

## God's Heritage Alive Today

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We have just celebrated Anzac Day, a day for remembrance of those who fought and those who died in war. It's an important time in our national calendar when we pause to think of the fallen and the heritage preserved for us by their sacrifice. I want to focus on the concept of heritage in this address, and in particular, the heritage that we, as Christians within contemporary Australian society, may preserve for future generations. Specifically, I want to focus on the heritage that one Man left to all mankind two thousand years ago on an obscure hill in the Middle East. As justice may be said to be central to that heritage, I will provide some comments on the nature of Biblical justice, a topic for which I, as a practicing lawyer, hold a personal fascination. I will also present several specific examples of the heritage left to us by our forbears, by men and women who have joined with Him in creating legacies that we still enjoy today. In so doing I will show that the heritage He created is still very much alive and can be joined by us in our simplest actions today.

## Responses to the Great War

The concept of heritage is very much a part of our current national dialogue. Our Prime Minister recently announced the creation of a National Commission on the Commemoration of the ANZAC Centenary to oversee a consultation process to define how best we may celebrate the centenary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli. Gallipoli is part of our national heritage, being part of the legend by which we define our national character, yet there is a story from that time in Australian history that remains largely untold, and speaks to Christianity's contribution within that period of great hardship and sacrifice.

I have since a youth reflected on the situation of those young men setting off on slow boats to Europe in 1915, impelled by the sense that they were doing their duty for the Empire and instilled with a certain naive adventurism, without any anticipation of the horrors of trench warfare that lay ahead. I can remember in history class at seventeen years of age studying the personal accounts of men in the trenches of the Western Front, men who were only slightly older than myself at the time, and contemplating how the immortality and glory that we hear so much of today presented to these young men in the muddied trenches at night. I used to contemplate how I myself, placed in that circumstance, would have responded to the hail of shells, the stench, the dark and the ever pervasive presence of death.

I want to start out on our journey together tonight by contrasting two contemporary responses to the Great War, the reaction of H.G. Wells, a famous British intellectual and novelist, and the reaction of Oswald Chambers, a Scottish born poet, Bible College Principal and Y.M.C.A. chaplain stationed in the Egyptian desert, who ministered to Australian troops travelling to and returning from the Gallipoli campaign.

### *Herbert George Wells*

Firstly, let's take the response of Herbert George Wells. The announcement of the war brought was welcomed by Wells. In his early years he had held to a Utopian ideal of a one world government, which government would arise to herald the end of the nation state and the unification of mankind. In his Utopian ideal, war would be unknown and the pursuit of education and science would provide equality to all mankind by allowing preference on the basis of merit, as opposed to birth right. This ideal spoke to, and was sourced from, his own life story, which played out within the context of a socially rigid British class system. His ideal of a merit based society spoke to both his humble origins, his father was a shop keeper, and to his academic abilities, which as a young man had distinguished him under the teaching of Thomas Huxley (Aldous Huxley's grandfather). Wells saw, in the announcement of World War One, the start of the conflict that would finally demonstrate the deadly menace inherent within the concept of the modern nation state, and that would ultimately herald the coming of the one world government.

In recognition of his writing abilities, Wells responded with relish to a call from the British War Office to serve as a war journalist. Following the call to serve King and country he visited the Western Front and was horrified by the suffering he saw. He began to question the idea that man could become more humane through education. In 1920, he wrote, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and complete failure." For Wells these deep reservations on the nature of man grew, and culminated in his response to World War Two. This growing reservation as to the nature of man possibly found its greatest expression in Wells' last book, *Mind at the End of its Tether*, which described a world in which nature destroyed all human life, to purge itself of the aberration that is man.

Wells had conceived that the means to fight evil was to educate humankind, and by so doing, enhance what was within man, to enable his capacity to do good. His disillusionment only grew in the sight of man using his ever increasing knowledge and scientific ability to gain power over other men through force, rather than to propagate peace and a stable world order. Wells' dream to create a peaceful social order, through education and equality, was increasingly frustrated. This was in no small part due to a flaw within the medium in which Wells sought to work, a flaw for which he never found the remedy. Ultimately, Wells, despite his faith in science and technology, could not change the fundamental character of man.

