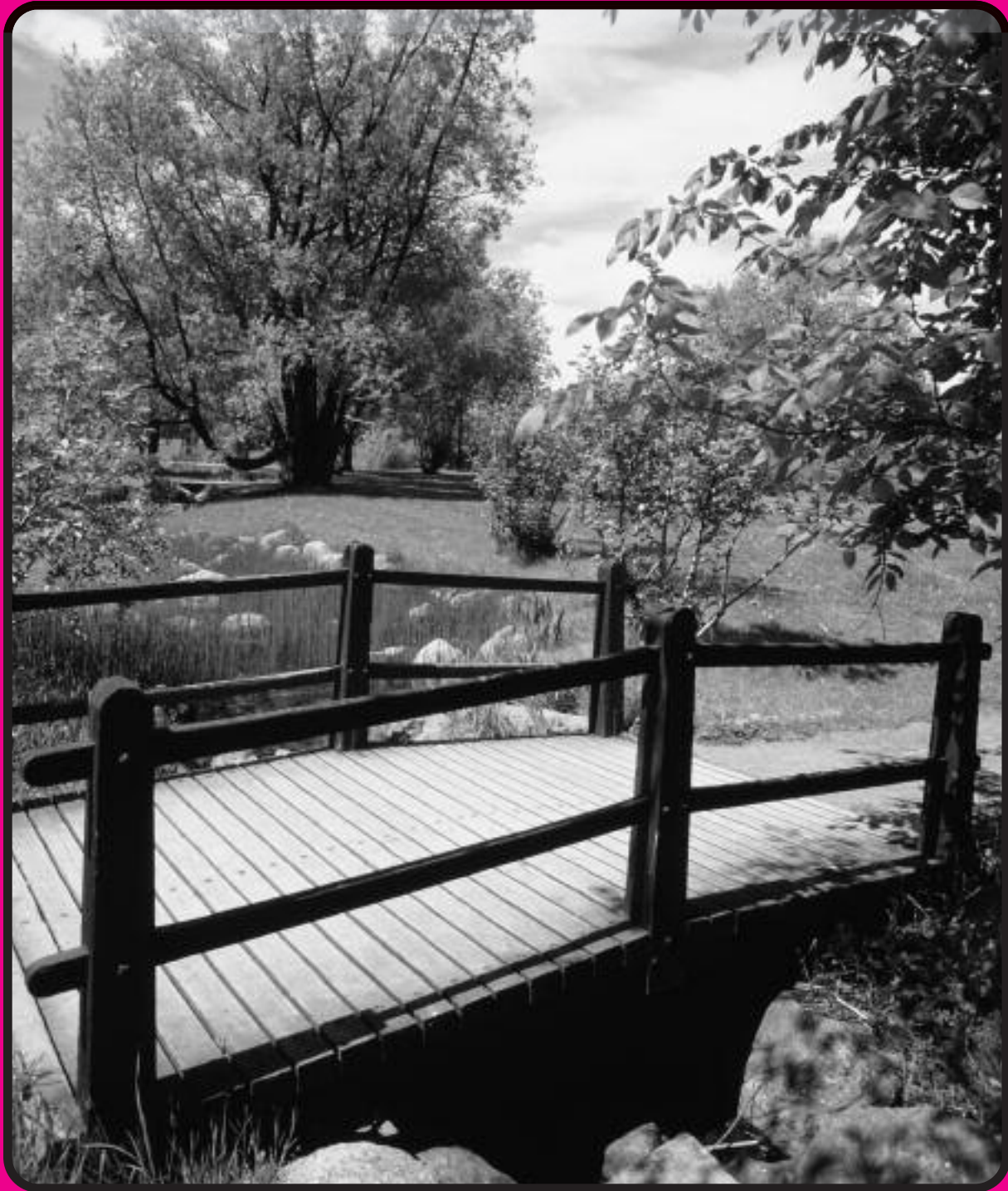


EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



Change

What are you *becoming*?

