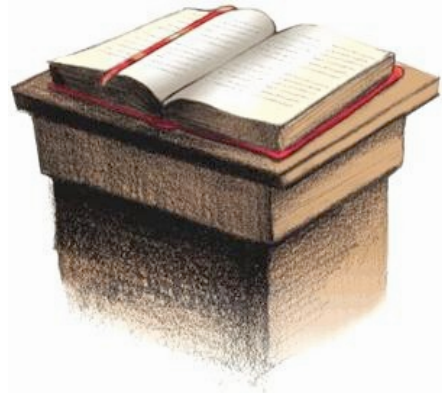


The Ultimate 'Unknown Soldier' – Christ Jesus



**A Sermon preached in
Londonderry Free Presbyterian Church**

by Dr. Ian Brown (11-11-2007)



Of all the million British dead of the First World War, only one was ever returned to his native land.

However, no-one knows his identity. Rather, he is famously referred to as, 'The Unknown Soldier.'

The Inspiration

In 1916 the Rev. David Railton was serving as a chaplain to British forces at the battle-front in France. In a garden at Armentières one day he noticed a make-shift grave marked by a rough wooden cross across which was written, "An Unknown British Soldier." This scene was imprinted on his memory and, four years later, he wrote to the Dean of Westminster about it. Dean Ryle recognised the message that was being transmitted by that grave in France and became the leading force behind the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of Great Britain.

Soldier Selected

The actual selection of the unknown soldier (or perhaps sailor or airman), who would eventually be buried alongside kings and other dignitaries in the Nave at Westminster Abbey, followed this pattern.

The remains of four unknown British war casualties were exhumed from four different battlefields in France - Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres. The four bodies were transported to St. Pol in Northern France on the night of November 7, 1920. There Brigadier General L.J. Wyatt, commander of all British troops in France and Flanders, entered the chapel where the unknown soldiers lay, each covered with a Union Flag. At random the general selected one to become the Unknown Soldier of the Great War, and two officers placed the body in a plain coffin and sealed it. The remaining bodies were reinterred at a nearby military cemetery.

On the morning of November 8 a service was held to commemorate the sacrifice of the Unknown Soldier. The body was then escorted under a French honour guard to Boulogne, drawn by a wagon with six horses and following by a mile-long procession

On November 9 the plain coffin was placed inside another that had been constructed of oak from Hampton Court, then sent over from England. Into the bands that secured the coffin was inserted a 16th century crusaders sword from the Tower of London collection. A plate on the coffin was inscribed: *"A British Warrior who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 for King and Country."*

The HMS Verdun, escorted by six warships, transported the Unknown Soldier to Dover, where the coffin's arrival was greeted with a 19-gun salute. Six warrant officers from the Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Royal Air Force and Royal Army then bore the coffin home to British soil to be taken by train to Victoria Station in London.

To the Cenotaph

On the morning of 11 November 1920 the Unknown Warrior was drawn in a procession to the Cenotaph in London, on a gun carriage pulled by six black horses. Many of the people who lined the streets to watch the cortège pass had been waiting all night. The Cenotaph was unveiled by King George V. At 11 o'clock, everyone fell silent for two minutes, and the Last Post sounded.

Westminster Abbey

The body of the Unknown Warrior was then taken on its way through the streets to the north entrance of Westminster Abbey, followed by the King, his three sons, members of the Royal Family and Ministers of State. The Unknown Soldier was laid to rest at the west end of the Nave in Westminster Abbey after passing through a guard of honour that consisted of 100 recipients of the Victoria Cross (both British and Canadian).

Following the hymn 'Lead Kindly Light,' King George V sprinkled soil from the battlefield at Ypres. (Six barrels of Ypres earth accompanied the Unknown Soldier home to England so that his coffin might lie on the soil where so many of his comrades had lost their lives).

When the coffin had been lowered and the hymn 'Abide With Me' sung, the congregation sang Rudyard Kipling's Recessional 'God of Our Fathers.' 'Reveille' and 'Last Post' were sounded and the grave was covered by a silk funeral pall, with the Padre's flag above it.

Symbol of National Grief

The organisers were taken completely by surprise by the response of the people to the ceremony. At least 40,000 people passed through the Abbey before the doors were closed that night. The pilgrimage past the Cenotaph and the grave of the Unknown Warrior went on throughout the weekend, and by the time the tomb was closed on 18 November, 1,250,000 people visited the Abbey.

