

Ed / t rial

**But
God**

Over the years I have listened to countless testimonies, and heard many 'faith stories' related of how God had turned

lives and situations around, both before and subsequent to the testifier having come in faith to Christ. And in those testimonies a short, two-word Biblical expression has so often been repeated. Twenty-five times in the New Testament we find this lovely expression: 'But God'. In situations that were humanly impossible, God stepped in and transformed everything. In this editorial I want to consider just eight of these.

1. The 'But God' of SUCH LOVE. From time to time we will have heard news reports of those who, with exceptional valour, have put their lives on the line in the defence of others, and paid the supreme sacrifice as a result. In His discourse on the True Vine, Jesus rightly said: 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' (Jn 15:13) Yet in Romans 5:8 we read of an even more remarkable love: 'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' Whilst a soldier may lay down his life for his brothers-in-arms, would any do so for one on the enemy side? In our unregenerate state we were sworn enemies in God's sight – with no time or thought for Him (Rom 3:10-18). But God saw the new creations we might become in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), and Jesus paid the costliest of price (Ps 49:6-8; 1 Pet 1:18-19), that we might be reconciled to God. How deep the Father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure!

2. The 'But God' of His SUPREMACY. How bleak things must have appeared for Jesus' early followers that first Good Friday. Jesus had been arrested, falsely accused, scourged, crucified, and His body now lay in the tomb. I can picture in my mind those two despondent disciples as they walk to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-17). Their hopes appeared wholly dashed. But naught, even death itself, is outside the control of the One who is supreme ruler over all: 'But God raised him (Jesus) from the dead.' (Acts 13:30) As someone has wisely said, the best news the world ever had came from a graveyard! Through His death Jesus had paid our sin debt completely, and His Father raised Him from the dead as a sign that there was nothing more to pay. '... When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.' (Rom 5:10) Today we proclaim a Christ who was dead and is alive, not a Christ who was alive and is dead. He arose to secure for us the inestimable blessings His death had purchased. If you know not these blessings, will you consider your state before God?

3. The 'But God' of our SORRY STATE. The second chapter of Ephesians opens with a stark and gloomy picture of what our state before God – outside of Christ – is. We are described as 'dead in trespasses and sins' (v1), 'children of disobedience' (v2) and 'children of wrath' (v3). Many people mistakenly think they can make things right with God through their own efforts or self-reformation. However, as Archbishop Temple rightly said: 'We contribute nothing to our salvation except our sin.' A dead man can never bring himself back to life. But thankfully Ephesians 2 doesn't stop at verse 3, for in the following verses we read these wonderful words: 'But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).'

(Eph 2:4-5) The following verses speak of our new position in Christ, and the future hope of all who have come to God by His one appointed way – by grace alone (not our works), through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone (Eph 2:6-9). Are you trusting today in the Lord Jesus, the One who is the Way (Jn 14:6)? Or are you vainly trying to come to God some other way? Don't make this fatal mistake.

4. The 'But God' of His SOVEREIGNTY. In today's world public accolades and adulation are chiefly reserved for its most talented, beautiful, productive or successful individuals. And this can leave the rest of us possibly feeling a bit overlooked or undervalued at times. But God's values system is different from this world's – His ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts like our thoughts (Is 55:8). Jesus taught 'many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.' (Matt 19:30) 'But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.' (1 Cor 1:27) Never feel you cannot do anything for God – some of Christ's own disciples were viewed as 'unlearned and ignorant men' (Acts 4:13) – yet God used them mightily to spread His good news to the then known world. And God still delights in using everyday people to do just the same today!

5. The 'But God' of His SOLIDARITY. The road to heaven is often not an easy one, and one Bible character who certainly discovered this was Joseph. Hated by his brothers, betrayed and sold into slavery in Egypt, falsely accused (despite doing the right thing) and wrongfully imprisoned, then let down and forgotten by a fellow inmate whose dream he had interpreted. This, of course, wasn't the end of the story. God exalted Joseph, and used him as the means to preserve the lives of his father Jacob and the entire family circle amidst seven years of famine (Gen 45:5-8). How did Joseph cope in the face of such a 'frowning providence'? – '... But God was with him.' (Acts 7:9) Hudson Taylor said: 'All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God, because they reckoned on God being with them.' And he was right.

6. The 'But God' of His SUPPLY. Many who knew little of Satan's existence before becoming Christians certainly found he was real thereafter. The devil will do his utmost to tempt and to trip us up in our walk of faith. But we have a mighty ally. 'There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.' (1 Cor 10:13)

That way of escape may be to flee a situation; it may be to rebuff Satan's lies and approaches with an apt scripture; or it may be to cry to God in prayer for help to stand. But the God of great faithfulness, whose compassions are new every morning (Lam 3:22-23) will always provide an exit strategy that will protect us – and provide for our every need (Phil 4:19).

7. The 'But God' of a SURE INCREASE. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote something that is both a challenge and an encouragement: 'I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.' (1 Cor 3:6-7) As Christians we play different roles in His service, but our very best plans, programmes, labours and activities will produce absolutely nothing in and of ourselves. 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.' (Ps 127:1) Jesus told us clearly that 'without me ye can do nothing.' (Jn 15:5) Service for God done in our own strength will yield nothing, but when we are 'labourers *together with God*' (1 Cor 3:9) He promises us the increase. '... To him that soweth righteousness shall be a *sure reward.*' (Prov 11:18)

8. The 'But God' of SOLEMNITY. In our thoughts so far we have considered God's provision for His children. But perhaps you may be so busy making money and prospering that God plays no part in your thinking. You may be like the farmer Jesus spoke of in Luke 12, who planned to pull down his barns and build bigger. There is nothing wrong with planning for the future, but this man was fixated on his material prosperity. He made the mistake of boasting about tomorrow (Pr 27:1) but left God completely out of the equation. And what happened? 'But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?' (Luke 12:20) Truly, 'what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' (Mk 8:36) There is nothing wrong with owning things, as long as our things do not *own us*. '... If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.' (Ps 62:10) Jesus' command is clear – '*... seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*' When we seek Him as Saviour and seek to put Him first in our lives, He promises to give us the other things we have need of too. And, through our service for Him, we lay up treasure in heaven – that lasts eternally (Mt 6:20).

Perhaps today you may be facing a difficult or a seemingly hopeless situation. As you ponder again some of the thoughts we have shared about how God can step in, change and transform what man simply cannot, may you be enabled to speak the words 'But God' over that situation today, to pray, and to believe that He will indeed do that miracle.