our existence, or else we are just an empty, useless lampstand, ready to be taken out of the way. Ready to die out.

This is a sombre warning, and we must always pray that God would lead us all, not as individuals only, but as congregations of his people, further and further into the love of Christ Jesus our Lord, and further and further into love for one another.

The elders of Ephesus were

to be commended for keeping out false doctrine, but they were condemned for forgetting why! They were forgetting that they lived for Christ and served him and were to teach those in their charge about the love of Christ



*'The Preaching of St. Paul at Ephesus',  
by Eustache Le Sueur, 1649*

above all other things, and were in danger of leading the people into as grievous a sin as heresy. Our role as representatives and leaders in our churches is the same – to maintain right doctrine but never forget our role as shepherds, leading the flock in love for Christ and for each other.

### **An Encouragement For Endurance**

Finally, there is encouragement and reward for the church in Ephesus. Look at verse 7: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”** ’

Repent, return to their first love, Jesus Christ and his

church, remain faithful to him – overcome. The encouragement is that there is a reward waiting those who are faithful as individuals, yes, but especially as churches: The Holy Spirit, who helps and guides us, and overshadows us all, says in the Word from Christ that the reward for faithfulness, the reward for perseverance is that we shall eat of the tree of life and dwell with the Lord forever, continually worshipping him in love and adoration, in the midst of paradise.

What words of comfort to a church suffering persecution, or even to a church that has lost its way. A church that has forsaken its first love, or the reason for it being a church in the first place. Triumph and victory and joy everlasting await those who serve the Lord in love.

Let us always be such people. Let us never let love fall from our hearts, by the grace of Christ and in the strength given us by His Holy spirit, let us be a church that loves first and foremost and seeks the truth of Christ in love.

Let us be delegates from our respective congregations gathered here to seek the true and proper course for our denomination to bring glory to Christ Jesus above all because love for him as his bride is our ultimate guiding principle, our passion and joy.

# The World in the Banner

## Margaret Court and her league of haters

For daring to stand up for heterosexual marriage, Margaret Court has been called every name in the book – and then some. She is of course a “bigot” and she is even a “racist”. Yes, lesbian and former tennis champ Martina Navratilova actually said Court is “a racist and a homophobe”. Um, how standing up for the right of children to have their own biological mother and father makes you a racist is utterly beyond me.

And Court has even been accused of causing the death of others with her remarks! Good grief. Let’s just get this over with. Let me finish it off. For daring to stand up for what marriage has always been – something between a man and a woman – Court has of course become directly responsible every evil under the sun.

She is clearly responsible for the Fall of Rome. She is the direct cause of the Black Plague. She was instrumental in the sinking of the *Titanic*. She obviously played a role in the crash of Lady Di’s car in a Paris tunnel. And I am certain that this morning’s burnt toast that I just had to chuck in the bin was brought about by her views.

Yep, she is that evil. Oh, and that time I fell off my tricycle as a toddler and scrapped my elbow? Yep, you guessed it. Court is directly responsible for that as well. She sure has a lot of influence. Makes Hitler seem like a nobody. At least, that is what you would have to believe if you listened to the enraged left.

Court’s family has certainly suffered as a result. Mrs Court’s nephew Phil Shanahan, who runs a tennis academy named for her in Albury, NSW, said he had received ‘ugly’ abuse from around the world and threats of a boy-

cott. He said he loved his aunt and she was entitled to express her views. He said his door had been ‘smashed’ in the middle of the night and said his family was ‘nervous’.

And her 41 year old daughter Marika is quite distressed at these attacks: “My mother has the biggest, kindest, most loving heart of anyone I know. This is a woman who found a man rummaging through her bin on the verge and invited him in for dinner. When we were kids, she was constantly pulling meat out of the freezer and giving it to people because she was worried they couldn’t afford to eat well.”

But sadly, I have had some rather clueless Christians and conservatives trying to tell me that the proposed response of the left – to rename the Melbourne tennis court named after Court – is no big deal, and we should pick more important battles. Sadly, they just do not get it.

Actually, the move to rename the court is in fact a very big deal. As Miranda Devine commented just the other day: “As a reader points out, this is a modern version of ‘Damnatio memoriae’, a punishment in Ancient Rome considered worse than death. Latin for ‘condemnation of memory’, it was a form of dishonour aimed at erasing the person from history.”