### *Oswald Chambers*

Although lesser known during his lifetime, Oswald Chamber's has left a heritage that has now influenced millions through the daily devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*. Chambers was distinguished by his unwavering constancy of faith, even in the face of the war. No calamity could waiver him from his unshakeable belief in a personal Creator who was intimately interested in the quietest aspects of each individual's life. For him, there was a much more dire fight to be fought – the fight for those perishing without a knowledge of the one Man who might introduce them to eternity. In the September 1914 issue of *Tongues of Fire*, the monthly journal of the League of Prayer, Chambers showed that he was not afraid to address the uncertainty of

the time with the certainty of God's message. He did not hold back in directly addressing the questions being asked by many of his contemporaries, writing:

"This question is on the lips of people today: Is war of the devil or of God? It is of neither. It is of man, though God and the devil are both behind it. War is a conflict of wills either in individuals or in nations, and just now there is a terrific conflict of wills in nations.

"Our Lord insists on the inevitability of peril. Right through His talks with His disciples, without panic and without passion and without fear He says, You must lay your account with this sort of thing, with war, with spite, with hatred, with jealousy, with despising, with banishment and with death. Now remember I have told you these things that when they happen you may not be scared.

"We are not only hearing of wars and commotions, they are here right enough. It is not imagination, it is not newspaper reports, the thing is here at our doors, there is no getting away from it. War, such as the history of the world has never known, has now begun.

"Jesus Christ did not say: You will understand why the war has come—but: Do not be scared, do not be put in a panic.

"There is one thing worse than war, and that is sin. We get tremendously scared when our social order is broken up, and well we may. We get terrorized by hundreds of men being killed, but we forget there is something worse—sinful dastardly lives being lived day by day, year in and year out in our villages and towns ... these are the things that produce pain in the heart of God, not the wars and the devastation that so upset us."<sup>1</sup>

And it was with this certainty of approach that Chambers addressed the ANZAC troops in the Egyptian desert. In 1915 Chambers left his position as Principal of the Bible Training College London to travel to the Egyptian desert, there to minister to Australian and New Zealand troops returning from and travelling to the Gallipoli campaign. Perhaps the best means to describe the response of this man to the Great War and the heritage he left in the hearts of those who came into contact with him is in the words of his contemporaries. Rev. Brother Douglas Downes records the meetings in the Y.M.C.A. tent in the Egyptian desert as follows:

"Out there in his hut at Zeitoun he can get a crowd of Australians night after night attracted by nothing but the message of Redemption. I went over to Zeitoun, and found the unheard-of thing had come to pass. Men whom no one could accuse of being religious turned up in large numbers on a week-night to hear a religious talk. There is no appeal to the emotions, no cant religious phrases, no anecdotes, just a flow of clear convincing reasoning—stark sincerity, speaking with the authority of deep personal experience; you are brought to the point where the natural man breaks down and where the supernatural must come in to take its place. After the address, a prayer that seemed to carry you with its confidence right into the presence of God. Then followed conversations with several who had been present. The life of one of those I met that night was afterwards completely transformed."<sup>2</sup>

Theo. Atkinson's account of Chambers' ministry records that:

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<sup>1</sup>Chambers, Oswald: *Abandoned to God*. Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1958; 2002

<sup>2</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 189

“The hut was packed with a large audience of Australians back from Gallipoli, a pretty tough lot, their being there at all spoke volumes for the new spiritual influence in the camp [resulting from Chambers’ recent arrival]. Mr. Chambers spoke for fully fifty minutes, and with such power and eloquence that there was not a man but was mightily gripped.”<sup>3</sup>

And his ministry to our soldiers was not without effect. Oswald Chambers’ diary records the following:

“*March 12, 1916*.... At the close [of tonight’s meeting] a young Australian soldier said that the message was entirely for him. In Gallipoli he had told God that if he was spared, he would know there was a God and would return thanks to Him. That very morning he had come out of hospital, and being reminded of his vow had gone into a church and thanked God for sparing his life, and now in the service God gripped him. I had a fine talk with him, and found my usual verse, Luke 11:13, work in a grand way.”<sup>4</sup>