I realize that's not the usual question. The common question is, who are you? What are you like? We're quite focused today on discovering our unique identity – and expressing it. If we numbered modern day "sins," second on the list beginning with driving a gas guzzling Hummer, would be to deny who you or others are. One musician sings it well: "Let me be who I am. That is all I need."

A modern crusade

Now respect for others and self-awareness are certainly good things. But we can take this perspective too far. Imagine if Hitler sat in this sort of "accept me for who I am" psychological couch. These slogans only work in a world that has a pretty optimistic view of human nature, or worse, one that has denied the validity of truth and morality. But if there's something twisted in all of us, the modern day crusade of self-discovery and self-expression could be just as misguided as anything in the Middle Ages.

To become or not to become

Let me suggest it's also too simplistic. That there is no static "you" or "me." Life is dynamic, either developing or decaying. Not even the stars stay the same. Change, someone said, is inevitable – except from a vending machine.

We're all in a process of *becoming*. It doesn't usual happen overnight. But one pensive day,

you've got a quiet moment, and it hits you. "I can't believe it. I've become. . ." you fill in the blank. In the movie *Sahara*, there's a scene where Dirk Pitt (played by Matthew McConaughey) finds himself in the middle of the desert, looking for a civil war ship. "How in the world did we get here?" he asks himself with a bit of disbelief. Small steps have had a big impact.

Only a grumble

It could go two ways, of course – for better or for worse. Let's look at the ugly side first.

Over the course of our lives, we can get ourselves into rough shape. Not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually, too. People can become emotionally anemic or spiritually bankrupt. They can lose the ability to make wise choices. You see that with a serious drug addiction. Any obsession can do that. Sex, pleasure, power, money, all have the potential to destroy us.

In one of C.S. Lewis' books he talks about a woman who was essentially addicted to finding fault with everything and everyone. She wallowed in complaining and self-pity. In fact, it so consumed her life, that in the end, Lewis says, there was no woman left – only a "grumble."

A Deadly Spiral

You find that kind of process outlined in the Bible, too. God tells us that sin not only has consequences for others – and that's something we also like to ignore – it has consequences in our own lives, too. The choices we make can destroy ourselves.

One of the key places this is described is in the first chapter of the book of Romans. There the Apostle

Paul describes a deadly spiral. It begins when we think we don't need God. And God – this is scary – lets us have our way. He abandons us to ourselves – and we self-destruct.

You are what you worship

We were all made to worship – not just to love, but to be in awe, to give someone (or something) a love that is filled with wonder, even reverence.

We were given that ability in order to love and enjoy God. But when we reject the Creator, something else takes that place. Created things. Stuff, sports, music, money, even good things like relationships and family. People become "religious" about the wrong things.

And that's a miserable life. Not only is it a lie – because we treat things as God that are clearly not – it also ruins us. Your life only rises as high as that which you worship.

When you worship money, you will become unable to think of much else. You become a human calculator, filled with nothing but numbers. When you worship material things, people become just another object to be consumed. You lose the ability to relate to others in a meaningful way. These sorts of things illustrate that what we give our hearts to in turn shapes what we become.

Mental mush

Paul also describes how we can turn our minds into mush – and our lives quickly follow. At one point, Paul makes a pun which is tough to translate. Let me try to capture it. "Since they did not regard it worthwhile to test and inspect the knowledge of God, God gave them over to an untested mind that would

not pass inspection. And so they do what ought not to be done.” (vs. 28)

How's your IQ?

What Paul is saying is that rejecting God makes you slow in the head. Not intellectually, but morally. Like your moral IQ drops to 25.

Paul, in fact, cites the practice and acceptance of homosexuality as an example. Even nature tells us this isn't normal. But our inability to see this shows that our rejection of God has damaged ourselves. Before homosexuality is a sin, Paul says it is a sign of sin. Reject God – and all of life, sadly, goes to pot. Lose God and you will lose your own humanity.