This soldier "unknown by name or rank" had become the focus for an extraordinary outpouring of emotion, far surpassing even the emotion expressed over eighty years later due to the death of Princess Diana. He became a kind of national emblem for grief, an anonymous symbol of all those lost without trace in the carnage of the battlefields. At once individual and for all: that Unknown Soldier could be any mother's son, anyone's father or brother!

For seven days the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of Great Britain lay under the watchful eye of a military guard while thousands of mourners passed by to leave their last respects. On November 18 a temporary stone sealed the grave, inscribed with the words: *"A British Warrior Who Fell in the Great War 1914-1918 for King and Country. Greater Love Hath No Man Than This."*

Permanent Stone

On November 11, 1921, the same date on which the American Unknown Soldier was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery, the temporary stone marking the Unknown Soldier of Great Britain was replaced. A slab of black Belgian marble became the permanent replacement with a gilded inscription to forever commemorate the Unknown soldier from World War I.

The Main Inscription on this stone read:

BROUGHT FROM FRANCE TO LIE AMONG
THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS OF THE LAND
AND BURIED HERE ON ARMISTICE DAY
11 NOV: 1920, IN THE PRESENCE OF
HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE V
HIS MINISTERS OF STATE
THE CHIEFS OF HIS FORCES
AND A VAST CONCOURSE OF THE NATION

THUS ARE COMMEMORATED THE MANY
MULTITUDES WHO DURING THE GREAT
WAR PF 1914-1918 GAVE THE MOST THAT
MAN CAN GIVE LIFE ITSELF
FOR GOD
FOR KING AND COUNTRY
FOR LOVED ONES HOME AND EMPIRE
FOR THE SACRED CAUSE OF JUSTICE AND
THE FREEDOM OF THE WORLD

THEY BURIED HIM AMONG THE KINGS
BECAUSE HE
HAD DONE GOOD TOWARD GOD AND TOWARD
HIS HOUSE

... a quotation of Scripture in **2 Chronicles 24:16**: *"And they buried him ... among the kings, because he had done good ... both toward God, and toward his house."*

Many nations followed suit.

- A famous tomb is located in France under the Arc de Triomphe that was installed in 1921 honouring the unknown dead of the First World War,
- or the one in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada shadowed by the Canadian War Memorial;
- A year after the British honoured their own Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey, America paid its own tribute to an unknown victim of the Great War - and followed the British pattern in bringing the body home, eventually interring it in Arlington Cemetery, Washington.

I cannot contemplate the impressive story of the Unknown Soldier without turning my mind to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He, I suggest to you, is **'The Ultimate Unknown Soldier.'**

He came to this world to take the battle to the gates of hell on Calvary. He made the ultimate sacrifice and His body was moved from the arena of conflict and placed in a borrowed tomb. He was unknown by countless millions then and still is today. Yet, in the ocean of ingratitude that is this world, there are numerous little 'island groups' to which His grace has come and from which His praise sounds out - those people for whom He died. There will come a day when, like the unknown soldier, our Lord Jesus Christ shall be known ...

The heaven's shall glow with splendour ...

The crowning day is coming by and by.

The fact that Christ was largely unknown is brought into sharp focus through the lines of **John 1:10&11**: ***"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and his own received Him not."***

Initially, we will address the issue of:

[1] RECOGNITION.

Christ Jesus was - and is - unknown by the majority of persons on this earth.

John 1:10&11: ***"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."***

What John makes clear in this passage (**John 1:10-13**) is that there are only two kind of people in the world: those who reject Jesus and those who receive Him and accept Him.

Baseline for Everyone

To reject Christ is every man and woman's starting point.

Ever since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden, mankind has been at loggerheads (enmity) with God. When we come out of the womb, our very nature tells us that even though everything around us points to a Creator we must reject Him.

In all the world around me

I see His loving care ...

... but our old sinful nature rising up, challenges and surpresses that feeling with the bitter words, *"No you don't! Forget about this God business ... you're in no way accountable to Him! Don't spoil you life before it begins!"*

A Word with Three Applications

John uses the word "world / cosmos" in three different senses within the space of this one verse in **John 1:10**.

