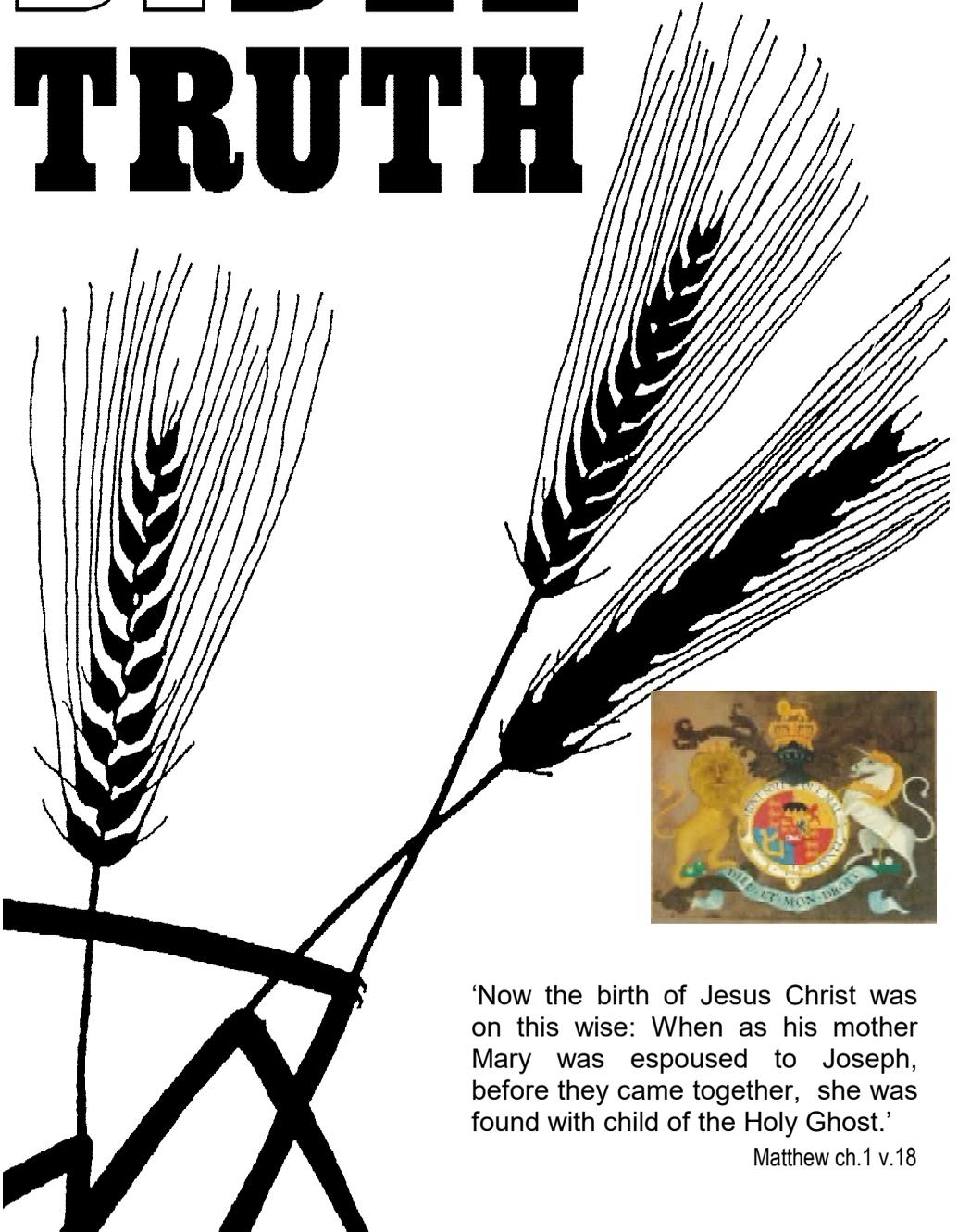


# BIBLE TRUTH

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'Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.'

Matthew ch.1 v.18



## *A Plea - by Mark Musty*

'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.'

Romans ch.1 v.16

I spend a lot of time in Bristol and even a cursory glance reveals a huge number of Churches, indicating a rich Christian heritage. A closer inspection will find many independent chapels that trace their ancestry to Victorian times and beyond - to the 18th century and the 'Evangelical Awakening'.