A Better Way

But there is another way. A different road of becoming. That's what the gospel of Jesus Christ promises you and me.

Sometimes people think the Jesus and the Bible is about “going to heaven.” That's too simplistic. Even the gift of forgiveness is but the first step. The gospel is about *becoming*. Becoming the masterpiece of God's creation again. Becoming something glorious, like God himself! That's what will make paradise truly paradise. Not so much that our surroundings have changed – but that we have changed. We will finally be able to keep in step with God himself, walk with him in his ways, love him and enjoy him forever.

Show me the money

How does that happen? Can we take the Bible seriously? Can the trend be reversed – so that instead of becoming something ugly, defined by our sin, our rejection of God, we become something wonderful, defined by God?

Let me show you this isn't just wishful thinking.

First, Jesus brings the world true worship. And if you become like that which you worship, this is pretty important.

Jesus shines the light of the glory of the true God in our darkness. Just look at the cross. There we see a God who is more gracious, more faithful, more holy, more angry (and rightly so), than we could ever imagine. We see a God who is clearly beyond us, beyond creation. And we are brought to our knees in awe and wonder. How can we be loved so greatly – when we deserve such wrath? How could the very God we've sinned against come and die in our place?

In the face of God's greatness in Jesus Christ, we also find greatness again. Through him, humanity finds new life, new inspiration. Strangely, the more we are broken and humbled before the true God, the more we are restored and lifted up.

The Master

Secondly, Jesus also gets busy in the lives of those who believe in him. This is his promise, his gift. He doesn't save us because we're good – He saves us to make us good. In fact, his goal is to make us like Himself!

If anyone else promised change – I'd be skeptical. Talk is cheap. But look at the Bible. Jesus truly practiced what He preached. He knows love – love for God and others – like no one else. Just look at the cross. You would want to learn martial arts from the best. If you want to learn love, for God and for others, here's the master we need.

Give me a knife!

He also gives us some hard-hitting instruction. “Whoever finds his life, will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” He gave us his all – and He requires our all in

return. What we hold back will only crumble in our hands.

He tells us to crucify ourselves, to put things like anger and hatred and lust and greed to death! Have you read a self-help book with a title like that? “Take a knife – to yourself!” Don't stoke evil desires – starve them! We would prefer something less drastic. Where we can still keep part of our comfortable life of sin.

There's also the positive. He tells us to clothe ourselves with things like compassion and kindness and gentleness. Clothe – something you do every day again. Even before we get dressed, we put on an attitude that thinks of others better than ourselves, we prepare to forgive as we have been forgiven by God, and more.

And all of this changes you, bit by bit, slowly but surely.

Two roads

Christianity is not first of all about rules. The laws of God are only like a trellis that guide and anchor a new plant. It's the plant that God has his focus on.

Alone, we would self-destruct. We would even become something hellish, constantly at war with God, with others, even with ourselves.

But the other way, the gift of Jesus, is as glorious as that one is awful. Back to C.S. Lewis. At one point he said that if you saw right now a Christian in their finished state, you would be tempted to worship them. That frail little old lady, that man you don't think much of, they will shine with the glory of God – the glory of his love, his righteousness, and more! Those who follow Jesus will truly be a divine masterpiece!

Thanks for reading.
Marc

Why is there something instead of nothing?

Have you ever wondered why there is something instead of nothing? For instance, why is there a universe with an earth, a sun, a moon and stars? Why is this earth so suited for human beings to live on? Why do you actually exist instead of not existing?

No speculation

We could speculate in trying to arrive at answers to these questions. We could, for instance, say that the universe sprang into existence some 13.7 billions of years ago as an infinitesimally small, infinitely hot, infinitely dense, as something known as a singularity. Once this singularity appeared, it slowly expanded and cooled, going from very, very small and very, very hot, to the size and temperature of our current universe. Where this singularity came from and why it appeared no one knows. This answer, also known as the Big Bang Theory, is really nothing but speculation – reasoning based on inconclusive evidence.