- The second time he uses it in **verse 10** ("**... and the world was made by Him ...**"), John uses the word cosmos to speak of the created universe;
- The first time he uses the word "world / cosmos" in **verse 10** it has the sense of this world, the earth – part of the vast universe that He created; ***"He was in the world ..."***;
- The third time he uses the word "world / cosmos" in **verse 10** it refers to the people of the world who live in the spiritual darkness that he had already described in **verse 5**:

"And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." ... "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not!"

This created universe, including this globe on which we live, is not capable of recognising or knowing Jesus Christ, ... but if it could, it would shout it aloud! The psalmist understood this as he wrote the lines of **Psalm 19:1-4**, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. 2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. 3 [There is] no speech nor language, [where] their voice is not heard. 4 Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world"*

The sun, moon and stars, mountains, hills and plains do *not* audibly or really declare the glory of God, but they reflect His glory in such a way that they proclaim it to men.

The world, mankind in rebellion against the light and truth, should recognise or know Jesus Christ, ... but it does not!

The rejection of Christ that is so characteristic of this sinful nature **begins with a lack of knowledge.**

John 1:10: *"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew [acknowledged] Him not."*

Think of ideas offered throughout human history that were rejected in ignorance:

- the world is round,
- the horseless carriage,
- the flight of man.

Napoleo Bonaparte once told Robert Fulton, *"What, sir, you would make a ship sail against the wind and currents by lighting a bonfire under her decks? I pray you excuse me. I have no time to listen to such nonsense."*

Possibly chief among the spokesmen of those who refuse the knowledge of God on this earth today is Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist and popular science writer who holds the Charles Simonyi Chair for the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford.

Such is his dedication to the defence of the Evolutionary Theory made famous by Charles Darwin that he has earned the description, "Darwin's rottweiler."

The titles of some of his Essays tell us exactly where he comes from on the subject of God, the Bible, and religion in general:

- Viruses of the Mind (1993) – Religion as a mental virus;

- The Emptiness of Theology (1998);

- What Use is Religion? (2004) – Argues that religion may have no survival value other than to itself.

His book titles speak for themselves:

Dawkins is a ferocious critic of creationism, describing it as a, "*preposterous, mind-shrinking falsehood.*" This is his constant theme throughout the pages of:

- 'The Blind Watchmaker' (1986, 1991, 2006);

- 'A Devil's Chaplain: Reflections on Hope, Lies, Science, and Love' (2003);

- More recently, he has published 'The God Delusion' (2006). Dawkins has said the publication of this book is "probably the culmination" of his campaign against religion.

Though Richard Dawkins may be thought of as an intellectual in the world's eyes, his bad-tempered rants against religion are characterised by ignorance and blindness - the darkness that is natural to the human heart in its unrenewed state. He simply illustrates Scriptures such as:

• **1 Corinthians 2:14:** *"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned."*

• **Romans 1:20-22; 25; 28-32:** *"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [Him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; 29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, 30 Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: 32 Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."*

Rejection begins with a lack of knowledge, or recognition.

It is carried out by a determination not to receive Christ.

John 1:10&11: "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and his own received Him not."

He made the world, and He was in the world ... but the world was and is so bound up, shackled, and chained to sin that it could not see the light, or recognise the Creator! They were not able to see the light! They did not receive the one they should have known.

Truth is ...

- None of us ever go looking for Him ...

• **Romans 3:10-12:** *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."*

- And when, on occasions (whether through attending a service like this one and hearing the Word of God preached, or taking time to read our Bible), **we catch a glimpse of Him, we do not like what we see ...**

• **Isaiah 53:2&3:** *"... He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, [there is] no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not."*

To us, Jesus offers no attraction. Rather, He is merely a distraction in the way of living all out for ourselves!

Man does not want to know Christ, because he knows that the conclusion will be that he will find himself:

- accountable to Him
- needing to obey Him
- with obligation to follow Him

... and he does not want to do this!

The name of Jesus is not a glorious name in the mind or mouth of sinners today. To them, they identify Jesus by a swear word, and have no interest in His saving work!

- We cannot grasp the importance or relevance of His saving work - His atoning sacrifice:

1 Corinthians 2:8: *"Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known [it], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."*

Have you ever asked yourself the question, *"Why did Jesus come?"*

If He came to save you, and yet you, by your goodness and self-effort, are hoping to save yourself, surely He wasted His time in coming, and in being crucified? If you can do by your good deeds what Christ could only accomplish by having the worst deed of man and the devil's inflicted upon Him, then He should have stayed in the safety of heaven! You are making His efforts redundant ... and you are making the aspect of His cross to look superfluous and silly!

