



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

5th May 2023

"My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, LORD, I will seek."

Psalms 27:8

It is said that there are few story-plots in the world, and that most stories fit one plot or another. For that reason it is often possible to find the gospel message in a novel, play or film. 'Lost and found' is one 'plot', and the whole Biblical story of fall and redemption, captivity and rescue, sin and salvation, is the greatest such story.

Steven Spielberg's 1987 film 'Empire of the Sun' -based on a work by J G Ballard- tells the story of Jamie, a British boy living in the privileged circumstances of the Shanghai International Settlement in China before the Second World War. In the chaotic evacuation arising from the Japanese invasion in 1941 he becomes separated from his parents, and for the remainder of the war he learns to survive in the chaos and traumas of an internment camp. When American forces bomb the adjacent airfield Jamie goes to the roof of a building to watch with boyish thrill. The British doctor rushes up to drag him to safety and in a most poignant moment the boy bursts into tears and cries, *"I can't remember what my parents look like!"*

The film continues, and after the war Jamie is placed in a holding-camp where parents visit in the hope of finding their lost children. Jamie's parents find him, but he is deeply disturbed and withdrawn, and does not recognise them. Eventually he reaches out slowly to feel his mother's hand, face and hair, and recognition grows in him, 'though after four traumatic years he is no longer a child.

Most of us have been born into comparatively privileged circumstances. It is not a matter for guilt or blame, but we have enough for comfortable lives under the protection of a free and well-structured society. But we are increasingly invaded by *"rulers, ... authorities, ... powers of this dark world and ... spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."* (Ephesians 6:12) Through society's effective rejection of God and his word, with secular forces, moral compromise, self-based materialism, misleading media and so much else, we and our children and grandchildren risk being separated from our parent-God and from each other's loving, strength-building, faith-supporting fellowship.

From that film the boy's words, *"I can't remember what my parents look like!"*, and the struggle he has re-engaging with them, have stayed with me as a parable for our age.*

The Psalmist writes, *"My heart says of you, 'Seek his face!' Your face, Lord, I will seek."* Jamie took no photograph of his parents into his war; and we have no photograph of God. Many -even Christians- are spiritually separated, lost and lonely. Out of the depths we cry, *"I've forgotten what my Parent looks like!"* and then *"My heart says... 'seek his face'"*. And for spiritual-self-preservation we need to respond, *"Your face, Lord, I will seek."* As the hymn puts it, *"O let me feel Thee near me, the world is ever near"*. And so, when the child was beyond words, the silent, slow feeling began to draw him home.

(* You can 'Youtube' the two excerpts from 'Empire of the Sun' I've quoted. Have your tissues ready!)