

February 21st

Memory Verse:

Thou therefore **endure hardness,**
as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 2 Timothy 2:3

Young children can learn the words in bold. More about today's memory verse in tomorrow's lesson.

Something to build¹

On a February day in 1861 – 157 years ago – the vicar of South Bersted, near Bognor, was just about to start his lunch when a message came that Robert, his gardener, urgently wished to see him. The man, a sturdy Sussex labourer, was shown into the study.

“What’s wrong Robert?” asked the vicar, seeing he was extremely agitated about something.

“Head bad, sir. Fit coming on,” was the reply. “Perhaps you could give me a note for the doctor. Can’t see objects.”

“You found your way into this room right enough.”

“Yes,” Robert replied. “But I can’t fix things at a distance.”

“What things did you look at?”

“Well, ‘fore I had started work, I looked about and saw everything I should. Like the spire...”

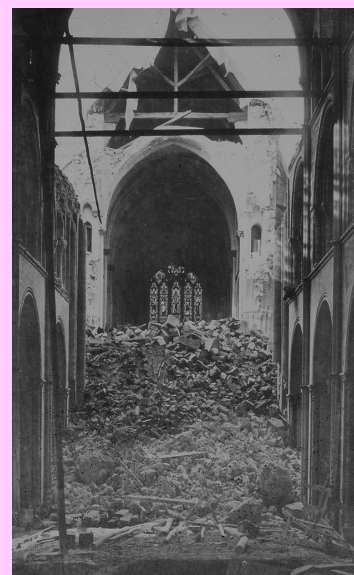
“Of Chichester Cathedral?”

“Yes sir. Then I did some digging for a while, then looked up again and the spire were gone.”

“Gone?”

“It’s the truth sir. I couldn’t see it where it should be. And I shut my eyes and opened them again quick and I rubbed them and no ways could I catch the spire; and I knew then I was took bad.”

When the vicar went to check for himself he couldn’t see the spire either – but there was nothing wrong with either’s eyesight. What had happened was that while Robert was bent digging, the great spire of Chichester Cathedral had collapsed.²



What an awful scene of devastation this old photo shows! On **February 21st** 1861, in the early afternoon, the spire of Chichester Cathedral collapsed perpendicularly into the church “as one telescope tube slides into another”. Fortunately no one was injured and no other property was damaged. The correspondent of the *West Sussex Gazette* explained:

The spire did not topple over, as might have been supposed, especially from the boisterous south-westerly winds which were raging at the time, but sank out of sight, with a rushing sound. We say sank out of sight, because, strangely enough, the spire appears to have slipped through the transept, as if it had been let through a trap door, and the transepts on each side are almost uninjured, but apparently a portion of a bay on each side of the tower was carried away. The organ, which is in the immediate locality was not damaged at all.

¹ For another lesson about dodgy church towers see August 9th.

² From an article by Chris Horlock in *Sussex Life* December 2018. Permission sought by email 12/10/21

Work was being carried out at the cathedral at the time. It had been discovered that there were structural problems with the building and attempts were being made to strengthen it. Sadly they did not prevent the collapse although this is the reason why no one was in the area when the collapse took place. It sounds to me as if there was a problem with the foundations of the building. There is more about buildings with wrong foundations in the lesson for August 9th and a Bible story to go with it. Can you guess which one?³

How high a tower can you make before it collapses? Use Lego, plain wooden bricks, K'nex or any other construction toy you have. What can you do to make your tower more stable and prevent it from collapsing?

A game to play



If you have a set of *Jenga* or *Tumbling Tower* blocks, now would be a good time to get them out again and have a game. This game is just one of removing blocks from a tower in such a way that it does *not* fall down – when it is your turn. The strategy is to remove a block so that when the *next* player has his turn he cannot avoid removing a block that causes collapse. You could probably play this game with ordinary wooden blocks if you do not have a *Jenga* set. See what you can improvise!

Something to read from history

Today is the anniversary of the death of a young Scottish missionary who died in a Japanese prisoner of war camp in China. He had been born in China where his parents were missionaries. He had spent his early childhood in China and spoke Chinese perfectly. He had dedicated his life to the Lord, serving him in China as a Missionary with the London Missionary Society. When the Japanese invaded China in 1937, killing the people, destroying their villages and burning their crops, he did not go home but stayed to help. He did this even though the Chinese themselves now often hated and distrusted any foreigners and his life would be in danger from both Chinese and Japanese.

He moved to a war-torn area where he preached and looked after the sick. Often he would use a bicycle to carry an injured person to the hospital, travelling over rough roads and sometimes under fire. Then the Japanese rounded up all foreigners and crowded them into a small, insanitary prison. Here they had little food and conditions were appalling. He began church services. He ran a school for the children teaching them maths and science, he organised games and sports and took care of the sick. Everyone in the camp respected him and he was able to help the prisoners lead orderly lives and treat one another fairly and with decency. He was utterly tireless in his service for others and for his Saviour. In the end he became sick himself. A brain tumour was quietly sucking away his life even as he played chess with the youngsters or firmly ensured that eggs smuggled in by some businessmen were shared by all. He died on **21st February 1945** with a whisper about total submission to Christ on his lips.

