

August 3rd

Memory verse:

The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.

Psalm 121:5

Today's lesson includes the story of a man who travelled in dangerous places among enemies but who was kept by the Lord in just the way this verse describes. But first we will keep up with the latest developments in mathematics!

Doing Maths

On 3rd August 2020 a discussion began on social media between maths educators in the USA. “Math professors and academics at top universities, including Harvard and the University of Illinois, discussed the 'Eurocentric' roots of American mathematics on Twitter. They asserted that the statement '2 plus 2 equals 4' is rooted in Western definitions of mathematics.”¹ They considered this a bad thing and made statements such as “the idea that math[s] is objective or neutral IS A MYTH.” Fuelled by the same discussions was a new draft curriculum for Seattle Public Schools aimed at “re-humanising” mathematics, suggesting that “Western” maths has been used to “disenfranchise people and communities of colour” by posing as “the only legitimate expression of mathematical identity and intelligence.” The document posed the question, “Who gets to say if an answer is right?”²



The ideas behind this rather weird discussion are partly based on a muddling of maths itself and the *teaching* of maths. No doubt, in the USA for instance, there has been an attitude among some maths teachers that is not helpful, a belief that “white people” are somehow better at maths than others. This is an idea that has its roots in evolutionary ideas and it is false.³ It is also true that if you treat people as if they are born with no aptitude for maths they may well demonstrate that very characteristic. It may have been the case that maths *teaching* was not neutral. However it is not the case that the flaw is in mathematics itself nor can the problem be addressed by trying to define maths differently!

The truth is that mathematics is not ours to define. Mathematics is a foundation of the universe and comes from the mind of God. Human beings make *discoveries* in the field of mathematics but they cannot make *inventions* in maths. The answer to the question, “Who gets to say if an answer is right?” ultimately is: God.⁴

Of course that does not mean you have to believe in God to do mathematics. However, anyone doing maths is using one of God's gifts just as someone who eats food is using what God provides. Nor does it mean that it is not possible to make a mistake in mathematics. Human beings are fallible and fallen. Although maths itself is perfect, our understanding of it can be faulty.

Do you enjoy maths? Not everyone does. It is a subject that requires quite a lot of hard work especially in the initial stages where there are tables to be learned by heart and calculations to be practised. However, maths can be much more enjoyable in the later stages which just can't be reached until you have mastered the basics. So don't give up or accuse yourself of being “no good” at maths. Persist at maths and you will have the privilege, as Kepler is said to have put it, of “thinking God's thoughts after him.”

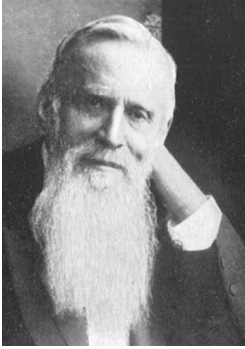
1 <https://www.campusreform.org/article?id=15409>

