

October 21<sup>st</sup> Trafalgar Day

### Memory Verse

**Go ye therefore,  
and teach all nations,**  
baptizing them  
in the name of  
the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Ghost. Matthew 28:19

Younger children could learn the words in **bold** and understand that what we are to teach is the truth of the Bible: that Jesus came to save sinners.

### Trafalgar Day

Some of today's lessons are difficult ones more suitable for older children. However, today is also Trafalgar Day, a great day of remembrance and thanksgiving in the Royal Navy. At Portsmouth where Nelson's flagship *Victory* can still be seen, the day starts with the usual daily Naval ceremony of "Colours", as the White Ensign of the Royal Navy and the Union Jack are hauled up, followed shortly afterwards by the flag sequence indicating Nelson's famous message to the fleet that "England expects that every man will do his duty".<sup>1</sup> I have put H E Marshall's retelling of the Trafalgar story, suitable for children of a wide variety of ages and excellent for reading aloud, in today's optional resources files for you to read for yourselves.

### Something to think about for older children<sup>2</sup>

Why do bad things happen?  
This is a question that unbelievers often throw at Christians. "If your God is all powerful," they say, "and he is also good, why do terrible disasters happen and why are there diseases like cancer?" We have two stories today that help to answer the question. One is a disaster from the last century and the other is the life of a poor slave.



**October 21<sup>st</sup>** is the anniversary of one of the saddest disasters in living memory. On that morning in 1966 in the Welsh village of Aberfan the children arrived at their school to begin their lessons as usual. Aberfan is in the coal mining district of South Wales and towering above the village were the great spoil heaps on which the waste from the coal mine was dumped.

There were springs of water under the tips and that day, after heavy rain, one of the tips began to slip. The wet waste material was like a kind of slurry and it poured down the side of the tip straight into the village. The school was engulfed and most of the children and teachers lost their lives.

1 You can see this done here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA58A6byN7M>

2 Image from <http://sedimentaryores.net/>

Miners and rescue workers hurried to the scene and dug away as much as they could but for most of the children it was too late; they were dead.

The grief of the villagers is impossible to imagine. Where could they turn in such a situation? The whole nation was horrified and stunned. Why had such a thing happened? An enquiry was held and some serious reflections on National Coal Board policies resulted but, while this may have helped to prevent such a disaster ever happening again it did not result in any comfort for the villagers.

Someone who knew the village of Aberfan quite well and who had preached in one of the chapels there was Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899–1981). In 1966 he was the minister of Westminster Chapel in London. Preaching at the usual Sunday evening service immediately after the disaster Dr Lloyd Jones reflected on the workings of providence.<sup>3</sup> Sensitively, he explained that sin is at work in the world. The fall of man has changed everything. “There were no calamities in paradise,” he said. To those tempted to blame God for such things he pointed out that the reason that the tips fell was the result of the outworking of natural laws. God still allows those laws to work but, after the fall, the sin of mankind can cause disasters happen as a result of these natural laws. Dr Lloyd Jones unflinchingly cited human greed, that is sin, as the reason for the *positioning* of the tips – something that would, in effect, be confirmed later by the Official Inquiry that was yet to take place.

That the villagers understood what Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones meant and wanted to hear more is confirmed by the fact that when the memorial service was held a year later in Aberfan it was Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones that they asked to come and speak to them at the Welsh Presbyterian chapel. What a difficult task!

The chapel was packed as was a nearby Baptist chapel where the service was relayed. The sermon does not survive although we know Dr Lloyd Jones preached on Romans 8:18-23. What we do know, however, is the effect of that sermon in the grieving village:

The evening message was one of glorious comfort for believers from the words of Romans 8:23, ‘For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us...’ At the conclusion of a profoundly moving service, the Rev Wilfred Jones, the Vicar of Aberfan came forward to tell the preacher that this was the message for which Aberfan had been waiting.