Man is not a willing receptacle for the knowledge of Christ. He does not wish to give Christ any room in his life!

John 1:10: *"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not."*

There's just no space for Jesus in the world He constructed!

The fact that there was **no room for Jesus' birth** was a sign that there would be no room for Him in this world. He was rejected at His birth just like Isaiah said, and He was rejected at His death just as God knew it would be.

- When Herod learned of His birth, that wicked King ordered that all the children in Bethlehem, and in the surrounding districts, from two years old and under, be killed (**Matthew 2**).
- When Jesus first journeyed into Galilee to the city of Nazareth, His own countrymen rejected Him and tried to throw Him off the cliff on which their city was built.
- When He went to Gadara and cast demons out of a man, the people *"besought him to depart from them."*

Over and again, everywhere Jesus went, every time He preached, in every place He performed wondrous miracles of healing, He met with severe opposition.

The world to which He came missed the message between His birth and death because the people would not make room for Jesus in their hearts. They missed the fact that God Himself had come and dwelt among them. They missed the opportunity to see God face to face. They missed the blessing of being made anew by a heart changing encounter with Jesus.

What about your life? Does Jesus feature in it? Is He a key figure?

Have you any room for Jesus,

**He who bore your load of sin?
As he knocks and asks admission,
Sinner, will you let Him in?**

**Room for pleasure, room for business -
But, for Christ the Crucified,
Not a place that He can enter,
In the heart for which He died?
*Room for Jesus, King of glory!
Hasten now, His word obey;
Swing the heart's door widely open,
Bid Him enter while you may.***

Daniel Webster Whittle (1840-1901)

Explanations, Please!

Why are we like this? What is the reason for our refusal to see the light of Christ? Why is there little room for Jesus today?

Two answers:

- **Our own sin** ... we love it too much to break from it and follow Christ;
- **The work of Satan.**

The Bible tells us that everyone born into this world is blinded by the devil; **2 Corinthians 4:4**: "... *the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*"

The devil knows who Jesus is. He always has.

He was once in heaven, but rebelled against God's great plan to enthrone Christ, send Him on a mission of salvation to earth, and so ransom a race of people through all the centuries of time who would worship and praise Him for His grace and glory to all eternity (cf. that wonderful prophetic chapter that lifts the lid on God's purpose regarding His Son; **Isaiah 53**).

The devil wanted the honour that was reserved for Jesus - and so it comes as no surprise that when he tempts our Lord to sin in the wilderness, the thrust of those temptations was that Jesus should bow down before and worship the devil (cf. **Matthew 4:8&9**: "*Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; 9 And saith unto Him, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me'*")!

Evidently, the devil's emissaries also recognised Jesus:

- There is an interesting reference in **Mark 1:34**: *"And He healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him."*

Sometimes they did speak - and announce to all around exactly who Jesus was:

- **Luke 4:34**: *"Saying, Let [us] alone; what have we to do with thee, [thou] Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God";*

- And again, **Luke 4:41**: *"And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking [them] suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ."*

The devil blinds the eyes and minds of sinners so that they do not recognise who Jesus is, or what the purpose He came to earth to perform

Well he knows that Jesus is the only Saviour, but he blinds the minds of those who do not believe on Jesus - and, given the liar and murderer that he is, he is dragging poor souls to eternal destruction.

And if the devil can keep us right here, then:

- **we will engage in a deliberate and repeated turning away from the light** (cf. **John 1:8-12**);

- **we will contemptuously turn our backs on Christ's sacrifice, having no personal interest in it;**

- **we will take our place among the crowd that cried, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" and confirm the fact that we are chargeable for His death;**

It is interesting that John later uses the same word to describe the action of the soldiers as they received Jesus to be crucified after he met with Pilate (**John 19:16**: *"Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led [Him] away"*).

He is not received on His arrival, but ends up being received to hasten His departure - to kill Him on Calvary!

Loretta Lynn wrote the lines:

**They bound the hands of Jesus
In the Garden where he prayed,
They led him through the streets in shame,
They spat upon the Saviour,
So pure and free from sin,**

They said, "Crucify Him,
He's to blame".