2 <https://mercatornet.com/is-it-racist-to-say-that-224/65717/>

3 For more on this topic see the lesson for 27th December.

4 <https://creation.com/mathematics-from-the-mind-of-god>

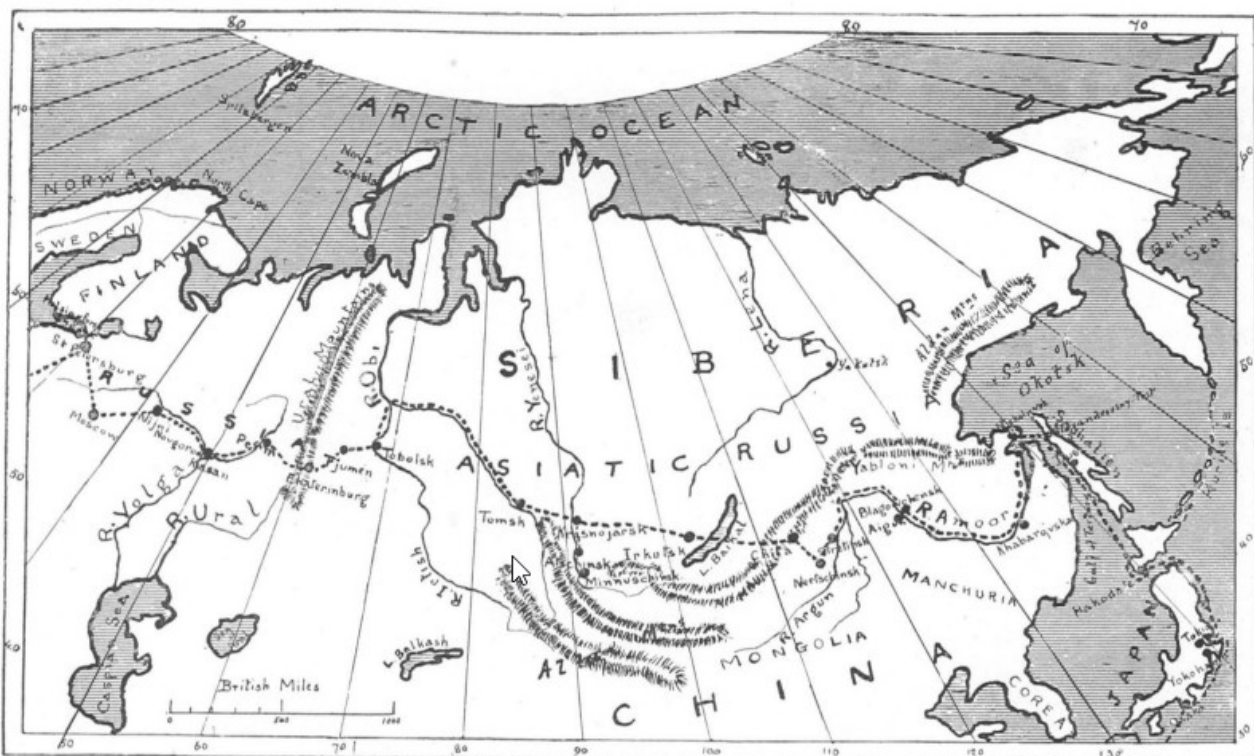
The story of *Deduchka* (dear grandfather)⁵



Friedrich Wilhelm Baedeker (1823 -1906) was born on 3rd August. His was a life of adventure and unparalleled service for his Master.

Born in Germany, Dr Baedeker was converted while living in England through the ministry of Lord Radstock. This peer had been greatly used of God in bringing the gospel to all classes in Russia.⁶ Dr Baedeker was a friend of George Müller,⁷ a fellow German who had also settled in Britain.

Dr Baedeker worked in Germany as an evangelist for a number of years and then, through contacts made through Lord Radstock he began evangelistic work among German speaking peoples in Russia. At this time Christians were persecuted in Russia as the Russian Orthodox religion was bound up with the government of the country. Lord Radstock's work among the Russian nobility had led to numerous conversions.



DR. BAEDEKER'S FIRST JOURNEY ACROSS ASIA.



The following extract from Dr Baedeker's biography⁸ gives some idea of his travels which you will appreciate if you look up the highlighted places in your atlas. Can you find out exactly what a *droschky* and a *tarantass* are? Dr Baedeker also travelled by *troika*. Can you find out what this is? Look at the map above and imagine travelling all that

way in such unsprung vehicles often on very primitive roads!

⁵ Information from Robert Sloan Latimer, *Dr. Baedeker: And his Apostolic Work in Russia* Second Edition (London, 1907) and other sources.

⁶ See Lesson for 8th December yet to come.

⁷ See Lesson for 27th September.

⁸ Robert Sloan Latimer, *Dr. Baedeker and his Apostolic Work in Russia*.