It is just like the Marxist rewriting of history. So in that sense it is a very important matter – it is fascism at work. Whether shutting down a business or ensuring that someone gets fired or fined, it is all of a piece. Taking away a name like this is just as fascist as taking away a home or a livelihood – it all has to be fought or we will lose it all.

And even those on the other side fully recognise this. One famous man who thinks he is now a woman, transgender Catherine

McGregor, said this was way too much: “I don’t think that persecuting a 74-year-old Christian pastor is actually going to take us anywhere. Stalinist airbrushing of someone’s history ... that is wrong.”

And former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett, who regularly pushes leftist causes, said this: “It would be an absolute travesty in the practice of democracy in this country if they bow to those sorts of pressures ... it would be a travesty if expressing one’s views somehow leads to a penalty. I don’t agree with her views, but that doesn’t mean she doesn’t have a right to express them.”

+ *Bill Muehlenberg, CultureWatch*

## Church In The Fire In Central African Republic (CAR)

Central African Republic is 76 percent Christian and 13.8 percent Muslim. In March 2013, an Islamic army seized control of the capital Bangui. Since then CAR has seen the rise of the ‘anti-balaka’, traditional village defence militias turned anti-Muslim vigilantes. The fabric of society has unravelled, there has been an outbreak of sectarian conflict and the de facto partitioning of the country into a Christian south and Muslim north. Five years on, violence continues as does the humanitarian crisis. From the outset, CAR’s Church has been at the very centre of all humanitarian and reconciliation work, despite its risks. Anti-balaka fighters adorned with occult charms routinely threaten to burn churches and kill pastors who shelter Muslims. The devil has established a foothold; CAR and its Church need our prayers.

+ *Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin | RLPB 407 | Wed 17 May 2017*

### **Law condones the act as it criminalises the image**

On March 21, 2017, the Supreme Court of Victoria handed down a decision that related to protesting outside a fertility clinic. This decision of the Supreme Court of Victoria arose from the appeal of a previous judgement in the County Court of Victoria in November 2015. In a nutshell, the Court argued that images of dead unborn babies cannot be displayed in public because they are too disgusting and “may be so distressing as to be potentially harmful”. The case upheld the criminal conviction of Michelle Fraser, a pro-life woman, for displaying an image of a dead foetus in public at a peaceful demonstration against abortion in 2013.

The effect of the decision is that showing any image of a dead foetus is obscene and therefore its display is a criminal act under laws that ban obscenity in several Australian jurisdictions. I am unable to ascertain at this point whether there will be an appeal to the High Court from such an ill conceived decision. If the photo of a dead unborn baby is distressing, then is it not distressing to realise that 100,000 babies are brutally murdered in the womb in this country every year? This ruling means that the truth about abortion practices can no longer be freely exposed.

Despite it being a Victorian decision, similar laws exist in other Australian jurisdictions that can be applied in the same way to stifle this type of political discussion. This only goes to show that many judges in this country are more concerned about dead babies being shown in public than being concerned about protecting communication concerning political matters that is constitutionally protected.

It is a basic principle of constitutional law in Australia that no law can unreasonably burden free communication on political

matters among voters. This implied freedom is a strong constitutional guarantee that has been developed by the High Court to recognise that this is so, even where communication might be seriously offensive. However, the confronting reality of abortion has now been (unconstitutionally) stifled by the unelected judiciary in the name of political correctness.

There is much to be said about judges ignoring an important element of the Australian Constitution. As Human Rights Law Alliance director Martyn Iles points out: “Often it is the shocking nature of a political communication which is the very thing that makes it effective, especially where, far from being gratuitous or unrealistic, the images are shocking precisely because they portray the truth about abortion to the public.”

The truth about abortion may be uncomfortable to many, but the solution is not judicial censorship of political communication. Instead, the solution is more public debate coupled with critical thinking about the seriousness of the problem.

+ by *Augusto Zimmermann, News Weekly, April 22, 2017*

### **Campaign Launched to Kill Assisted Suicide Bill**

Family First NZ will immediately be launching a major campaign to oppose the ACT MP David Seymour’s Private Members Bill to legalise euthanasia.

“The country is currently having an extensive inquiry into the issue of ending one’s life in New Zealand. This needs to be a robust honest debate about assisted suicide without the emotion of a parliamentary law change in the mix, and should examine whether so-called ‘safeguards’ deserve that label, whether coercion is subtle but real, and whether patients will ask themselves why they are not availing themselves of assisted suicide,” says Bob McCoskrie, National Director of Family First

NZ.