Upon His precious head
They placed a crown of thorns,
They laughed and said
"Behold the King."
They struck him
And they cursed Him
And mocked His Holy name,
All alone He suffered everything.

*He could have called 10,000 angels,
to destroy the world, and set Him free.
He could have called 10,000 angels,
but he died alone, for you and me.*

- we will die in our sins, and bear the penalty for them in our own bodies;

We start out in a position of rejection, denial, or dismissal of who Jesus Christ is from birth. This is exactly where we stay when we do not receive Him by believing in His name. **John 3:18** tells us where we are: *"He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."*

- we will be another chalkmark on hell's board for Satan - another of his victims who will suffer his tortures in a lost hell forever!

Not to know Christ in time is bad enough - we miss out on many blessings ... but for Him not to know us as His children, we will miss out for all eternity. This is infinitely worse!

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

Another issue to rise to the surface of our text centres on:

[2] RECEPTION / REHEARSAL.

The story of the Unknown Soldier is worth recording, preserving, telling!

In February of this year (2007), a book was published on this very subject, 'The Unknown Soldier.' It was authored by Neil Hanson, published by 'Black Swan,' and recounts the stories of three combatants who saw action and died during the First World War - an English soldier, a German soldier and an American airmen.

D M Mortimer, from Basildon in Essex, said of it: *"Through diligent and meticulous research, Hanson allows the reader to get to know the three men and also, more importantly, care about them. The intention of the book is to follow closely, the lives and actions of these individuals to their eventual demise on the killing fields of the western front, and the fact that you are made to care elevates this book above a cold fact filled history, the narrative is gripping and ultimately humane and moving."*

In some small way, Hanson's book is designed to help us get to know the Unknown Soldier - his struggle, his sacrifice, the sorrow shared by his friends!

Life's greatest quest is to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

This is why **John 1:10-12** reads: *"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. 12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on His name."*

As we live in this world, *vital questions* need to be addressed about Jesus. We need to know:

- Who He is,
- What He did, and Why He did what He did,
- Who He did it for!

- HE IS GOD in human flesh.
- CHRIST CAME, TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE!

It was not merely a possibility that He would die, this was the guaranteed, pre-determined outcome of His life and ministry!

• **John 10:17&18:** *"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again";*

• **1 John 3:8:** *"... For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."*

He came ... to die!

- WHY DID HE DO IT?

Why do men and women give their lives in war?

It will be from a mixture of motives:

- Some go to war carried along on a wave of patriotism,
- others, simply because their friends are going and they do not wish to be separated,
- and some because their sweethearts would give them a white feather if they did not go. The Pals regiments of the First World War, were recruited like this.

A rear gunner who flew in Lancaster bombers testified: *"We didn't think about it really. We were young and lived day to day. It was very exciting."* To keep that excitement in context, tail gunners had a life expectancy of three weeks.

Our Today for your Tomorrow!

Whatever other reasons can be given ... "Our Today for your Tomorrow" often sums it up.

The unknown soldier gives his life for values such as those expressed in the US Declaration of Independence – *"We hold these truths to be self evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness."*

- Life,
- Liberty,
- and Joy.

The Blessings of Calvary

These are exactly the blessings our Lord Jesus died to secure for us! The devil tries to match these - and he partially succeeds, short-term ...

- He promises life to the full;
- He offers satisfaction (there are pleasures in sin, although they last only for a season);
- He talks up freedom - while he leads you into bondage!

Truth is, the devil cannot deliver the Life, Liberty and Joy that Christ gives!

- **We have Life through His death:**

• **John 20:31:** *"But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name."*

• **1 John 5:20:** *"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, [even] in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life."*

- **And Liberty** ... liberty from the power, penalty - and ultimately, from the presence of sin and Satan!

• **John 8:36:** *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."*

- **And Joy:**

• **John 16:22:** *"... I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."*

• **John 17:13:** *"And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves."*

The Unknown Soldier played his part - did his best - gave everything he could ... and yet the turmoil that still exists in the world today reminds us that we cannot repair our broken world on our own because of the brokenness and acute vulnerability of our own humanity. This is true of all wars in history and we are daily reminded.

But Jesus has, and is, accomplishing His mission!

He is calling out of the world a people to the glory of His name, filling their lives with Life, Liberty and Joy ... and promising them these blessings 'to the max' - and indeed the overflow - in an endless future in His heaven!