FROM the banks of the Rhine, in the neighbourhood of which he was born, to the last desperate penal settlement of Saghalien, beyond the Gulf of Tartary in farthest Asia; and from the princely homes of devout nobles in Stockholm, to the rough and bare settlements of Stundist exiles in the Caucasus at the foot of Mount Ararat, roved this apostle of two continents. Up and down Europe; away over Siberia; to and fro by rail and by boat; by droshky or tarantass along interminable roads and tracks; by sledge across the wide snows of the steppes and along the course of frozen rivers; hither and thither this extraordinary man journeyed, preaching the gospel.

Indeed the horseback exploits of John Wesley in evangelising England are completely dwarfed by the side of these thousands upon thousands of miles of travel undertaken by Dr. Baedeker ceaselessly, these many years in the service of Christ. For what purpose? To preach and win sinners to repentance. To circulate diligently the Word of God in many languages, and thus scatter the seed of the Kingdom in expectation of a golden harvest. And chiefly, to hearten and help the children of God who were far removed from all Christian fellowship. To confirm these disciples in their faith... ..to be the instrument of the Holy Ghost the Comforter to multitudes of scattered, lonely, persecuted, outcast saints; to take to them the inexpressible joy, refreshment, and exhilaration that comes from contact with a kindred human soul, from the warm pressure of a brothers hand, from the glance of sympathetic and affectionate human eyes, this was perhaps the most characteristic feature of his lifework.

...At the advanced age of eighty-three years he laid down his service and passed into his Master's presence; but even in his last year on earth he paid no fewer than four visits to the Continent in the interests of struggling communities of Christians there, who stood in need of his counsels and his aid. ...For many years his face was quite familiar in every large city, and in many of the towns and villages of Central and Eastern Europe; and people joyfully recognised him wherever he went, as an old friend.

The picture below shows Dr Baedeker in his Russian travelling clothes which were the gift of a Russian countess who was worried that his health would suffer in the clothing he originally had. Dr Baedeker's visited prisons all over the Russian Empire. He wrote:

Formerly I had no idea of the large part of the population of many countries that are kept as if they were wild beasts behind iron bars and with heavy chains upon them. Learning the facts in Russia, my heart's desire was, 'Oh that the prisons might be opened to me!' I ventured to express my desire to a lady of rank in St. Petersburg, and asked her whether it was possible. She shook her head sadly. But she did not forget my desire....

The Countess was one day shopping in St. Petersburg. The Count, her husband, stood at the shop door waiting for her. "Here, quickly!" he exclaimed.

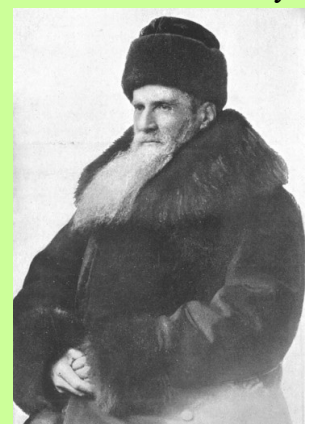
"What is it?" she inquired, hastening to the door.

"There is the very man you want; on the other side of the road!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"The Director of the Prisons Department. He is the man to speak to about that 'permit ' you have been inquiring for."

"Run, then, and call him back!" cried the Countess.



The Count hastened after the official, and returned to the shop with him. “May I have the honour to oblige your Ladyship?”

“I would like you to supply my friend Dr. Baedeker, an Englishman, with a 'permit' to visit prisons and see the prisoners, not of course for a political purpose, but to give them Bibles and do them good.”

“Does your friend think he can reform them?”

“He thinks God can, through His Word, the Gospel.”

“Indeed, that is so, madam! I will certainly see that he has the permission he requires.”

“The 'permit' reached me here in England, as I was about to start for Russia, and I looked upon it as a wonderful gift indeed. Hastening on the journey, I got at last to Odessa, and one of my first visits was to the prison. I showed my document, and it was good; the prison doors were opened, and the officers were most kind and considerate, and helped me in every way. This was indeed a wonderful answer to prayer. Ah! you little know the enormous number of people in every land who are kept out of sight, and are never thought of by others.