“It is telling that ACT MP David Seymour is offering yet another attempt alongside Louisa Wall’s and Sir Geoffrey Palmers’ similar attempts to mitigate the real concerns around safeguards,” says Mr McCoskrie. “This ACT MP bill raises massive concerns around issues of subjective definitions, risks to the elderly and vulnerable, and statements made around potential euthanasia for disabled persons.”

“One of the main reasons that politicians in NZ have rejected previous attempts to decriminalise euthanasia is that they realised that the safeguards, while sounding good, would not guarantee the protection required for vulnerable people including the disabled, elderly, depressed or anxious, and those who feel themselves to be a burden or are under financial pressure,” says Mr McCoskrie.

“The international evidence backs up these concerns, and explains why so few countries have made any changes to the law around this issue. We simply need to ensure a palliative care regime in NZ that is fully funded and world class. That’s where the politicians’ focus should be.”

In 2017 alone, assisted suicide bills have been stopped or defeated in Maine, Tasmania, Hawaii, Utah, New Mexico, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Maryland while in several other states, assisted suicide bills were introduced but lacked support to even be debated.

“The politicians need to immediately and quickly pull the plug on this flawed and dangerous bill.”

+ *Family First NZ, 8 June 2017*  
([www.rejectassistedsuicide.org.nz](http://www.rejectassistedsuicide.org.nz))

# The Miracles At Calvary

The Open Tombs

Matthew 27:52-53a

Sjirk Bajema

Could there be a more depressing scene for those of this world than that of an open grave? They who had so much hoped and trusted in what they could do have got nothing left they can do. "Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes" is so true. For them it is as Aristotle confessed, "Death is a dreadful thing, for it is the end!" And Rousseau bluntly affirmed it, "He who pretends to face death without fear is a liar!"

Perhaps we have been very sad then, too. We miss those who have died. There will always be that empty gap in our lives. But if they are fellow believers we know where they are now. We are not afraid of death, as the world is. By faith we say confidently those words of the twenty-third Psalm. As it says in verse 4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

There is an eternity of difference between the funeral of a Christian and that of an unbeliever. For the one it leads to unending anguish and suffering; for the other it opens up to unending bliss. As the apostle Matthew describes for us in 'The Miracles at Calvary' he comes to this same ultimate distinction, for he has told us of the miracle which symbolised the darkness of God's curse. And he graphically pictured the supernatural cry from the cross. Then there was the torn curtain - ripped from top to bottom - symbolising that the former separation between God and his people had now gone because of his Son. That happened at exactly the same time as the violent earthquake, which expressed God's power in

## Matthew 27:45-54

<sup>45</sup> From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. <sup>46</sup> 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?"

<sup>47</sup> When some of those standing there heard this, they said, "He's calling Elijah."

<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. <sup>49</sup> But the rest said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."

<sup>50</sup> And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. <sup>53</sup> They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

<sup>54</sup> When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

creation singing out its 'Amen' to Christ's death on the cross. And now it is through the Church herself that God finally confirms the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Just imagine how strongly Matthew's account of Christ's crucifixion would have affected his Jewish readers. They had been taught about the genealogy of the Messiah King from their earliest years, had his Kingdom presented to them throughout Matthew's Gospel, and, now, on reading this account of his passion, they are confronted with the knowledge that Jesus was indeed the Christ they had been looking for all these years!

You might be wondering here, though. You're thinking: 'How can I presume to say all this?' Well, where else apart from the Gospel of Matthew do you find the story of this particular miracle? In Mark, the Gospel which is so similar, there is no mention of it. And Luke, the other synoptic gospel, does not record it either. Nor does John's Gospel, the one so different and yet the same, allude to this miracle.

Yes, Matthew's Gospel is the only one writing of this miracle. But it's here in all its truth, and for the best of reasons. You see, these people rising from their graves are citizens of the King of all creation. And not just ordinary citizens; they are the King's own ambassadors from the past, here again for a short time to represent their Lord.

## What a way to wake up

This is indeed what physically happened to them. Their souls, already in heaven with the Lord, were now rejoined with their bodies, which had been in their graves. When verse 52 begins, "The tombs broke open," they were broken open by the same force which produced the earthquake and split the rocks. Remember, these tombs were set into the side of the hill. And it was a large stone which was rolled across to close the entrance.