In the verse Chambers refers to, Luke 11:13, Jesus paints a picture of God as a good Father who will give the Holy Spirit to those of His children who ask. J Stuart Gardiner, an Australian in Egypt at that time wrote:

Here were doubt and difficulty changed to understanding and renewed faith—the mysteries of life, and life beyond, reconciled with the plan of the Great Creator, each word pregnant with the authority of a teacher who had communed in silent places with the Father of men.

The men who listened to these memorable talks of the O.C.’s [as Chambers was affectionately known] returned again to the Line—to its danger and hardship—treasuring the possession of their Bibles, for his words had been like the penetrating rays of a great light which had lit up the darkness of their ignorance and indifference, and brought them face to face with the only thing that mattered—their relationship to God.<sup>5</sup>

And the fruit of Oswald Chambers’ spiritual efforts were seen amongst the men as they travelled on to the trenches, where a bible study was subsequently held.<sup>6</sup> John D. Blight an Australian soldier from Adelaide, wrote of Chambers’ ministry —

A military camp is the last place to which one would willingly go for influences that touch the finer side of life and that speak of things that are age-abiding; but at the Y.M.C.A. hut

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<sup>3</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 187

<sup>4</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 230

<sup>5</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 340

<sup>6</sup>Chambers wrote in his diary:

“Greenfield who is now up the line, writes of his classes thus—

“Dugout, Holy Land. Delighted to say our meetings are being blessed and I have tried in my feeble way to apply the method you adopt to these efforts night after night. The chaps who are attending are delighted. I am ‘gone’ personally on the effect your meetings produced on my life, and what is good for me ought to be good for the other chap. I place the papers (i.e. outlines) on the sand in the tent, we have one or two candles for light, then lying on our sides, sometimes kneeling all the time, we try to pack into our thinking along Bible lines all we can grip. Luke 11:13 is more to me to-day than ever, and I pass its truth on. Two Australians come to my dugout for prayer at mid-day each day.” Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 329

at Ismailia, in spite of the hampering influences of militarism, men were brought face to face with a greater reality than the grim reality of war. The memory of days spent with Oswald Chambers in Egypt surpasses in vividness all other memories, and eclipses the physical and mental nausea and discomfort of the campaign. From that time life could never be the same again.<sup>7</sup>

How wonderful that the message of the gospel, declared through an instrument that held unwavering belief in its unchanging timelessness, and its irrepressible relevance to the lives of humankind, could reach these battle-hardened men, regardless of the age and the times in which they resided, no matter the extremity of their experience. These men who had first hand witness of the tragedy and extremity of war, could exclaim that a meeting with this Jesus in a tent in Egypt had left a greater mark on their lives than that of the experience of the trenches, that this meeting had left a deeper impression than the horrors of warfare. How wonderful to think that God's abundant grace and His tender healing hands were there for our troops ravaged by the brutality of the Gallipoli campaign, that our chaps weren't left alone at that time of horrible depravity. Here was God intervening in a personal way at a time of definition in our national history to present our men with the opportunity to hear of His personal healing comfort for them. His faithfulness was on offer, His answers were made available to those of our men who sought certainty in the face of an inexplicable war. God's desire for a personal relationship with His created beings even extended to men found in the seemingly godforsaken environ of the trenches.

I think again of those young men, in whose shoes I had often sought to place myself. It is a great consolation to me, that if I were placed in such a situation the constancy and love of God would ensure that His friendship and His support, expressed through His presence, His Word and His people, would not be far from me. Chambers' story is not one that has been associated with the ANZAC tradition here in Australia, but it is one that I believe is deserving of recognition, for it speaks of the nature of Jesus Christ and the constancy of His character, expressed at a time essential to the unfolding of our national story.

In concluding our comparison of H G Wells and Oswald Chambers, whilst we may say that both men had witnessed first hand the depravities of war, their responses to the suffering they saw differed vastly. In 1923, perhaps reflecting the zeitgeist, Wells ruminated:

The world is now a very tragic and anxious world, and the desire for peace of mind and a courage such as only deep and pure convictions can supply has never been so strong

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<sup>7</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 193

and so widespread. "More people are asking today and asking with a new intensity :  
"What must I do to be saved?"<sup>8</sup>

Despite his searching, Wells' beliefs left him without a true hope for redemption from the depravity of humankind.

Unlike Wells, Chambers kept to his death bed a resolute confidence in humankind. That confidence was not placed in the ability of man himself, but in the stirring of divine love within man's spirit by an everlasting hand. Chambers' confidence was founded in his personal relationship with a God whose message continues to span all historical barriers in bringing a timeless love into the individual lives of men and women. As a first hand witness of Chambers' ministry, Bright reasoned that Chambers' "calm confidence in men was born of his absolute trust in his Lord and in what He could do for any man. His it was to introduce men to Jesus Christ, never doubting the issue. ... His one anxiety was to get men in touch with Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup> It was Chambers' unwaveringly resolve in the power of this introduction that provided a real and certain hope for men facing the daily threat of death. It was that introduction that ultimately could transform the lives of those men. They were transformed not by the force of Chambers' personality or his persuasive reason, but because Chambers introduced them to One who was greater than their own fallen natures, one whose love was more powerful than their own horrifying experiences, Jesus Christ.

### God's Justice

Having commenced with an example of the heritage an individual submitted to Christ's love may offer within a society, even a society ravaged by war, being a lawyer you must forgive me if, in addressing the concept of heritage, I cannot resist the temptation to offer some comments on God's conception of justice and from this demonstrate how this conception is central to the historical development of His heritage for mankind.

Let us first turn to the Israelite legal system. A study of that system gives a unique insight into the principles that God emphasizes or seeks for a people who live submitted to His sovereignty. The Israelite legal system addressed matters such as:

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<sup>8</sup> Haining, Peter, *The H. G. Wells scrapbook : articles, essays, letters, anecdotes, illustrations*, New English Library, 1978, p 111

<sup>9</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 194

1. The dignity of the person, seen most fundamentally in the commandment “you shall not murder” and for example in the placing of a cap on the number of floggings that may be administered to an offender, lest “your brother will be degraded in your eyes”<sup>10</sup>;
2. The security of the possession of property, the most classic example of which is the commandment “you shall not steal”. This commandment provided the foundation of a system by which the fruit of one’s labour may be held secure;
3. Reward for work: the right to the fruit of one’s labour, seen for example in the admonition “Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight”<sup>11</sup>, together with the commands concerning the protection of property, this created foundations for economic productivity and certainty;
4. Equality before the law. Even the King was admonished to “learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law”.<sup>12</sup> Failure to do so could bring judgement even on the King; and
5. Access to Justice and a fair trial. Access to courts in which judges were impartial in decision making was to be the right of all.

The law also aimed to provide equality by ensuring that the powerless, the widow, the disabled, the impoverished, the deaf, the blind, the orphan and the alien could find a place within the community and have their dignity upheld in that community.

These are a selective sample of the matters addressed in the Old Testament law, but suffice to say, the law sought to lay the foundations for a cohesive and functioning community in which members were free to maximize the application of the command “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”<sup>13</sup> within their lives.<sup>14</sup>

But the Israelite legal system was designed not only to be a system of sanctions and restrictions. It was to be a system of justice that could imbue the heart with its wisdom and its guiding principles. After delivering the ten commandments to the nation of Israel Moses proclaimed “These commandments are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”<sup>15</sup> God’s commands were to be a living, breathing system of norms that infused the heart, and when expressed in action, were demonstrative of a human being in full relationship with both God and in right relationship with other people.

From 2005 to 2007 I had the privilege of ministering in an indigenous community in Darwin, Northern Territory. Interestingly, and as an aside only here, I pause to note the parallels that may be drawn between this concept of God’s life-imbuing law and the legal systems of the

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<sup>10</sup> Deuteronomy 25:3, New International Version.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 19:13.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 17:19-20.

<sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5.

<sup>14</sup> McIlroy writes “the high point of the Biblical vision was for a state of shalom in which because of the righteousness ... of the people, acts of delivering justice performed by judges were very much the exception rather than the rule.” McIlroy, David *Christian Perspectives on Law: A Biblical View of Law and Justice*, Paternoster Press, 2004

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6.

original inhabitants of Australia. The Indigenous legal system is not just a means for the enforcement of societal norms, but is seen as a living breathing Law, which infuses the life of those initiated into its wisdom, and provided a comprehensive, expansive and coherent worldview. This worldview was handed down through the generations, through the rite of passage of initiation, by which one entered into a sacred knowledge that was given of the ancestors. The recipients of that knowledge are to hold that wisdom sacrosanct. The knowledge with which they are entrusted is regarded as amongst the most valuable possessions within that society. It defines the recipient's place within society, and demonstrates the trust placed in, and respect to be accorded to, the recipient.

For indigenous peoples, the Law is an expression of community, of continuity, of responsibility and of that which is sacred. This Law defines a distinct identity and provides a link to posterity. The concept of a Law that enshrines a worldview, that provides a community with its identity, and is living and breathing in its own right, is a concept perhaps foreign to those who comprehend legal systems as being comprised of laws which are made either by dowdy men glaring down contemptuously from teak benches, or by reactionary legislators responding to the latest overhyped media concern. This is not the occasion however to provide a comparison between the indigenous legal system and our own or that of the ancient Israelites. It is suffice to say for our current purposes, that both the law of the Torah and indigenous Law operate as not just a system of prescriptions and rules, as we contemporary Westerners may perceive a legal system, but as a living breathing system that was to present an all encompassing, life imbuing means by which we may be this thing that is called a 'human'.

But returning to our contemplation of the Old Testament legal system, David Mcllroy in his text *Christian Perspectives on Law: A Biblical View of Law and Justice* suggests that in the Torah God's justice has two fundamental subsets, the first being mercy, and the second being judgement. Both aspects of justice are facets of God's response to injustice, two sides of the one coin as it were.<sup>16</sup> God's mercy was directed at upholding the weak, or oppressed, the widow, the blind, the lame, the poor, the underprivileged. Conversely God's mercy also necessitated that He act positively to cease the deeds of those who acted against His mercy. This is the expression of the other aspect of his justice, judgement.<sup>17</sup> In His judgement is expressed His desire to rid the world of the sin that has so stained His creation and His intentions for humanity. This is the desire so beautifully expressed in God's question to Job "Have you ever given orders to the morning, or shown the dawn its place, that it might take the earth by the edges and shake the wicked out of it?"<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Marshall writes "Given Israel's origins as liberated slaves, [shalom or God's intended state of wellbeing peace for the nation of Israel] necessarily required provision for the impoverished and oppressed, which is why so much biblical legislation is devoted to 'social justice' concerns, such as care for widows, orphans, aliens and the poor, the remission of debts, the manumission of slaves, and the protection of land rights. In this covenant justice could be understood as positive succor for, and intervention on behalf of, the poor and oppressed." In Mcllroy et. al, page 49.

<sup>17</sup> For example, the prophet Amos' declaration of God's impending judgement upon Israel was solely in response to the Israelites' failure to follow the principles of God's justice. He claimed that "they sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed." Amos 2:6-7.

<sup>18</sup> Job 38:12-13.

And it is in the actions of His Son Jesus Christ where these two elements of God's justice are so perfectly revealed, finding their final consummate expression in the cross that for us represents the death of his Son. There has been no event that has more singly expressed the union of these two facets of His eternal nature. Firstly, the cross of Christ presented in its most final and complete form the judgement that has to be meted in order to satisfy justice's call that there be a recompense for wrongs. The victims, the oppressed, the silenced, the sum total of history's wronged, require justice. Just as Abel's blood called to the Lord from the dirt, so the lives of those fallen to injustice required God's judgement to answer and bring satisfaction to their rightful claims. God's answer to these cries was the meting of judgement on the one perfect Man who had walked this earth.