Instead of speculating, we would do well to take our starting point in the Bible. Someone once compared the Bible to a pair of glasses. He wrote:

Just as old and bleary-eyed men and others with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in

our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.

You see, we all walk around with confused knowledge of God in our minds. In this sense, we're all a bit like these bleary-eyed men who can see the letters in a book clearly. Yet, when we put on a pair of glasses, this all changes. Then our sight becomes clear and we see (and understand) what the author of the book is saying. And that is precisely why God gave us the Bible. It function like that pair of glasses that enables us to make sense out of our confused knowledge of God.

God created the world

When we read the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, we find out that God created the world in six days. First, God created the earth as formless, watery mass cloaked in darkness with the Spirit of God hovering over its surface. Then God began to give form to this watery mass and fill this form. The first three days you could call days of forming. The second three days you could call days of filling. On the first day, God made a separation in the darkness by creating light so that there was day and night. On the second day, He made a separation in the watery mass by creating a sky so that there was water above the sky and water under the sky. On the third day, He made a separation in the water under the sky by creating dry land and vegetation. On the fourth day, God filled the light with light bearers by creating the sun, moon and stars. On the fifth day, He filled the sky and the seas by creating birds to fly in the sky and fish to swim in the water. On the sixth day, God filled the land by creating the animals and human

beings. Then, on the seventh day, God made a separation between work and rest by resting from his work of creating on this day.

Entering into and sharing in God's love

So, why is there something instead of nothing? The answer is: because God willed or wanted there to be something instead of nothing. Why, you ask? Well, not because God was lonely for He wasn't. On the contrary, God eternally exists as three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who eternally live in a relationship of love with one another. In fact, they live in one another (John 14:10-11). This "indwelling" in each other and living for each other in love is an expression of their unity as well as their diversity (John 17:21). As someone once said, "I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three; nor can I discern the Three without immediately being carried back to the One." Thus, God absolutely had no need to create something outside of Himself. And yet He did! And He did because He wanted others to enter into and share in his relationship of love (1 John 4:8, 16).

God especially wanted human beings to share in this relationship of love. You see that, for instance, in the fact that the earth was created for human beings. Before God created them, the earth was nothing but a formless, watery mass cloaked in darkness. But after three days of forming and three days of filling the earth was ready for human beings. It was especially they who God wanted to enter into and share in the joyous fellowship of love that He as Father, Son and Holy Spirit eternally enjoy.

Being able to enter into and share in God's love

Yet, the fact that God created the earth for human beings is not the only thing that shows He wants human beings to enter into and share in the fellowship that He has as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Also the fact that God created human beings in his image illustrates this (Genesis 1:26). Among other things, this means that we have a personal nature, just like God. Moreover, it means that we have the capacity to be indwelt by God just like the Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell one another.

Human beings have this capacity because God created them with an immaterial or inner self and a material or outer self. The immaterial or inner self is often called the soul. Sometimes, this immaterial self is also called the spirit. A person's soul or spirit is multidimensional. This comes to expression in the various words used the Bible uses for the soul. For instance, when the word "mind" is used, it often refers to the way the soul thinks and decides. When the word "heart" is used, it often refers to the desires and motives of the soul. When the word "will" is used, it often refers to the way the soul chooses. Having created human beings with such a multidimensional soul means that God is able to dwell or live in a person's thoughts, desires and will and a person is able to dwell in or live in God with his thoughts, desires and will.

Examining the soul¹

Our soul, however, is vulnerable. Consequently, when it is threatened, we erect walls to protect ourselves. As a result, we can keep God out of functions of our soul. Our soul is also needy and sensitive. However, when our soul equates itself with what fills and satisfies, it is estranged from itself (Matthew 6:25; 16:26). On the other hand, when our soul is not filled and satisfied with

what it thirsts for, we run the risk of filling it with surrogate fillers. When this occurs, our soul is estranged from itself too for in both cases our soul is focused on itself and not God.