In that breaking open, the bodies of many of them were reunited with their souls by the will of their Lord, whose divine force generated so much activity over this definitive period of time. Those bodies in the ground have no say over the

proceedings. It is as Ezekiel prophesied from the Lord in chapter 37, verses 12 and 13, "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them... Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them."

Now, some have thought this was rather cruel of the Lord. Imagine their souls having enjoyed the fellowship up above, now being sent again to their earthly surroundings. So there must be a very good reason for this.

And what better reason could there be than to do it for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ? His was the perfect life of love. In his words in John 5 verses 21 till 23, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him."

At this point it is relevant to mention that there have been two quite different views about what's happening in our text. These views are reflected in the two different possible translations of the

text. Both agree that these saints arose at the same time the tombs were opened. The difference arises as to when those bodies came out of the tombs. One view says that the bodies came out after Christ's resurrection and then went and appeared to people in Jerusalem. The other view says that these saints came out of the tombs when they were opened but did not appear to anyone until after Christ's resurrection.

Does it make such a difference? Yes, it does, because such a startling event as all those tombs being opened would have meant people going and looking at the strange sight.

There is a possible objection to this, though. It says that being around about the time of the Sabbath, there would not have been many people at the cemetery. They say the Jews would not have wanted to be unclean at such a time.

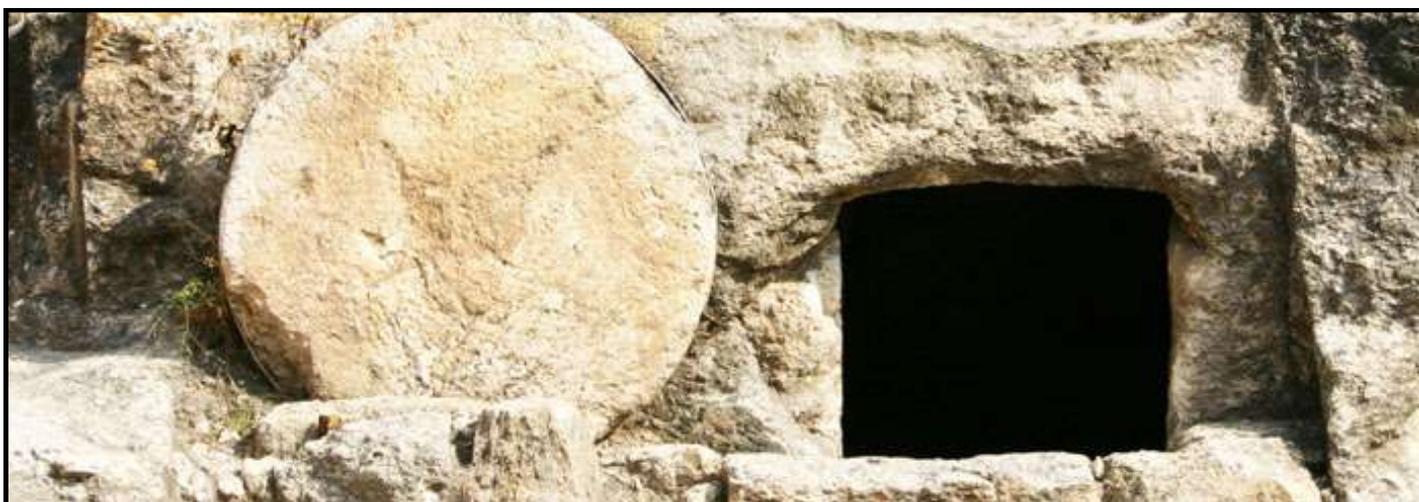
There are two possible responses to this. The first is that people only became unclean when they actually touched a dead body and merely visiting a graveyard would have no effect on their being clean or unclean. We must remember that since Passover was a major feast, there would have been Jews visiting from all parts of the known

world. Some would have been paying their respects to the deceased relatives and others. And it wasn't the Sabbath yet, in any case: that was still some hours away.

Then, secondly, where was Jesus buried that afternoon? As he was already dead, he had to be buried before the Sabbath day. And there's every indication that would have been in the cemetery – the cemetery where Joseph of Arimathea had his own new tomb, which he used to bury the Lord. It's a bit hard to not notice all the open tombs when you would have been burying him! And what would those at the cemetery that afternoon have seen? What kind of scene would they be greeted with?