This permit was most valuable and gave Dr Baedeker access to the most terrible prisons all over Russia. At one point it was stolen from him – along with all his money. At once he wrote to the Countess who managed to get a replacement. To his great joy it was couched in wider terms than the old one! Every time the permit was renewed (every two years) he found he had more privileges granted to him.

Dr Baedeker began his ministry interpreting for an American evangelist while in Germany but people soon asked him to preach himself. He travelled in Bohemia, Moravia, Hungary, Galicia,⁹ Poland, Switzerland, Finland all over the Russian Empire as far as China including Ukraine, Siberia the Crimea, the Caucasus, Estonia and Latvia. He started off by trying to get official permission to preach but soon gave that up saying “Go on until they stop you. It saves time!” He preached in German, English or French and used interpreters for Finnish, Frisian, Russian, Latvian, Georgian, Arminian and Estonian.

In Russia he was often the subject of intense police surveillance but his permit to visit the prisons never failed him. Being a foreigner helped him too! He was allowed to carry on while Russian nobles who opened their homes for evangelistic meetings were banished. He often found the prison staff, to whom he also witnessed, were very supportive of his work. On returning to certain prisons after a few years he found the Bibles he had left were well used and well cared for. In one place the prisoners had carefully made cardboard sleeves or jackets for their bibles to help protect them.

In many places in Russia Christians were at this time fiercely persecuted. Groups of believers such as the Molokans, Stundists and Baptists were exiled to the Caucasus and other regions where it was very hard to earn a living. Here Dr Baedeker found them and ministered to them to their great joy and comfort.

Despite often travelling in bandit-infested areas he carried no weapons. He would have said that today's memory verse was his protection. Infection was more of a danger to him than robbers as the prisons and penal settlements he visited were often the centres of deadly diseases. Although he was often ill the Lord was indeed his keeper and he lived to old age. He had some medical training

⁹ Now part of Poland and Ukraine.

which was invaluable to him in his travels.

Dr Baedeker delighted in preaching the gospel and distributing Scriptures among the poorest and most forsaken people of Europe. They received him gladly and listened open-heartedly to his message. Through Lord Radstock he had access to the support of many people, especially ladies, of the highest ranks of Russian society but it was also from this class that most of his opposition came.

In Zürich in Switzerland he advertised his talks as being about “The Bible” and the clever students, thinking they were going to hear that book pulled to pieces and criticised, flocked to hear him. They were so enraged when they heard him speak about the truth of the Bible that he only escaped being thrown in the lake by quietly slipping out of the back door of the hall. He was not allowed to hire the hall again but found other places to preach and his work was blessed.

Something to think about

Dr Baedeker once met the Russian Novelist Count Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy has left a hostile and distorted picture of Baedeker as the characters *Kiesewetter* and *the Englishman* in his novel *Resurrection* for he understood neither Dr Baedeker nor the message he proclaimed – as you will see from this report of the conversation they had:

“What is your errand to Russia?” inquired the Count.

“To preach the gospel of Christ in the Russian prisons,” he replied.

“There ought not to be any prisons!” exclaimed the novelist.

“So long as there is sin in the world there will be prisons,” was the quiet rejoinder of the evangelist.

“There ought not to be sin in the world.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that if people were properly taught, sin would not be!” said Tolstoy, with fiery emphasis.

For answer Dr. Baedeker quoted Luke xi. 21 and 22: “When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils’. That is a parable of the soul of man and the devil's mastery over it,” said the doctor. “That accounts for sin.”

“Where is that?” inquired the Count, greatly interested.

“In Holy Scripture,” he replied. “There is a stronger than we – the Evil One – against whom our natural armour of resolution and of moral codes, is useless. My message to the prisoners of Russia, and to all sinners everywhere, is, that there is a still Stronger One, Who is able to deliver the captives and slaves of Satan, and to transform them into the holy and beloved children of the Eternal and Holy God.”

Can you find the flaws in Tolstoy's argument that education will eradicate sin? Can you state in simple terms Dr Baedeker's reply?

More about Dr Baedeker in the lesson for 25th December. If you do not do lessons on that date you can read it today.