So, it was a case of Christ's life for our life; His day for our eternity!

The Blackout!

In the early months of the last war the great preacher Donald Grey Barnhouse was holding a series of meetings in the British Isles. The hall in which the meetings were being held contained places for several thousand people, and the dome of the auditorium was made of glass. Obviously, it would have been as a beacon shining toward the sky, and in the blackouts of those days when the German Luffwaffe was bombarding Britain on a nightly basis it was necessary to turn out the main lights because of the danger.

Each evening the chairman of the meeting announced in introducing the preacher that the main switch would be pulled at the blackout hour, and said something about the fact that it was fortunate that the speaker did not have to use notes.

Barnhouse quickly became accustomed to having his audience disappear from his sight in the darkness when that switch was pulled, and went on preaching in the darkness, sometimes with great blessing.

One night someone was looking for something in the anteroom where the switches were and pulled the main switch by mistake, instantly lighting up the hall.

Barnhouse's first sensation was to notice that his entire audience had relaxed into a comfortable position, and that all heads were bowed, chin on chest. There was a sudden movement of several thousand heads coming up with a brusque movement, and then the consternation as he stopped speaking and the ushers ran for the exit to correct the mistake.

But one thing really caught his attention.

Right down in front of me in a chair that had been placed in the aisle for him, a man started to claw at his companion and say, "*What is the matter? Why did he stop? What has happened?*"

He was soon told that the lights had been turned on, and he sank back into his seat.

"Why did he have to be told?" asked Barnhouse. *"It is obvious, of course, that he was totally blind. The coming of the light meant nothing to him in his darkened world. Not one tiny ray penetrated within his sightless eyes. If I had been speaking to an audience made up of none but the blind, there would not have been a motion when the lights came on. No one would have looked up."*

This is what happened when the Lord Jesus Christ began His ministry. No one would have looked at Him if God had not made the arrangements in advance.

John the Baptist was sent to tell the world that the light had been turned on; that Christ, the light of life, had appeared! He needed to announce this, for Christ, **"was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not"** (John 1:10). So, John the Baptist came shouting, "*God's light is on ... God's light is on!*" He bore witness of the light, because of the blindness of the world.

And this passage in **John 1** contains this damning statement: Christ "*was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"* (v9). But when He did light every man, they did not look up. His lighting merely revealed their blindness.

Need Sight as well as Light!

It takes more than light for man to see. It is necessary to have **sight** as well as light.

The coming of Christ brought the light - condemning light; but the salvation of the cross is what can bring sight. In order to see, you must come to the cross for regeneration.

How we need to get the light on! We need to realise that Christ came all the way from Heaven to reconcile God unto man. By His atoning sacrifice, God is now reconciled.

We must come to the cross and be reconciled to God, and we can stand once more as His son or daughter. Otherwise, there must be for us, forever, the condemnation of judgment.

**At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!**

• We need an operation of grace to know Jesus, and this is performed by the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ ... to bring Him before our minds and into our hearts (**John 14-16**) ... to give us sight so that we can see the Light that is already shining!

Personal Interest in Christ

Back in the C18th, Charles Wesley showed his amazement and excitement when the truth dawned on his soul that Christ had died for him the sinner:

**And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

**'Tis mystery all: th'Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
Let angel minds inquire no more.**

**He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!**

**Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.**

And because of this:

**No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.**

From the day of our conversion and forward to the end of our time here, our quest will be:

Philippians 3:10: *"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."*

**There are depths of love that I may not know,
Till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach,
Till I rest at home with Thee!**

Draw me nearer

Our Responsibility to Relate

Also, just as the Royal British Legion produces and sells red poppies today as a reminder of those who have died. And just as we raise - and now repair - monuments to honour and preserve their memory to future generations, let us never forget that WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MAKE CHRIST KNOWN.

We have been called upon to tell out the grace and glory of the Lord ... to make the unknown God known (cf. **Acts 17:23**)!

And if in telling His story, our names remain shrouded in ignorance, well, ... let our names perish, but His be known!

The words of John W. Peterson (1921–2006) are relevant:

**So send I you to labour unrewarded,
To serve unpaid, unloved, unknown,
To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing -
So send I you to toil for me alone.**

**So send I you to bind the bruised and broken,
O'er wand'ring souls to work, to weep, to wake,
To bear the burdens of a world weary -
So send I you to suffer for My sake.**

**So send I you to hearts made hard by hatred,
To eyes made blind because they will not see,
To spend, tho' it be blood, to spend and spare not-
So send I you to taste of Calvary.**

Are you willing to serve unknown? To serve souls of lost men and women ...