Do you see what I mean? If they had risen but not gone out of the tombs, they would have been seen alive in those tombs before the three days were completed. And then the game would have been up! Yet, if all those curious people had noticed many empty tombs among those that remained undisturbed, what then would they have been thinking?

Adding everything up, many of those onlookers may have noticed similarities in the characters of those whose bodies



*An Open Tomb (Image courtesy of The Institute for Creation Research, <http://www.icr.org/ChristEmptyTomb>)*

were no longer there. As William Hendriksen points out, "Is it reasonable to believe that these saints, with glorious resurrection bodies, remained in the darkness and corruption of the tombs from Friday afternoon until Sunday morning?"

### Notice who did rise up

Have you caught on yet? What did all these people raised from the dead have in common? Let's join those who are looking at the empty tombs. It might seem a morbid exercise, but we're just curious as they were. We want to see exactly who it was who got left behind.

Firstly, whose are the tombs that are left untouched? Also all the rich and famous, with their grandiose tombs, remain as they were, while the majority of the empty tombs belong to normal folk who led everyday lives. But those who and understood their scriptures could recognise this miracle as a fulfilment of another prophecy regarding the promised Christ.

This is all because Jesus Christ has brought them back. He has conquered death. And so he exposes as liars those who had taunted him on the cross. They had shouted out at him, as we read in Matthew 27 verse 42, "He saved others, he can't save himself!" "He's the king of Israel!" they insulted him. "Let him come down from the cross, and we will believe in him. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

But do you think they really would have believed he was the Son of God as they said and came down from the cross? No, they would still have denied him – even in the midst of all those miraculous stories swirling around. There should have been more than enough signs to convince zealous Jews that here was the Messiah, but the eyes and minds of many were blinded to the truth.

It is likely that a number of those resurrected saints were men and women that they had persecuted. As was done with the prophets of old, so it had been done to their most recent saints. They had not been well received. John the Baptist is but one example.

It has been argued that because the saints were recognised when they went into Jerusalem, they must have just recently died. It's a good point, but that didn't stop Peter and John and James recognising Elijah and Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32-33).

Because "many holy people" are mentioned, it is likely they were from across the centuries. Of course they had to be those who had been buried in Jerusalem, but that cemetery had been there for a long time.

This is the truth Jesus had spoken of in John 8 verse 56. In speaking to the Jews there he had said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." And now saints just like Abraham were tremendously joyful. This was the day they had so much looked forward to in their own life-time. And now they had their physical life returned to them so that they could testify that Jesus is the Messiah. So those 'holy people' were already a witness three days before anyone got to see them, because their graves were empty!

Imagine, then, the suspense across the 'holy city' for those three days. People were openly saying, 'What's happened to those bodies?' 'Who could have taken that many?' 'This must be a miracle!'

Remember where we began this study? It was by the graveside. This is the open hole in the ground which either shows the end of a life or the most glorious beginning. In Jerusalem, the Jews were being confronted by many

open graves. Those grave faced each of the onlookers with the question of their own eternal destination. There was no getting away from this.

Those tombs are open before you also, this day. They are witnessing to you the fifth miracle at Calvary, because there are no bodies in them. Go on - have a look! The same mighty power that shifted those heavy stones which closed the tombs, has given new life to many of those who were in them.

And, you know, they are still prophesying. In this miracle God is giving us a foretaste of nothing less than the resurrection of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ himself. It's the door of Christ's tomb which is the way by which you enter the Kingdom of God. In the words of the apostle Paul in 1st Corinthians 15:20, Jesus is the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. All those scriptural signs and other fulfilments of prophecy point straight to the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and what God plans to do through him.

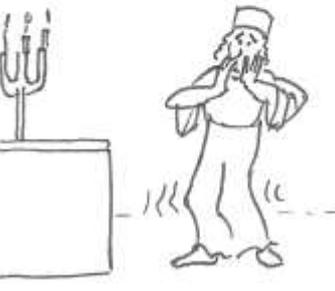
Rediscovering  
the **Gospel**  
*Lessons for the Local Church from the  
Reformation*