Our soul wants to live. However, when our soul tries to live on its own, it becomes alienated from itself because it is made to live and move and have its being in God (Acts 17:28). This implies that a soul cannot save itself, but needs to be saved. Our soul also is the personal self-representation of ourselves (Psalm 116:8). As a result, we can reflect upon what goes on in our soul and speak to it (Psalm 42:5; Luke 12:19-20). Consequently, we can choose to surrender every function of our soul to God (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

Our soul is highly mobile. It can go upward and downward, forward and sideways. Each of these movements, however, is ambiguous. A soul can go upward in prayer, but also in pride. It can go downward in humility, but also in depression. A soul can go sideways for freedom, but also because of greed. It can go forward in love, but also in bloodthirstiness. We would do well, therefore, not allow ourselves to be aimlessly tossed to and fro on the movements of our soul, but intentionally focus the functions of our soul on God, always reflecting upon our deepest motives.

Our soul has the capacity to step out of itself. It most dearly longs to be with its lover (Song of Song 3:1-4). Being with the other involves personal contact, fellowship and intimacy. Ultimately, our soul seeks rest in the Other (Acts 17:27-28). Jesus, therefore, calls everyone to find rest in Him (Matthew 11:28-30). When we do, we will be one with Jesus as He is one with the Father (John 17:11, 21, 23).

Our soul can be lost. We can do this negatively through giving it to sex, money, attention, power, status, but also positively like Mother Theresa, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi. Jesus calls us to positively

lose our soul for the other (Matthew 16:24-26). This includes taking down its protective walls, disallowing it to be controlled by its neediness and sensitivity, and giving up its tendency to try to save itself. Only this kind of love for the other will satisfy the soul. We will only be able to give this kind of love if this kind of love has first entered into our soul (1 John 4:7-11).

Is it well with your soul?

Why is there something instead of nothing? You now know the answer: because God wants it to be here. He wants it to share in his fellowship of love. Especially human beings God wants to enter into and share in his fellowship of love. Even you.

Are you? Or are you erecting walls to keep God out of your soul? Are you filling your soul with all sorts of surrogate fillers instead having it filled with God? Are you living in your own strength or God's? Are you allowing yourself to be aimlessly tossed to and fro on the movements of your soul or are you intentionally focusing the functions of your soul on God? Are you negatively losing your soul through giving it sex, money, attention, power or status? Or are you positively losing your soul by giving it in love for the other?

As you know, you can reflect on what goes on in your soul and speak to it. If you have not surrendered your soul to God and entered into and share in his fellowship of love, I would urge you to do so. You have the capacity to choose. Go to Jesus and seek your rest in Him through faith. Then you will be one with Him as He is one with the Father. That's why you exist. That's why there is something instead of nothing. Thanks for reading.

Dick Moes

¹ Adapted from Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*, trans. John Vriend (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 435-446. See also Philip Troost, *Christus Ontvangen: gereformeerd en charismatisch: leren van elkaar* (Kampen: Kok, 2006), 87-100

God scatters the Nations over the Earth

Bible Story based on Genesis 11:1-9

The stories about the Great Flood were told often. The people of the olden days remembered how the Lord had sent mighty waters. Nearly everyone had drowned when God came to wash sin from the face of the earth. Only Noah and his family were saved, because they believed the Lord. Obeying his Word they built the ark, which kept them alive through the waters of cleansing.

Once the earth had dried up, the family of Noah grew out into several tribes. These groups of people all spoke the same language. But even though the people continued to tell each other about the Great Flood, they forgot its meaning for their lives. Again they started to turn against the Lord. They denied his repeated promise to look after his people. They would rather look after themselves. They trusted their own might and cunning more than the Lord's promise.

It became their passion to grow stronger than their Maker. They discovered how to make tools. They found out how to use bricks, stones and mortar. They learned how to build strong, high structures. In turn they used these discoveries to mount an attack against the Lord. Before long a plan took root in their hearts. It spread like wildfire through the tribes. "We are going to build a tower that reaches into heaven! We will dethrone the Lord once and for all! We'll defy him to his face! Ha!"