- with consistency?

- and with compassion?

I put it to you, that once a blind man finds the source of restored sight, he will want to share the news with all other blind men and woman around him! Can you imagine 'Blind Bartimaeus,' after the Lord cured him, taking a stick and laying into each and every blind person he met?!

**I too was once so lost ...
... But now I'm found,
Was blind, but now I see.**

Therefore my policy is:

**Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His Name;
Preach Him to all, and cry in death,
'Behold, behold, the Lamb!'**

We may live in obscurity, but we will die in victory ... and live in that victory throughout eternity!

[1] RECOGNITION:

Christ Jesus was - and is - unknown by the majority of persons on this earth.

[2] RECEPTION / REHEARSAL:

Life's greatest quest is to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

[3] REVELATION:

One day the name of this unknown soldier will be revealed.

Lord Frederic Leighton (1830-1896) painted a famous oil on canvas, 'And the Sea Gave Up the Dead Which Were in It' (presented by Sir Henry Tate 1894).

This expressive painting shows the resurrection of the dead before the Last Judgement, as described in the Book of **Revelation 20:13**: *"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."*

Various figures are shown rising out of tombs or the sea. The main group are a husband, wife and child. Their skin tones underline the stages of resurrection, from the pallor of death to the reddish hue of renewed life.

The 'Unknown Soldier' will be part of that resurrection. And when he comes forth from that pile of dust, his name shall be revealed!

Blessing for some, Curse for others!

Scripture gives details of this resurrection ... and assures us it will be a blessing for some, but a curse for others. The Bible speaks of a clear, yet painful division in that day - a separation between Allied and enemy forces with respect to Him ... a plain line of demarkation between those who Received and those who Rejected Him:

- The prophet Daniel noted, in **Daniel 12:2**: *"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame [and] everlasting contempt."*
- Our Lord Jesus Himself warned; **Matthew 25:31-34; 41&46**: *"When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: 32 And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [His] sheep from the goats: 33 And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 41 Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."*

Our Lord Jesus, unlike the Unknown Soldier, has already been resurrected ... after three days in Joseph's tomb, He raised Himself!

He raised Himself to return again ...

... and when He returns, it will *not* be a re-run of His first appearing - in humility and obscurity ... born in a manger in Bethlehem, and admired only by a couple of old souls in the temple, a bunch of rough shepherds and a collection of eastern wise men! Not as an object of derision will He return, but as the mighty Judge of the actions of men:

- **2 Thessalonians 1:7-10**: "... *The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; 10 When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.*"

To return to the Scripture behind Lord Leighton's painting ... **Revelation 20:13-15**: "*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*"

Laurence Binyon wrote one of the most famous pieces of War Poetry - 'For The Fallen':

**There is music in the midst of desolation
And a glory that shines upon our tears.
They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds
Uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.**

**They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.**

**... To the innermost heart of their own land they are
Known
As the stars are known to the Night;
As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain;
As the stars that are starry in the time of our
darkness,
To the end, to the end, they remain.**

We fondly remember our Unknown Soldier(s)!

I pray you will come to embrace the salvation offered by Jesus, the Ultimate Unknown Soldier: **"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world**

knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. 12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on His name."

I quote another piece of poetry in closing, written by Leila N. Morris, (1893):

**In fancy I stood by the shore, one day,
Of the beautiful murm'ring sea;
I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way
Of the Stranger of Galilee;
I saw how the man who was blind from birth,
In a moment was made to see;
The lame was made whole by the matchless skill
Of the Stranger of Galilee.**

**His look of compassion, His words of love,
They shall never forgotten be;
When sin-sick and helpless He saw me there,
This Stranger of Galilee;
He showed me His hand and His riven side,
And He whispered, "It was for thee!"
My burden fell off at the pierced feet
Of the Stranger from Galilee.**

***And I felt I could love Him forever,
So gracious and tender was He!
I claimed Him that day as my Saviour,
This Stranger of Galilee.***

It is our prayer that you too will come to know Christ, the Ultimate Unknown Soldier!

"He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11 He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. 12 But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on His name."

