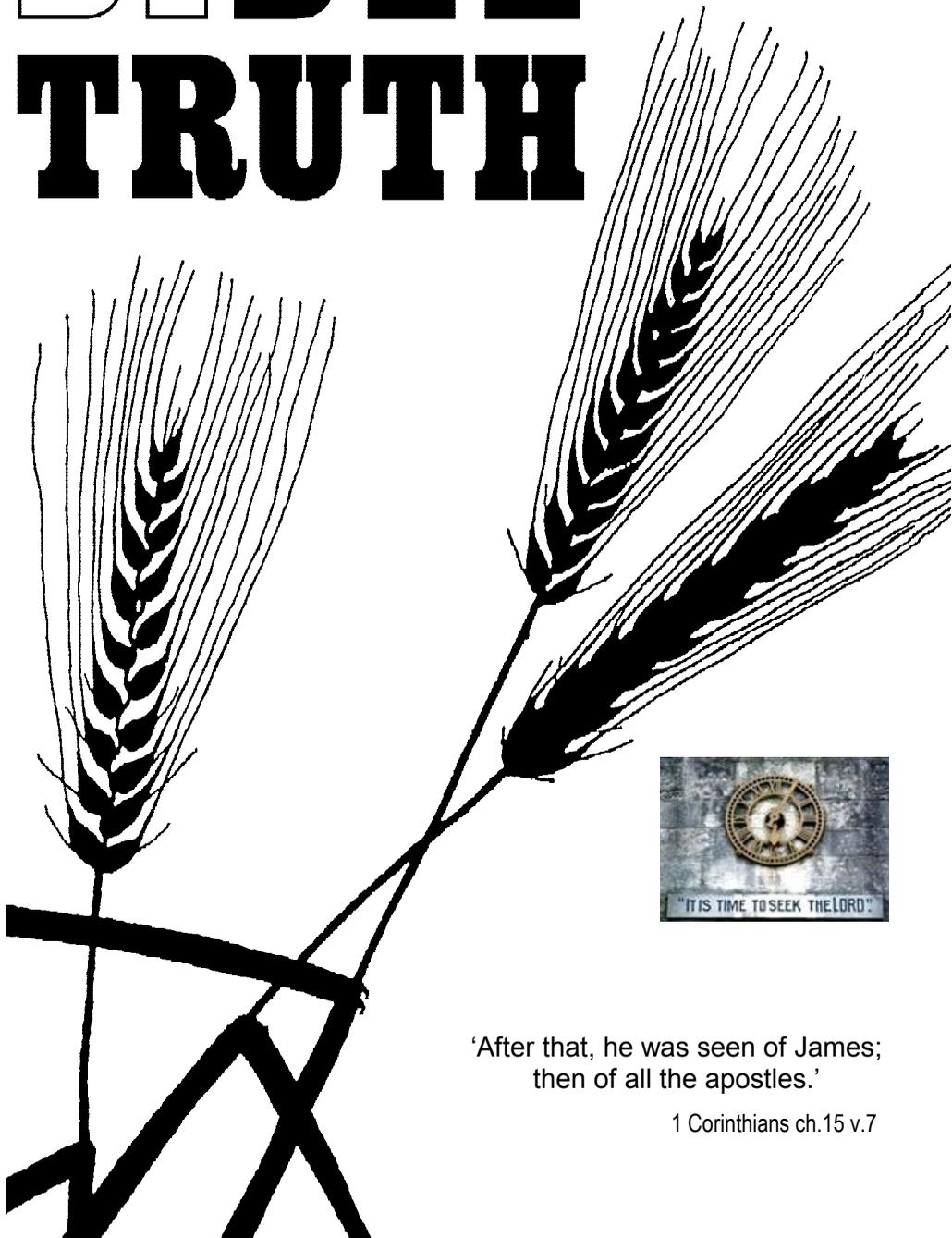


BIBLE TRUTH

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'After that, he was seen of James;
then of all the apostles.'

1 Corinthians ch.15 v.7

Amazing Grace

By Tom Benyon

Editors note - Tom Benyon since his retirement from Parliament has worked tirelessly to raise funds for **ZANE**, a charity providing holistic social services across Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia); it particularly helps the pensioner community to survive the awful pressures they are under. In recent years he has raised considerable sums by being sponsored to walk the length and breadth of Britain. We are most grateful to him for being permitted to reprint this extract from his diary, *The last Leg*, when travelling between Holyhead and Oxford in the Summer of 2013.



