

# Called to higher ground

*Bryn Jones*

***"I ... had ambition not only to go further than any man had ever been before, but as far as it was possible for a man to go."*** Captain James Cook

'Mrs Jones, Mrs Jones!' It was our neighbour calling over the garden wall to my mother. 'Is Bryn there, please? I need his help.'

As always, my mother readily volunteered me and I ran next door to see what was wanted.

'Come in quickly, Bryn,' said the neighbour, hurriedly shutting the door behind me. 'My budgie's got out of its cage.'

After feeding the bird she had forgotten to close the cage door, and now the bird was flying around the house. I felt awkward because I didn't like birds to be caged and never believed we should keep them that way. For the next ten minutes, although I tried to catch the bird, I was secretly hoping our mission would be in vain. I didn't want this beautiful bird to be caught.

As I went into the lounge she said, 'If it gets out it will die because it can't live in this climate.'

I couldn't help thinking, 'But wouldn't it be better to have a short life truly free than a long life imprisoned?' My dilemma was resolved, however, when the bird, flying up the stairs with the neighbour and myself in hot pursuit, escaped through an open bedroom window.

When truly free you can only be what your nature is, and a bird's nature is to fly, not to hop from perch to perch in a cage. The cage was not right. Its bars too restraining, its world too small. It was a prison.

Out of its cage the bird rose naturally on the wing. It was born for flight, to climb the skies with songs of praise. It is a friend of the clouds, the wind and the air.

Worship has that same liberating effect upon the soul. When we are lost in the wonder of God's grace and goodness, worshipping the one whose beauty has captured our hearts, we discover we are not born again to be tied to this temporal world. In our liberated state we are most at home in his heaven.

Paul understood this experience. On at least one occasion he had been 'caught up into the third heaven'. Such was the fearful yet wonderful revelation of that time that an enraged enemy assaulted him in an effort to destroy the faith released by it. But the

apostle found God's grace sufficient to enable him not to crumple under the pressure but to overcome in praise. He was a free man.

`[The Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me' (2 Corinthians 12:9).

On another occasion Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown into jail at Philippi. Mistreated and abused, they sat in the damp, airless dungeon, surrounded by cries of pain, fear and bitterness from other prisoners. Yet in that situation so little conducive to worship, the Bible says, `About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them' (Act 16:25).

Little wonder what then happened. I plead guilty to the running away of my imagination at this moment, but in my mind I can see the angelic hosts, stirred by these songs of praise, crowding into the cell. The heavenly choirs pressed in as the men continued in their worship until the whole place bulged at the seams, finally erupting when the doors burst open, the walls collapsed and the prisoners' chains dropped away!

To worship in Spirit is to find oneself strangely detached from the external pressures of life. Because you are joined to God, none of life's restrictions seem to have any bearing on what you are experiencing. Whatever your circumstances, you now find yourself baptised into a river of peace and tranquillity. The pressures of life clamouring to pull you down seem so far away. The worshipping lover of God is so God-conscious that, though his body may be imprisoned, his soul is like a bird set free.

Worship knows no prison, no chains, no locked doors-we are free to be, to love, to rise, to adore before his throne. Whenever we worship we are ascending higher into the presence of God. Things are very different in the hill of the Lord.

Mountains have always held a fascination for me. Not the extremely high ones that are unreachable to all except trained and skilful mountaineers, but the small mountains-or large hills, whichever you prefer to call them.

In summer months we have often taken the family for picnics `up the mountains'. They have always been happy, boisterous times. One such occasion was one of those rare and beautiful days when the sun was shining but there was a pleasant, cooling breeze. We started up the Long, sloping mountainside. At first, we made good headway, stopping every fifteen minutes or so to turn around and gaze at the view from the hillside, the children impatiently urging us to go higher.

Soon, their urgings ceased. It wasn't long before our youngest was too tired and wanted a piggyback. The others also wanted a turn. Their legs were aching, but still we pressed on. Now it was I who was urging them to continue-I felt we had come so far up, so why give up now?

`When you reach the top,' I said, `it will be beautiful. When you get up there you'll see things you haven't seen before.' And so I kept urging them.

To their cries of 'How much further?' I would say, 'Oh, look, just a little further, we're almost there.' Then we would reach the point I had been indicating, only to find that the mountain sloped away and up another rise. Nevertheless we persevered and finally reached the top.

Everybody flopped down on the grass. We lay there for a few minutes, letting the sun shine warmly on us, everyone sighing and breathing deeply.

Finally, I looked up. 'My, it's terrific!' I exclaimed. 'What a beautiful view! How much more is visible up here than from down below.'

The children struggled to their feet to look and the eldest said, 'You're right, Dad. Everything looks different from up here.'

Sometimes we get too close to life to see it clearly. We become problem-conscious instead of God-conscious. We lose perspective in our situation. Molehills become mountains.

Psalms 120 to 134 are 'psalms of ascent', ever leading upwards to the presence of God in his temple. 'Who may ascend the hill of the Lord?' the psalmist asks elsewhere. 'Who may stand in his holy place?' (Psalm 24:3).

To worship in the mountain of God's presence enables us to see the way he has mysteriously and marvellously interwoven the circumstances of our lives. And here we will find that those very fingers that wrought the heavens and earth with such care now unravel the complexity of our twisted emotions.

Nothing need be to our loss. His love causes job, family, home and even hard times to find their place in his purpose, just as, from the mountain-top, fields, rivers and villages form a patchwork quilt across the earth.