And in this same cross, God's eternal mercy upon humankind was for all time perfectly revealed. That judgement, meted on Christ, was the same judgement that was measured for us, that should rightly have been borne by us. The unfaithful, the untruthful, the oppressors, the unjust, we were the ones who were deserving of God's judgement, the ones by whose actions His mercy was so offended. And yet beautifully we were the same ones who met with His mercy. We were those oppressed by the heavy burden of sin, those isolated and lost without reason or direction, we were the ones who had so offended, and yet we were the ones so in need of upholding. So in the one act He brought His justice, both His mercy and His judgement to bear in a final eternal expression of His just nature.

### The Abolition Movement

So we have considered the example of the Old Testament Law, and God's intentions for His people as displayed in that Law. We have considered the culmination of the two elements of God's justice, being mercy and judgement in the cross of Christ. We have considered the example of a man on whose heart that cross had left an indelible impression, that of Oswald Chambers. Let us take one further example of a man in whom the workings of that cross led to shape another story in our modern history, that is, the example of William Wilberforce, the nineteenth century legislative reformer. Wilberforce was counseled by John Newton, the famous author of the hymn Amazing Grace and reformed slave trader, who was a spiritual guide to Wilberforce in his student days at Oxford. It was later in Wilberforce's life that God's Spirit began to stir in his heart as an unrelenting desire for knowledge of the eternal creator, ultimately culminating in Newton leading Wilberforce in conversion. Having made the introduction between Wilberforce and the living God, Newton then counseled Wilberforce to remain in parliament. Wilberforce held a deeply felt conviction that the barbaric slave trade should end. This conviction inspired his tireless efforts in the face of strong industry lobbies to introduce his bill to defeat slavery. After many years of dogged persistence, the abolition movement carried the day and slavery was abolished in his lifetime.

Though we may credit Wilberforce's persistence, it was God, working personally in the hearts of both Wilberforce and Newton that moved to change the course of history. How wonderful that the God who had turned a slave trader from his evil trade should, having redeemed this man, use him as part of his kingdom purpose to end the slave trade. Not only is this dramatic historical irony, but it is a statement of the effect of redemption – we are totally cleansed by His

blood, to the extent that we are then fit for use to completely end the ills we once perpetrated. Did God join these men, one broken and convicted by his own role in the slave trade and one a skilled orator and parliamentarian, to influence the course of history to end the oppressive slave trade? It seems not too far a conclusion to reach.

But God's response to the inhumanity of the slave trade was not limited to the hearts of these two men. Around the same time God convicted two Dutch Moravian missionaries to travel to the other side of the world to a Caribbean island that was at that time solely inhabited by slaves. The owner and governor of this island had vowed that no religion would be brought to his island, and so driven by God's conviction to reach those lost souls, these two Dutch men sold themselves into slavery to share the light shed in their own hearts with those living in darkness across the other side of the world.

For many of those taken from Africa, men and women such as the Moravian missionaries offered a hope upon which they could rely as an act of daily survival.<sup>19</sup> For these men women and children, the story of the Israelites, who could rely upon the God who heard the cry of the oppressed slaves, held a special resonance we here today perhaps may only contemplate. They could see that through his suffering, Christ, as a man, could sympathise with their own suffering. Through these missionaries they also heard of a place in which their sorrow would end, and that, even though they be regarded as mere chattels here on earth, intrinsically each one of them was of eternal value in the eyes of a God who would send his Son to perish to win their passage into eternal peace.

And by combining the words of these missionaries with their own personal faith, these African men and women miraculously discovered that this God even came into the present, into their experience to meet them personally and assure them of His love through the gift of the Holy Spirit into their lives. For them the thought that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but came to meet them in their suffering held a special resonance. It was He who offered a personal response, who offered the warmth of friendship and an uncompromising heavenly love unknown in all their prior suffering. All through the Americas this God was reaching out through the preaching offered by men and women such as the Moravian missionaries.