The building began according to a grand plan. They designed a fortified city with the tower in the centre. Together as one strong man they would hold their ground against the Lord.

With the false trust of a fool they started their work. They made bricks. They build strong houses. They raised the tower, layer by layer. Their bragging escalated as their tower

grew. There it was! Looming in the darkness! Radiating in the midday sun! Day and night it forced the glance upward to the clouds and beyond. The heavens were going to be theirs. Their conquest was a matter of time. They were on their way to outsmart God himself.

But the Lord in heaven was not absentminded, blind or scared. He was not retreating to the far corners of his heavenly regions. Poised to act He waited for the folly of the godless people to reach their peak.

As soon as the false trust of the foolish people soared out of control, the Lord made his move. He did not send a thunderstorm that would destroy the tower. He did not send an illness that would make the people weak.

No. The Lord interfered in the minds and hearts of the people. He hurt them in the seat of their pride. He took away their common language. From that moment on they could not understand each other any longer, as there suddenly were countless different languages. The result was a very great confusion. There was such babbling, that soon their new city was called Babel.

In a moment's time the Lord had changed the people's ability to share their thoughts. He confused their common purpose. No longer were they united in their defiance against

the Lord. In one master move the Lord had overturned their attack on his majesty.

The people became distrustful of each other. After a while their common rebellion against the Lord faded away. In its place came a deep-seated distrust and hatred for each other. Filled with disgust they could no longer stay together. Angry and disillusioned they left Babel. The Lord forced them to spread over the earth, as He had intended it. As the people scattered over the earth like the waters of the Great Flood, their cry of defiance grew dim.

Soon the proud tower turned into a ruin. It became a heap of shame. Heaven cannot be reached with a staircase built with human strength.

But there is a way.

Many years later our Lord Jesus died on a small hill outside of Jerusalem. This small hill definitely did not reach to the height of the heavens. But by his death on that small hill the Lord Jesus brought heaven within reach of all believers. With his blood the Lord Jesus wiped away their sins. Washed clean God's children are free to enter Heaven. They are ready for the Day when the Lord will return. At that time He will gather all his children from the corners of the earth and bring them together to their eternal home.



Activity Page

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Imagine how it would feel if no one around you spoke your language. You would feel very lonely. You might also begin to feel a little dumb. You don't know what to say. As you cannot express your thoughts, feeling and needs, you might start to think that you are stupid. People need language to find their place among the people around them.

Language is special gift of the Lord to people. It is through language that the Lord tells people what his plans for them are. Creation in itself tells about God's majesty and strength. But with words the Lord can become intimate with his people.

We have the Lord's words in the Bible. In our part of the world we have free access to the Bible. It is good to read the Bible every day. We must stay in close contact with our Lord. That will help us to trust Him and to walk in his ways.

It is also possible that we talk to the Lord. We can use our own language to speak to Him. Speaking with the Lord is called prayer.

Through Bible reading and prayer we enjoy communication with our Lord. We can also use language to share the message of salvation in Jesus. In that way the Word of God will reach the ends of the earth.



THE LANGUAGE OF FAITH

The story of the Tower of Babel is found in the beginning of the Bible. It tells us how the one language branches out in countless others.

Toward the end of the Bible we read how all the languages come together again.

After the Lord died and went up to Heaven, his Holy Spirit came down to help the believers in bringing the Good News to the ends of the earth. The outpouring of the Spirit took place in Jerusalem, on the feast day of Pentecost. At that time there were many people from different countries in Jerusalem. They all spoke their own language. The apostles, who were Jesus' special servants, explained to them what was happening. As sign of the Spirit's presence, a language miracle took place. All the different people were able hear the apostles in their own language!

LANGUAGE PICTURE

The picture is a Babel of letters. It contains letters from several different alphabets. Some you will recognize. There are English letters in an archaic form. Other letters come from a foreign language. This Babel of letters also contains the sign of love, and you might recognize a name. There are many more alphabets than represented in this language picture.