**7- 9 July, 2017**

Keynote Speaker  
**Pastor Barry York**  
*Professor of Pastoral Theology  
RPTS, Pittsburg, PA, USA*

geelongbibleconference.org.au

# Children under the Banner — Daniel 5

<p>The Writing on the Wall</p>	 <p>King Belshazzar gave a great banquet.</p>	 <p>He ordered that the goblets taken from God's temple be used.</p>
 <p>Suddenly a hand appeared and wrote on the wall.</p>	 <p>The king was so terrified his knees knocked.</p>	 <p>None of his wise men could read the writing.</p>
 <p>The queen came to see what all the fuss was about. "Don't be alarmed, send for Daniel. He will tell you what the writing means." she said.</p>		 <p>Mene - God has numbered your days Tekel - You have been found wanting Parsin - Your kingdom will be given to the Medes and Persian,</p>  <p>That night the Medes invaded and King Belshazzar was killed.</p>

# Prescribed Search Work

## **JULY 2017**

*Senior Section 12 years and over; Intermediate 10—11 years; Junior 9 years and under*

### **SENIOR AND INTERMEDIATE** (Intermediate omit questions 7 and 8)

#### 1 SAMUEL chapter 17

1. How did Saul and all Israel feel when they heard the words of Goliath, the Philistine?
2. What words of David caused Saul to say, "Go, and the Lord be with you"? (1 verse only)
3. What weapons did David finally take with him?
4. What was David's reply to the Philistine when he called to David, "Come to me"? (3 verses)
5. When Goliath was dead, what did the Philistines do? What did Israel and Judah do? (2 verses)

#### Chapter 18

6. Why did Jonathan make a covenant with David?
7. What did Saul do when the women praised David? (2 verses)
8. What two things caused Saul to become still more afraid of David? (2 verses)

### **JUNIOR**

#### MARK chapter 9

1. Who appeared on the mount of transfiguration, talking with Jesus?
2. What did the voice out of the cloud say?
3. What happened when Jesus told the dumb and deaf spirit to come out of the child? (2 verses)
4. What did Jesus say to the twelve after he had taken a child and set him in the midst of them?

**Please send the answers to:**  
**Mrs I Steel**  
**PO Box 942**  
**Epping NSW 1710**  
The questions for the whole year  
are available from the above postal  
address or by email at:  
[iesteel@gmail.com](mailto:iesteel@gmail.com)

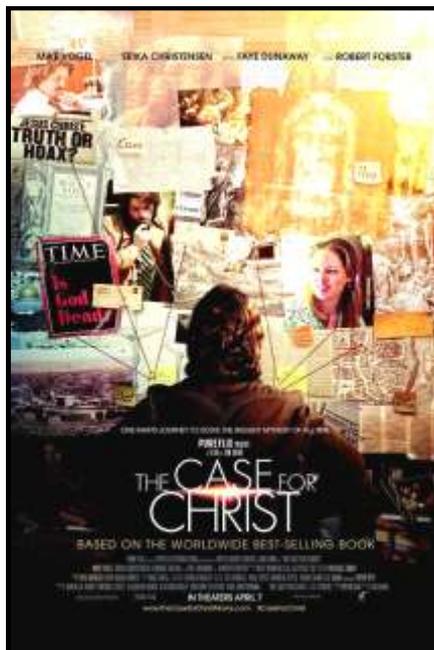
## Reviews in the Banner

### *The Case for Christ*

Reviewed by Rowland S. Ward

*The Case for Christ* is a film adaptation of the life of Lee Strobel (b. 1952) who was an atheist working as an investigative journalist with the *Chicago Tribune* but became a Christian through his efforts to disprove Christianity from the evidence for the resurrection and the authenticity of the Biblical writings. Essentially a true story, it tells how his wife became a Christian through the providential intervention of a Christian nurse when their child choked on a sweet in a restaurant and could have died. This lady, an African American, reminded me of the role played by such a person in the film *War Room* (2015).

While the acting is good and interest is maintained, *The Case for Christ* shares the weaknesses of *War Room*. *War Room* showed a man becoming a Christian but there was no real emphasis on repentance and once he



became a Christian everything came right and he had a prosperous life. *The Case for Christ* likewise really had no emphasis on confession and repentance, even Lee's brief prayer of commitment had no mention of Christ. Doubt-

less one must recognise that initial commitments to Christ often occur with minimal knowledge. Perhaps that fits well with the film showing them attending Bill Hybel's Willow Creek Community Church which is neither Reformed or traditional evangelical.

True to modern form the trailer at the end of the film showed all the family as subsequently successful and in influential positions. Tell that to our brothers and sisters who are suffering in the Middle East and elsewhere who know a special degree of the tribulation that the Saviour promised for us in this world. Watch the film by all means but don't be taken in by its weaknesses and do use it as an opportunity to present a more Biblical position in which proper attention is given to the heart of the Gospel and the work of the Spirit.