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<sup>19</sup> This is perhaps evidenced by the rich of heritage of Negro spirituals handed down the generations. Many of these hymns stand as testimonies to the strength that may be gained by those suffering under extreme conditions of poverty and injustice through a focus upon the promise of heaven. Just think of the words of such classics as "Swing low sweet chariot, coming just to carry me home" and "Were you there when they crucified my Lord", which drive the singer to consider the day when they will reach heaven and rest from the troubles of this world. I remember a visiting pastor from Africa accentuated this difference for me many years ago when he remarked, on visiting our churches, on just how many of our worship songs thanked the Lord for what He had done for us. It was his reflection that by contrast many of the songs sung in Africa focus upon the final day when we will return home and our earthly sufferings will cease. Indeed, the all time favourite classic hymn in the indigenous church which I attended in Darwin, in a community where mourning was conducted in an uninterrupted cycle, where violence and drunkenness was a perpetual visitor and poverty was rife, contained the following refrain "Ready, oh yes I'm ready. Lord I'm ready to go home. When that trumpet sounds my feet will leave the ground, Lord I'm ready to go home."

Yet it was the same God who had moved in the heart of Newton, in the heart of Wilberforce and in the heart of the Moravians. Through Newton, he moved to demonstrate the endless nature of his grace; through Wilberforce, he moved to demonstrate His practical concern to end the suffering through influencing earthly powers; and through the Moravians he moved to show His personal concern to be alongside the slaves in their suffering and in their grief. So, on one side of the world the Negro slaves heard of the God who could save them and a God who will listen to their cry for mercy, while on the other side of the world the same God would use a former oppressor, whose heart His mercy had touched, to inspire a legislator to doggedly, insistently pursue change. Each individual did not act alone, but instead was part of God's bigger picture.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, and in bringing the stories I have told tonight together, I want to suggest that God's intentions for mankind through the course of human history may be likened to an ever flowing stream that has been progressing for thousands of years right to this current date. The tangible effect of its ebbs and flows can be seen within the hearts of men such as Oswald Chambers, John Newton, William Wilberforce and the Moravians. This eternal stream found its most divine expression in the cross of Christ, by which cross, the love of God broke through the power of death and altered irretrievably the tide of human history. From that day, for the first time since the fall of humankind, man could gain access to His eternal creator. That day offers the hope for those, who, like the man in the parable of Jesus beating his own chest in sincerity cried 'have mercy on me Lord, a sinner', that those persons may know a power beyond their own reason, to draw upon an eternal unmitigated source of love. It is he who has ears to hear this eternal song of love that winds through the ages, it is he who finds the blood of Christ poured out for them, who now find passage to the Most Holy Place. And as Paul, in writing to the Romans, tells us, this eternal unstoppable force will ultimately break through on the day for which all creation groans, the day of the return of the Christ.

The heavenly hope we hold is that the love that underpins the course of history, the unwavering course which progresses ever unerringly towards our Saviour's return, may come to meet you in this moment. The Bible holds the hope that somehow, by some divine expression of faith in the resurrection of this Man Jesus Christ, we individuals can join in this unstoppable tide. For within each generation, God seeks men and women willing to join his eternal tide. Psalm 53 describes a God who searches the earth looking for one who will respond to His heart:

“God looks down from heaven on the sons of men,

To see if there are any who understand,

Any who seek God.”<sup>20</sup>

Through Christ's actions in offering his life to a righteous God as a recompense for our own shortfallings, we too may in this present life somehow, by some imperceptible heavenly impartation, be joined in the motivations of love for our fellow man that so powerfully drove Him.

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<sup>20</sup>Psalm 53:2.

As Chambers so assuredly preached to our troops in the Egyptian desert, Christ's death now enables an introduction to the divine.

Through Christ's death God unleashed within man's hearts the potential to see God's nature here on earth. What God had so longed to see exhibited in the nation of Israel, and that which He so welcomed in the life of Christ, is now on offer to all mankind – the ability to be one with God's motivations here on earth. The cross represents not only the end of the age of the victory of the sinful nature, it represents through the giving of the Holy Spirit *into* man, the beginning of the victory of the righteous man.