The names of George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley are intimately linked with Bristol. In the Rose Green area of the city, there is a plaque on a wall that tells its readers: 'George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley preached to the people of east Bristol 1739 - 1788 in nearby fields, later the site of Rose Green High School. About three miles from there is the village of Hanham where Whitefield preached outdoors to the miners of Kingswood. It is here that John Wesley tried his hand at 'field preaching' for the first time at Whitefield's invitation, and he too experienced God's blessing on his message. It is recorded that when the miners heard the Gospel message, many were so affected that their tears made gutters down their grimy faces.

So what did these men of God preach to the poverty stricken miners in Kingswood? Did they preach so called 'liberation theology', or did they, like Marxist inspired politicians, preach 'armed struggle' to throw off their 'oppressors' as the late Nelson Mandela did? Did they preach the 'prosperity gospel' (God wants you healthy and wealthy!) proclaimed by Joel Osteen and other so called 'TV evangelists'? No of course not. They preached 'Christ crucified' (1 Corinthians ch.1 v.23) unashamedly and with great boldness and compassion.

The message of the Christian Gospel is what drove Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. The glorious message that God had become man in the person of Jesus Christ, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death on the behalf of sinners, had risen again from the dead and offers eternal life to all who repent and put their faith in Him. This was the Good News of the Kingdom, the 'evangel', the 'good tidings ... which shall be to all people' (Luke ch.2 v.10). Whitefield and the Wesley brothers called ordinary men back to God. They knew that it wasn't social conditions that were man's greatest problem. They didn't believe that man was basically good and if only life was easier he would behave himself. No, they knew that man was wicked at heart, that there was something wrong with him at a deep and fundamental level. The heart of man was and still is the heart of man's problem. They knew that unbelieving men were lost and on their way to an eternal hell and that only the Lord Jesus Christ could save them. It was love for God and love for men that caused these evangelists to follow Christ in such a radical way.

Whitfield's favourite text to preach from was

'... Ye must be born again.'

John ch.3 v.7

He preached from this text so often because he knew, as John ch.3 v.7 states that we all 'must be born again!' He firmly believed that the Gospel was indeed 'the power of God that brings salvation'. It wasn't the power of personality or even eloquence and oratory that brought men and women into the Kingdom - but rather the 'demonstration of the Spirit and of power' (1 Corinthians ch.2 v. 4). Whitefield and the Wesley brothers were men consecrated to God, set aside for His work, anointed by the Holy Spirit, faithfully proclaiming His Gospel - whether people would listen or not. Many mocked and jeered; Whitfield and John Wesley even suffered physical assault at times, yet multitudes of people from all sections of society were converted to Christ. England was a dark place in the 18th c - as it is today - yet the power of the Gospel was able to change hearts and to turn a nation. England and

Wales were transformed spiritually, and this in turn brought about a number of social reforms, such as improved working conditions, care for the poor and the abolition of the slave trade.

Allow me to briefly apply Whitefield's favourite text to us all: 'You must be born again!'

Have we been born again? Have we responded in faith to the Gospel of the Son of God? Are we trusting in His sacrificial death on Calvary to pay the price for our sins? Have we stopped trying to earn God's favour by our own 'good deeds' or religious rituals? Whitfield said that a man could no more get to heaven on the basis of his good deeds than by 'climbing a ladder of sand'. Are we trusting only in what Christ did for us on the cross? Has a change taken place in our lives so that our attitude to sin has altered? Do we now hate the sinful things we once loved and love those things of God we once hated? Do we know that our sins are forgiven because of the Lord Jesus Christ dying in our place and rising again?

What about the text at the beginning of this article? Are we ashamed of the Gospel? Do we believe it can save multitudes of people now as it did years ago? Do we believe that God could bring another 'great awakening' on our nation?

This is surely our nation's only hope as we slide ever closer to the precipice of moral anarchy. Within a stone's throw of Rose Green, the map reveals around five chapels - one has disappeared without trace, one is converted into flats, one is a gym, one sells windows and the final one is boarded up. Sadly, their lampstands have been taken away (see Revelation ch. 2 v. 5). The Holy Spirit can be grieved. When the uncompromised Gospel is not preached He may withdraw.

In the 18th c the great Evangelical Awakening saved Britain from the bloody revolution that came upon France - an event from which spiritually it has never recovered. Perhaps God will be pleased to save our nation from ruin again. Only God knows but whatever happens we are called to be faithful men and women in His service - not to be ashamed of the Gospel but to proclaim it corporately and individually. To be 'evangelical' does not just mean believing a set of doctrines, it also means acting upon them! The fields are still white for harvest and the labourers are few. We must have no confidence in our own strength, abilities, plans or programmes but instead go to the God of our spiritual fathers in brokenness, repentance and faith. He is the same God and has not changed. We need to seek Him for He is waiting to bless us.

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