## Youth under the Banner

### Youth Camp Report

Maclean, Easter 2017

Matthew Schmidt

The first youth camp in living memory (for those involved) was held over the Easter long weekend. The residence of John and Judy Greensill became tent city for the duration of the camp, with around 20 young adults attending. Great enjoyment was had while watching some of the campers (Chris Hamilton) attempting to erect their tents on the first evening.

The youth at the camp joined the Maclean congregation for both the morning and afternoon services, with Rev. Jim Klazinga taking the services while Rev. David Kerridge was conducting

the studies for the camp. The Maclean church also hosted the youth for lunch between the morning and afternoon services on the Lord's Day, including a talk by Mariam Hussian from the Taleem centre in India. Mariam gave a presentation on the history and the work of the Taleem centre and the difficult road she has travelled in her family's service of the Lord in a predominantly Muslim region.

The studies conducted by Rev. David Kerridge during the camp, focused on the topics of; the identity of Christ, our identity in Christ and practical advice on how to

live a Christian life in a secular world. The talks lead the youth to consider how the Lord Jesus Christ is not only our saviour, but also the true image of God and the perfect example of how we are to live a Christian life. Rev. Kerridge also encouraged the youth, particularly the young men at the camp, to consider how they could best use their God given gifts to serve in their community and in their church. The final study and following discussion also considered how to live a life of prayer, meditation, devotion and servitude to God. How easy it is in our busy

lives to not make time for what is most important! The discussion groups were led by Nic O'Dell and Matthew Schmidt, with oversight by Stewart Carswell and Rev. David Kerridge. During the discussions, the campers considered matters including; how we can know Christ? What is a saving faith? and how can we go from being dead in sin to alive in Christ?.

Each morning and evening, praise to God continued with devotions and a time of psalmody, led by Julie Schmidt. The devotions were led by Matthew Schmidt, Nic O'Dell, Ben Klazinga, Cameron Hamilton and Mark Hamilton. The time was ini-

tially set aside to sing favourites from both the Scottish Psalter and the Sing Psalms versions, however by request, Julie also taught the parts for two tunes; Lord of the Years and Ottawa.

During the free time on the Saturday afternoon, the campers were able to enjoy the beautiful location of Maclean and the surrounding towns, going to the beach, kayaking and going to the annual Maclean Highland Gathering where they enjoyed other traditions from the homeland of the Presbyterian denomination. Each night ended with conversations around the campfire for some, and over a card game for others.

Thanks go out to Stewart

Carswell and Rev. David Kerridge for their help organising a camp that ran seamlessly. Thanks to John and Judy Greensill who graciously offered their property, time and cooking services to make such an enjoyable and spiritually building camp possible. Thanks must also go out to the Northern Rivers congregation who proffered donations towards the camp, in order to provide baking and a port-a-loo for the duration of the camp. Also to Judy Greensill, Barbara Schmidt and Mandy Kerridge for the delicious meals we enjoyed throughout the camp.

The camp offered an oppor-



tunity for the youth to be gathered with fellow believers and without the secular pressures placed on them every day of their lives. It is hoped and prayed that those who attended the camp left with a better understanding of who they are in Christ, how God strengthens

and guides us through the Holy Spirit and how God's children should live their lives according to his Word. From the feedback received from the campers, the re-introduction of a youth camp for the PCEA was well received and thoroughly enjoyed. While the

frequency and location of the camp into the future is still to be determined by the Youth and Fellowship, Easter 2018 is being considered, with the Greensills offering to host it once again.

## Churches in the Banner



### Ulverstone

The photos shown from top left on this page were from the farewells we had for Sue and Andre Scheepers. Our minister has retired early due to ill-health. They have moved up to Brisbane to be closer with family.

The next three pictures show our ladies' craft with examples of the craft we have done.

The photo of the young couple is of Luke & Tessa Keast, who became members of our congregation by transfer from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand on the same Sunday Andre conducted his farewell services.

Next to this is the farewell for Jess Driscoll (third along) held on June 4. With her are Sandra Hamilton, Loretta Hingston & Joan Cameron-Smith.

The 'team' photo is of our congregation with the Rev Andres Miranda, our Interim Moderator, who was with us on the 21<sup>st</sup> May to 'preach the congregation vacant'.