Generations of men have come and gone, not leaving any legacy that is remembered by those who have benefited from their labours. But there is a means by which we today might fashion a legacy that lasts for all eternity. God seeks men and women willing to join His eternal tide, not to record their own glorious achievements, but instead to decrease in glory that He may increase. A. W. Tozer put it beautifully when he fashioned this prayer: "Be thou exalted over my reputation. Make me ambitious to please Thee even if as a result I must sink into obscurity and my name be forgotten as a dream".<sup>21</sup>

I want to suggest that, our smallest turning from the hatred and dissension that so often characterizes humankind, that so troubled H G Wells, the turning from this to the quietest act of love can build the latest installment of that eternal movement – the movement that will last the test of time. In so acting, we are joining to, and building with Him, the heritage that He has orchestrated since the beginning of time. With Him, we are creating His legacy here on earth, a legacy that will not perish, or pass away.<sup>22</sup>

I want to suggest that our actions, firstly inspired and then empowered by his eternal hand, may, with prophetic resonance, offer a glimpse to those around us of the divine age to come. As Christians we can bring God's concerns for humanity to the community in which we live through our actions, within the vineyards in which we labour. The simplest of actions, the respect we show our colleagues and our competitors in the marketplace, the respect we grant our employees or employers, simple acts of kindness we grant to our neighbour, each of these can be a demonstration of the heavenly principles which have informed our own hearts.

I also want to suggest that, as He is the eternal orchestration of the eternal tides ebbs and flows of history, if we join to His Spirit He will infuse us with the role that we are to play in creating the current chapter of His heritage here on earth. Our worth then is not found in our singlehandedly changing the world, that accomplishment has been met in the death of Christ Jesus. It is instead found in our fulfilling the place he has set aside for us in this eternal tide. Regardless of whether we are remembered by future generations, we will be remembered by Him.

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<sup>21</sup>Tozer A W, *The Pursuit of God*, Authentic Media 2009, Page 74.

<sup>22</sup> Jesus spoke of our ability to create an eternal heritage when He said "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Matthew 6:18-19.

Just as this Jesus Christ used Chambers to offer a true hope to our troops grappling for real answers, the Lord is looking for men and women who hold a similar conviction in the continuing relevance of His Word today and an assuredness of the faithfulness of His personal love for this generation of humankind. John D. Blight, of the Australian Infantry Force wrote that Chambers' teachings in Egyptian desert left him with an understanding of the timelessness of the teaching of Jesus:

None of us, I think had realized until then that the Sermon on the Mount was meant for us in our day; but he taught us that Christ's teaching was not a matter for the first century alone but for the twentieth century; and when amid the hurly-burly of civilized life, doubts arise as to the possibility of its twentieth-century application, the memory of ... that man of God dispels them, and we know that they are Jesus Christ's words for us now and always.<sup>23</sup>

Wells perceived that the war ravaged generation in which he lived was asking the question "What must I do to be saved?". This question is still being asked in the hearts of this generation today, as it has for countless generations before us. The question stems from a desire that is planted within all hearts, the desire to know the eternal creator. We must tell the story of how one gains access to this eternal stream. We must in our actions join and speak out that eternal story. Inscribed by an introduction to the eternal creator, our hearts are the tablets by which God's living heritage presents itself to the generation of today.

In the acceptance of his heavenly power at work in you, somehow the love that underpins and drives the ebbs and tumult of history, whose influence courses almost imperceptibly as we head to the final day of restoration, reveals its power in your own life. Knowing this, let's boldly go into His Holy place and listen to the whisperings of His heart and from there take His living message to a dying world. The whisperings we each hear will differ, the truths He shares, and the inspiration given will be seen in light of our particular gifting, characters, callings and stations in life. His desire will be expressed differently in each of our particular professions. However through history, through the likes of the Moravians, Wilberforce and Newton, God has shown His ability to amass the sum total of our quiet contributions to influence and shake a society.

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<sup>23</sup>Chambers, Gertrude: *Oswald Chambers : His Life and Work*. London : Simpkins Marshall, 1933, S. 194