Two years later a woman wrote a postcard to say she would never forget those services at Aberfan and many others confessed the same. ‘I have heard the eminent preachers of all the churches,’ said one Anglican hearer, ‘but have never heard a sermon or address to compare with what I heard at Aberfan.’ A letter written to [Dr] M[artyn L[loyd]-J[ones]] by one of the ministers present, the Rev John Phillips of Merthyr Tydfil, on November 19, 1967, gives a vivid impression of the effect which this preaching had upon the community:

‘Your visit was eagerly awaited at Aberfan and has been the subject of all our prayers over the past weeks. Once again our prayers have been answered, praise His Name, for I know that, through your messages, inspired by Him, we have all received, not only a wonderful blessing, but renewed courage and determination. After the services I saw mothers, who had lost little ones, and fathers also, smile with renewed hope in their faces. I know they will face the future now with more confidence. God bless you, for all you have done for these dear people here and indeed for us all.’<sup>4</sup> (I have highlighted some words in the passage in blue that you might want to look up in your dictionary.)

<sup>3</sup> The whole of this remarkable sermon can be heard here: <https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/acts-7-1-2/the-god-of-glory-visits-abraham/>

<sup>4</sup> Murray, Iain H, *D.M Lloyd-Jones The Fight of Faith* (Edinburgh, 1990) p.571-572.

In the face of such a disaster it was not “community action” or “financial compensation” which was ultimately able to make bereaving parents smile with renewed hope; it was the truth of the gospel.

The only way in which such tragic events can be explained with real compassion is through a Christian world-view. How does an atheist or humanist account for such things?

The answer may surprise you! Despite the fact that atheists or humanists often criticise Christians for having (they say) no creditable explanation for the existence of evil things in the world, they have *no explanation themselves* either as the British Humanist Association website explains:

For humanists then, the answer to the question *why [do] bad things happen*<sup>5</sup> is simply, because they do: that is just the way the world is. All bad things have natural explanations. Human psychology and social conditions mean that some human beings are motivated to do things of which we disapprove.... The physical forces that dictate the conditions of our world just happen to occasionally lead to natural disasters. Not everything needs a reason. Some things simply are. ...for humanists, the general question ‘Why are there evils in the world’ is not a real question.<sup>6</sup>

I'm not sure how humanists would respond if when they asked Christians the question, “how do you account for the existence of evil?” we replied, “not everything needs a reason... that is not a real question!”

At the beginning of Luke Chapter 4 Jesus deals with a similar matter. People came and told him of disasters, deliberately man-made such as Pilate massacring Jewish worshippers and accidental such as the falling of a tower. The questioners wanted to know if these things were sent as a judgment upon the particular people to whom they happened. Jesus said, no. The people who were caught up in these things were not more sinful than those who escaped. Such disasters are a terrible warning to *everyone* that one day there *will be* a day of judgement.

We can pray for all miners and those who work in dangerous conditions. In many countries of the world accidents on the scale of Aberfan still happen and miners still work in very dangerous conditions. In July 2020, for instance, at least 174 people were killed in a landslide at a jade mine in Myanmar and in November 2021 over forty were killed in a coal mine in Russia. We can pray for the safety of such people and also that they will have the opportunity to hear the gospel and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Map work and a story from history



Can you find **Gracechurch Street** on a map of London? The picture shows Leadenhall market which can be entered from Gracechurch Street.

It was at the Quaker meeting house in Gracechurch Street on **21<sup>st</sup> October** 1785 that a group of eight African delegates from America presented an *Address of Thanks* to the Quakers for their part in the movement for the abolition of slavery. One of the delegates was Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745– 1797), himself a former slave.

5 My italics.

6 <https://understandinghumanism.org.uk>



Olaudah was a very interesting character. He was converted through the influence of the Countess of Huntingdon<sup>7</sup> who encouraged him to write his autobiography. It quickly became a best-seller. This book was one of the first written by an African author to become popular in Britain and was translated into a number of different languages. It was the reading of this book that convinced many people of the evil of the slave trade.



In his book Olaudah explains how he grew up in Africa and was kidnapped along with his sister and sold into slavery in Barbados. He describes the cruel treatment he received, the horrors of the “middle passage” in which the newly captured slaves were carried from Africa to the Americas for sale, his time as a sailor on board ship and his arrival in England. He also tells of his realisation of his sinful state and his eventual conversion to Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Included also in the book are some verses about his life which you can read in today's optional resources files.

Olaudah suffered the sad experience of slavery and brutal treatment. Yet the Lord used these terrible circumstances to bring him to know him. These things also equipped him uniquely to contribute to the movement for the abolition of slavery.

Autobiographies, especially those of Christians, are one of the most valuable sources of information we have about the past. Keep your diary going (or start one today); one day you may need the information in it to compile your own autobiography! If you have a few diary entries to work with already you could even experiment with writing some of them up in an autobiographical format.