We are indebted to Tom for allowing us to reprint this.
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‘Do you really believe the Gospel?’ I groaned inwardly. It was an uncomfortably hot day: shimmering heat and a bony, slightly aggressive young woman whom we met in a café asking me ‘the question’.

A few days ago, Miranda asked if she could walk with us for a while, and since I could hardly refuse, I was stuck with her questions. Still, she indicated that she could only spare a couple of hours and so, with any luck, come lunch I would once again be alone with my own thoughts. See what an enthusiastic evangelist I am!

The questions came thick and fast. ‘You can’t really be serious,’ said Miranda when I told her that yes, I did believe the Bible was the word of God. ‘I’m deadly serious,’ came my response. ‘What?! You truly believe all that stuff about a virgin birth, walking on water, blind people seeing and a dead man living again?’

I fought back the urge to pick up my speed and leave Miranda trailing behind. ‘Yes, all that. It’s not always easy to believe, but I do believe it.’ ‘It’s complete rubbish,’ she near shrieked. ‘You are an intelligent man so how can you possibly be so naive?’

I stopped and turned to face her. 'Please stop saying I am talking rubbish! My faith is important to me, and whether you choose to believe in God or not is a matter for you. You can't force anyone into faith and so I am not going to argue fruitlessly with you. And you started the conversation! The most important thing you can do in this life is to decide what you believe and I have made my choice.'

'I've studied the Gospel carefully and think there is sufficient evidence to sustain an intelligent conclusion that it's true. You are clearly free to make your own decision, but long ago I decided that I would stop dithering.'

Miranda shook her head dubiously as we both calmed down. Her voice at least had lost its shrill note. 'What about miracles?' she asked. I told her that I had seen some: 'I've watched people I love come to faith. Once we were blind and now we see. The Gospel has several stories about physical blindness being cured and I have seen spiritual blindness being cured. Indeed I was cured myself,' 'Brainwashed you mean!' I nearly dropped my stick. 'Our society has been hollowed out by the belief that things like money, power and sex will make us happy. That so many people turn to booze and drugs shows what a lie this is. The other option open to us is to turn to the scriptures. I was as sceptical as you are to start with, but I had an open mind and thought hard. You see I was very impressed with some of the really bright people who believed it. And I was less impressed with the quality of those who didn't.'

Miranda was finally listening, and so I pressed on: 'It all starts with the head, then the heart, and not the other way round. Most people don't even bother to study the Bible, they lazily lump 2,000 years of our Judeo/Christian inheritance into a box marked "the tooth fairy and other myths" and never bother to think about it again. They blank it out perhaps because they are unimaginative, or because they fear what their daft friends might think of them. Or perhaps they are locked into addictive sin or have done something terrible and think they can't be forgiven — and can't forgive themselves. Then there are those who listened to snatches of dull religiosity at school and walked away never to think about it again. And some have suffered tragedy and think that if God existed, he wouldn't allow such pain. These issues can often destroy whatever green shoots of belief might exist. However, there is nothing original about any of these doubts. People have been worrying about these problems since St Paul, and there are intelligent answers to them if you are prepared to look for them'.

I slashed at the nettles with my stick and then continued. 'At least the likes of Dawkins engage with the questions. I don't agree with him at all, but I respect the fact he's carefully considered the arguments. But the lack of sensible curiosity of most people I know simply astonishes me. They just shrug and say they've no idea. They are prepared to leave it like that and that really worries me, especially when people I love take such a view. Surely whether the Gospel is true or not is a vital question. So many indicate their fear by resorting to silly slogans like "Bible bashing" and joke that believers have been "brainwashed". All this is sheer nonsense encouraged by the media. Perhaps such people think slogans are a substitute for intelligent debate.'

Fishers of Men

Miranda looked taken aback, and then she asked me, 'Why do you believe?' I thought a while and then replied: 'I thought it was wishful thinking at first. Then I began to believe the testimony of those who witnessed the resurrection. That's the key. History reveals that not one of these men ever denied his testimony about Jesus. Why did the disciples willingly accept terrible and painful deaths if Jesus had not been raised from the dead? And what turned these simple fishermen into such amazing preachers? That is what convinced me. I was another doubting Thomas but I took that first step of faith and went on from there.'

Miranda shrugged and left us a short while later. I told her that if she was serious she should read the Gospel of John and ask herself, is it true? I doubt she will somehow. Perhaps I was insensitive, but then again I had so little time to persuade her of what I truly believe to be the truth.