3 See Matthew chapter 7 or Luke chapter 6.

The missionary's name was Eric Liddell and he was a great example of a Christian who “endured hardness” both in a physical sense and in the spiritual sense spoken of by today's memory verse. Before becoming a missionary he had won a gold medal in the 1924 Paris Olympic Games for the 400 metre run as well as a bronze for the 200 metres. But the thing that made him famous was not the race he won but the race he did not run at all.

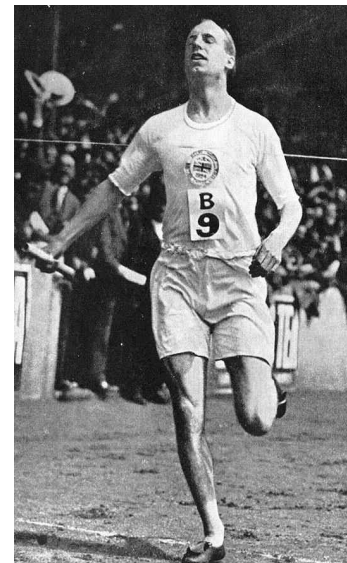
Eric Liddell was an all round athlete from his school days on. He played rugby for Scotland as well as running. Even before he entered university (where he studied science) he was known as “The Flying Scotsman”. Eric Liddell's special ability was the 100 metre race and this was what led to him being chosen to compete in the Olympics. However, although he travelled to Paris for the games, Liddell would not compete in the 100 metre race. The heats⁴ were going to be run on a Sunday. Liddell knew that God expects us to keep His Day as a day of rest each week when we can worship Him. “I object to Sunday sport in toto,” he said. He would not take part in the heats and so could not run in the race. The 100 metre race was the one which he had a good prospect of winning. The decision to withdraw, some six months before the games took place, caused shock waves in Britain. Liddell was also withdrawn from the relay races⁵ that would be run on a Sunday.

After Eric refused to run on Sunday, Britain ran through the stages of grief. They said Liddell would ultimately change his mind. When that hope went unrealized, they grew angry, calling him a coward and asking how he could turn his back on his country. They bargained, suggesting that he dedicate the race to the Lord or that the Sabbath ended at a particular time of day.

“My Sabbath lasts all day,” Eric replied.⁶

Liddell was content to forego the Olympics completely if need be. Some people asked that the heats be rescheduled by the International Olympic Committee. Nothing came of that suggestion. Britain's hopes of Olympic glory seemed to be dashed and all because of one stubborn Scotsman. There was still the 200 metres, of course, but in the political and athletic storm that erupted over his withdrawal from the 100 metres that disappeared from view.

As for the 400 metres, Eric Liddell had never seriously competed in this race in his life. To enter for the 400 metres in the Olympics where he would be competing against athletes who had trained at 400 metres for years was unthinkable. He asked his coach, Tom McKerchar, what he thought. His coach replied that he should definitely try and Liddell began to train for the 400 metres run.



When the 400 Metre Relay took place without Liddell, Britain took third place. The newspapers were quick to blame him. If Liddell had been running, they said, Britain would have been first. Then came the 200 metres. Liddell gained the bronze medal and the race was won by the American, Jackson Scholz.⁷

Just before the 400 metre race someone handed Liddell a note from an American team member which read, “It says in the Good Book ‘them that hono[u]r me I will hono[u]r’”, a reference to 1 Samuel 2:30. Liddell had not been outstanding in the 400 metre heats and he was allocated the sixth

4 Heats are preliminary races which eliminate weaker runners.

5 The picture below shows Liddell running in a relay race: the British Empire versus United States of America, Saturday, 19th July, 1924 at Stamford Bridge, London. You can see the baton in his hand. The British team won this race which was held shortly after the Olympics.

6 <https://www.tyndale.com/sites/readthearc/the-decision-that-made-olympic-history/>

7 Watch old film footage of the event here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYNUxdoIacA>

or outside lane on the track. In this position it was not possible to see the other runners in order to pace himself. All he could do was run as fast as possible. And that is exactly what he did.

“The secret to my success over the 400 meters is that I run the first 200 meters as fast as I can. Then, for the second 200 meters, with God’s help I ran faster.” He was the first runner to treat the 400 metres as a sprint.

Something to think about

In these days, when there is a lot of pressure on youngsters to participate in sporting and other leisure activities on a Sunday, it is good to be reminded of Eric Liddell's story. God has given us His day as a gift⁸ as a day in which we can worship him together, setting aside other concerns. Excuses are sometimes made about how we understand the fourth commandment in the New Testament dispensation and the change over from the Jewish Sabbath to the New Testament Lord's Day. But these are indeed just excuses. In Liddell's day it was not that Christians somehow naively confused the Sabbath of the fourth commandment with Sunday. I suspect that the issues are generally brought up because of a desire to avoid the disappointment of not being able to participate in sporting, musical or other events along with our peers. But, if we are Christians, we should remember the whole picture. What has the Lord done for us? Is there anything we should not be prepared to give up for Him? The Ten Commandments are 10 not 9. If we can effectively do away with one, we can do away with them all.

Something to do

Have you ever tried to train yourself to run better or for longer? If you did these lessons last year you may have used the method given in the lesson for June 18th. Today would be a good day to review your progress if you did and maybe take your running skills a little further. If you did not do last year's lessons you can have a peep ahead to the 18th June lesson and start training now!