### Letter writing<sup>9</sup>

Another useful source of information about the past is letters. Here is one that tells about a sailor's experiences of the Battle of Trafalgar which took place on **21<sup>st</sup> October** 1805. Sam experienced the battle aboard the *Royal Sovereign* and he wrote home to tell his father all about it.

Honoured Father,

This comes to tell you I am alive and hearty except three fingers: but that's not much, it might have been my head. I told brother Tom I should like to see a great battle and I have seen one, and we have peppered the Combined rarely; and for the matter of that, they fought us pretty **tightish** for French and Spanish. Three of our mess were killed and four more of us **winged**. But to tell you the truth of it, when the **game** began, I wished myself at Warnborough with my plough again; but when they had given us one **duster**, and I found myself snug and tight, I set to in good earnest, and thought no more about being killed than if I were at Murrell Green Fair, and I was presently as busy and black as a collier. How my fingers got knocked overboard I don't know, but off they are, and I never missed them till I wanted them. We have taken a rare parcel of ships, but the wind is so rough we cannot bring them home, else I should roll in money, so we are busy smashing 'em and blowing 'em up wholesale.

<sup>7</sup> See lesson for 24<sup>th</sup> August (yet to come).

<sup>8</sup> The book is still worth reading today and can be found here: <https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/15399/pg15399.txt>

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today?* Book 3 available on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>



Our dear Admiral Nelson is killed! So we have paid pretty sharply for **licking** 'em. I never sat eyes on him, for which I am both sorry and glad; for to be sure, I should like to have seen him – but then, all the men in our ship who have seen him are such soft toads, they have done nothing but... cry ever since he was killed.

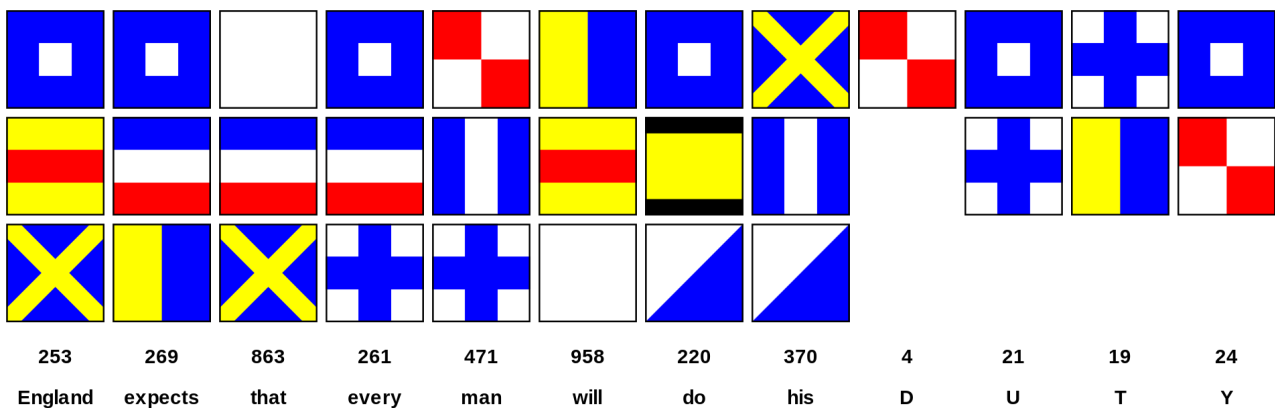
So no more at present from your dutiful son,  
Sam

Use your own encyclopaedias and reference books to look up the background events to the Battle of Trafalgar. Why was the enemy known as the Combined Fleet? How did the French and Spanish happen to be fighting together against the British Fleet? What did Sam mean when he wrote, “We have taken a rare parcel of ships, but the wind is so rough we cannot bring them home, else I should roll in money”? I have **highlighted** some slang terms Sam uses. What does he mean by them?

When you have finished reading about Trafalgar you could imagine you were there along side Sam and write your own letter home to your family. Or, if Trafalgar does not appeal to you, choose some other historic event you know about and write a letter home as though you were there.

### Something to make for Trafalgar Day<sup>10</sup>

The famous signal looks like this:



You could make your own paper flags and copy the signal as a Trafalgar Day decoration.

<sup>10</sup> Image:By Ipankonin - Vectorized from raster image, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3355360>