If you colour the picture, the letters will stand out more in all their variety. The abundance of languages

was necessary as a punishment. Yet each language is amazingly beautiful. Moreover, the Lord has given people the ability to learn more than one language. Praise be to the Lord of the heaven and earth. All tongues and peoples, praise his name!



ALL PEOPLE THAT ON EARTH DO DWELL



*All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the LORD with cheerful voice;
Him serve with joy, his praise forth tell,
Come now before Him and rejoice.*

Psalm 100



Dawn

More than a Folk Tale

“Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

1 Kings 3:5

In the classic Arabian tale, Aladdin rubs an old oil lamp which begins to produce a vapour and out of the vapour, a genie appears. “Master,” it says to Aladdin, “I will grant whatever you desire,” and Aladdin is granted three wishes.

That part of the story is well known. Who wouldn't want to have their wishes granted, whatever he or she wanted? We dream of being asked, and ponder what pleasures we might request.

In the biblical book of 1 Kings chapter 3, God himself came to Solomon in a dream and said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.” *Whatever* you want. For most people, it would be dream come true! The impression is that Solomon is granted one wish. But he could have whatever he wanted.

So what did Solomon ask for? Well, he asked for what was on his heart. That is what you'd expect. We don't often want the things we need but what's on our heart. So if you've got greed on your heart, you'd ask for selfish things, like endless supplies of money. If you felt very lonely, you might ask for a faithful friend, or maybe a good wife or husband. If you were afraid because of a disease, you might ask to be healed.

So what was on Solomon's heart? Well, he was afraid. He was a young man. His father had been king over all Israel, but now he was dead. Solomon was made king over all the land. This weighed very heavily on his heart. He was afraid that he might not be a good king and that he might make bad decisions. He said to God, “I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties.” Of course, he was exaggerating, or using a figure of speech. He was not a little child, but a young man. Yet this is how he felt.

And there were two things that made him afraid. First, there were so many people under his care. “Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number,” he said to God. But what made him even more afraid: The people he ruled over belonged to God. They were God's people. “Who is able to govern this great people *of yours?*” he said. If he made a mistake, God would hold him accountable.

So what is on his heart? His job as king over Israel. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to be wise enough to do a good job so that people would be blessed by the decisions he made and so that God might be happy with him for what he did as king over his people.

So what did he ask for? He did not ask for money. That wouldn't help him much. He didn't ask for long life, because what use is it to live a long time if you're doing a bad job of things. What he wanted most of all is what he asked for: “Give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.” He asked for wisdom.

What is really special here is that what he wanted is exactly what he needed.

Now, this offer to be granted whatever you want is not just the stuff of fairy tales, nor is it only an old story in the Bible. It is a promise that God makes to you in Jesus Christ. God is so pleased with you if you put your trust in his Son, that He will give you anything at all that you could want and ask for. Jesus told his disciples this straight up: “I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

Jesus used the same word that God did to Solomon: *whatever* you ask. Whatever you ask for, God will give it to you, if you ask in Jesus name. That of course means that Jesus must be on your heart. Your heart must be filled with love and thanks for Jesus because He saved you and rescued you from the punishment your sin deserves. Your heart must be as filled with a desire to serve God and his people, as Solomon's heart was.

That's the amazing thing about the gospel in Jesus Christ. If you belong to the Lord Jesus by faith, then you have as much or more than anyone had in the Bible, and you are far better off than anyone you read about in fairy tales.

Paul Aasman

EVANGEL

Volume 26, No. 4 Editor — Dick Moes; Layout and Printing — Premier Printing Ltd. Illustrations — p.6 by Jane deGlint; p.7 by Dawn. *Evangel* is published four times per year by **Reformed Evangelism Taskforce**. All correspondence and subscriptions to: **R.E.T., 21804-52 Avenue, Langley, BC V3A 4R1.**

Compliments of: