

# EVANGEL

*The Good News of Jesus Christ*



**PASS IT ON**

# Are You Missing Out?

**Have you ever missed out on something big?**

**Perhaps at the hospital you stepped outside for a moment and missed the birth of one of your children. True story.**

**Perhaps you were away on holidays when some long lost friends you hadn't seen in years unexpectedly dropped by.**

Wonderful, delightful things can happen. But we can also miss them.

Something like that can happen also with God. In Jesus of Nazareth, God has acted in the most amazing way yet. On Good Friday and Easter world history turned a corner, never to turn back. God has acted to decisively deal with the evil and misery of this world.

But yet we can miss it.

Perhaps because of our own expectations of what God should do. Perhaps because of our own fears and tears. Perhaps because of our own plain rebellion and foolishness. There's lots that can blind us to what God has done in Jesus Christ.

## Right under our noses

In the Bible, towards the end of the gospel of Luke, we read about two people in that situation.

It's the day of the first Easter. These two have set out from Jerusalem and are traveling back home, to a little town named Emmaus, about seven miles away. And it's a journey with long faces and plodding steps.

They have followed Jesus, admired him greatly. But now he's been brutally put to death. A terrible mistrial, a humiliating crucifixion. They have also heard strange reports that somehow the tomb of Jesus is empty. And that some women have had a vision of angels.

But it all baffles these two. They

can't make sense of anything of this. This is as confusing as an episode of *Lost*.

On one level it's surprising, even shocking to read this. The greatest thing in the world has just happened. The death and the resurrection of Jesus is God's great act of redemption. This is the epicenter of God's eternal plans. But these two have missed it!

But it's not just them. That's how bad we've all got it. On our own, we can't even see the wonders of God, even if they were right under our noses.

## Open my eyes

But that's only the start of the story.

On their somber journey home, a man comes up on these two travelers, deep in discussion. It's Jesus, actually, risen from the dead. And we see Jesus patiently removing their blindness.

That tells us the resurrection of Jesus is an especially beautiful thing. First of all, the resurrection means that in Jesus God has truly conquered death, sin and satan. But it's even more than that. The resurrection of Jesus also means that he is alive to open our hearts and minds to God and his salvation.

I know I need that in my life. "Don't be frustrated with me, Lord. It may seem impossible that I can miss what you've done. But I have. Please, don't hold that against me. Be patient with me. Work with me. Just like you did with those two journeying home to Emmaus."

Just imagine. Jesus has essentially shown the greatest love this world has ever seen. He's given his life on a cross for mankind. But these two are woefully ignorant of what's happened. Is it too strong to

say – they have quite literally turned their back on God?

Thankful God does not turn his back on us.

## Divine blindness

Surprisingly, we're told that at first the two men (or was it a couple?) were kept from actually recognizing Jesus. Perhaps that's because after his resurrection he wasn't quite the same – he had conquered death forever. But this is a typical way to describe the actions of God.

At first, *God* keeps them from recognizing Jesus? Why? So that they would come to see him in a greater way. Not just physically, with their eyes. In the way we all need to come to see Jesus. So their story would also be our story.

## A reprimand

Jesus inquires about their heated discussion. And they give a pretty detailed account of everything that's happened in the last while. They are surprised he seems ignorant of it all. That shows just how big the events of the last days are in their mind. Who could not know about it? And yet they still can't put two and two together.

Jesus actually reprimands them. He's compassionate – but honest, too. "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken? Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke 24:26)

## A sermon

But Jesus doesn't just give a reprimand.

Then he opens up the Bible, the Old Testament, and explains it all to them. He gives a kind of sermon, if you will.

Certainly, what God has done catches us off guard. Just look at

Good Friday, a naked crucified man. God has a way of doing things we don't expect. He loves to clothe his power in what seems like weakness, his glory in what seems like shame.

But God's plans have not gone unannounced. Just pick up your Bible. For thousands of years, God has worked with the world, to prepare us, to teach us what he must do.

### **Pick up and read**

You and I both have our own ideas of what God has to do in this world – and in our own lives. And those ideas often confuse us, even blind us.

The Bible tells us we need a Saviour who would die for us. Not just a teacher, not just a good example. Our sin deserves punishment. The Bible tells us we need some serious help. We aren't able to better the world in our own strength. Sin and Satan, death and decay need to be dealt with. All in all, we need to be reconciled to God again. And that requires a cross.

But God hasn't left us in the dark. Pick up your Bible! As long as it is closed, your eyes will be closed. You'll miss out on what God has done. But open it up, pray and read, and you can have what these two men had as well. Jesus is alive to continue to explain to us, through his Word, about his work, both stranger and more wonderful than we imagine!

### **Breaking bread**

But there's more to the story. Because it's not actually at this point that God allows these two to see just who is traveling with them.

As good hosts, when they arrive home they invite Jesus in to join them for a meal

Jesus does join them. But not as a guest. During the meal, he's the one who take the loaf of bread, gives thanks, and then breaks it and gives it to them. And it's at this particular time that their eyes are opened and they recognize him.

This is how these two, and you and I, need to come to see Jesus. As the host, the giver, the breaker of bread. In more ways than one.

You see, that's what his death, his cross is about as well. It was unlike any other death on a cross. It was God's gift from heaven, the gift of bread, the gift of life. When Christ went to the cross he was not even the hero or martyr giving up his life. He was handing out his life. His death was not some sort of rallying point for others. His death for our sin means life for sinners.

No doubt these two from Emmaus first looked at the crucifixion of Jesus as a terrible failure, a tragic end. But they need to see that in the cross Jesus also is the host, breaking his body, for them. It's the same for us, too. We must be the guests, we must in humility receive the death of Jesus as our life. That's where our eyes are opened to see God.

### **A signature act**

You can know which works are those of a famous artist because of their traits or strengths. Rembrandt is known for his attention to detail. Michelangelo can capture poise like no one else.

God has his "signature" acts as well. Love and grace. These are things God does like no one else does. God has a love that does the unexpected, that acts powerfully, that is much more than just feeling. God is also gracious like no other, giving richly to those who don't deserve it.

Look at Jesus, breaking this bread, handing it out. Look at his cross and resurrection, his triumph over sin and death for us. Do you see? This is a mark of the true God! Only God would be this good, this giving to those who don't deserve it. Only God's love would be this deep, entering our world, our sin, in all its misery and guilt.

### **Guests of God**

God has acted, written his magnum opus, in Jesus Christ.

But we can miss it.

We're out of tune with it. Like your radio or television that's on the wrong channel. We have our own crude ideas of God and what he must do.

We need Jesus, his Word, his Spirit.

Read his Word. It's the word that humbles us, that shows on every page our desperate need for nothing less than the death of the Son of God. We are in way over our heads. We have nothing to cling to ourselves. Our goodness is filthy rags. We need to be broken, humbled. Without that humility you will miss what God has done.

It's the Word that also speaks of grace. It reveals that in Jesus Christ God is the host of life, now and forever. This is what we need to see. We always are but guests – but what a blessing, what a joy it is. To be the guests of God!

And one day, God will show this in the greatest way. The death of Jesus – that is only the beginning of so much more. One day, God will fully give himself to us, to be our life, our joy forever! Those who in faith see Jesus now – we will one day *see God* – and deeply enjoy his glory and beauty eternally.

Thanks for reading,

*Marc Jagt*

# What does it mean to put your faith in Jesus Christ?

The magazine you are reading is called *Evangel: The Good News of Jesus Christ*. In it you will often read a call to believe or to put your faith in the Jesus Christ. Sometimes, the authors will explain what this means; other times, they may take for granted that the reader knows what this means. In this issue, I would like to write a whole article on what it means to believe in Jesus Christ or to put your faith in Him. I am going to do this by structuring the article around a definition of faith someone gave about 450 years ago. The definition goes like this: [Faith] is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Bear with me and keep reading as I unpack this definition bit by bit for you.

## Faith is knowledge

Notice that faith is, first of all, knowledge. The author of this definition stresses this because people in his day said that you could have faith without knowledge. In order to be saved, you did not have to understand anything. All you had to do acknowledge that the church was right. But is this really true? Imagine if you are looking for a spouse. Would you be satisfied with someone telling you that so and so would be a good spouse for you without you knowing and understanding anything about your prospective spouse? I'm sure you wouldn't. You would want to know and understand some things about your prospective spouse yourself before you enter into a love relationship with her. And that

is what believing in Jesus Christ is about. It's about entering into a love relationship with Jesus Christ! That's why it should not surprise us that this is also what the Bible says. Jesus, for instance, says, 'This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (John 17:3).

This does not mean, however, that we believe in Jesus Christ or put our faith in Him because we know and understand everything. In this life, because we are so limited in our knowledge and understanding, there are many things about the Christian faith that we will not understand. In such cases, according to the author of our definition, "we can do nothing better than suspend judgment, and hearten [= encourage] ourselves to hold unity with the church." Thus, in saying that faith is knowledge we simply mean that faith is not ignorant of what it believes, but involves a limited understanding of what and who it believes.

## Faith is knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ

Second, faith is knowledge of God's benevolence or mercy towards us in Jesus Christ. We find this benevolence or mercy of God in the Bible. The Bible and faith can never be separated just like you cannot separate the rays of the sun from the sun itself. This means that in general the whole Bible is the focus of our faith. But in a more particular sense, it is what the Bible tells us about God's benevolence or mercy towards us that is the focus of our faith. More precisely, we can say that it is the word about Christ in the Bible that is the focus of our faith. He is the One to whom the whole Bible

points. God's benevolence or mercy toward us in Him forms the heart of the Bible. Thus, when we believe we put our faith in Jesus Christ who is the substance of the Bible.

## Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ

Third, faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence or mercy toward us. Faith is firm and certain because what God says in the Bible about his mercy towards us in Jesus Christ is dependable and reliable. Consequently, faith puts its full weight on these promises and trusts that they are true. Faith does this because God Himself is faithful and dependable. Moreover, Jesus Christ has proven what God has said about his mercy towards us to be true. Jesus' life, death and resurrection are one big manifestation that God can be trusted when He says that in Jesus Christ He is merciful toward us. Thus, it belongs to the very essence of faith to be firm and certain.

Yet, notice that this certainty of faith is not just an objective certainty in the reliability of what the Bible says about God's benevolence or mercy towards us. This certainty of faith is also a subjective certainty or inner persuasion that God is benevolent or merciful not just to others, but also to you personally. God the Father not only loves others, He also loves you. Jesus Christ came into this world not only for others, but also for you.

Yet, because our faith in Jesus Christ is always under attack, it is not always firm and certain in practice. For instance, faith is sometimes under attack by our own

unbelief (Mark 9:24). Other times, faith is under attack because of our anxiety or doubts. Yet, even though our faith is constantly under attack, the outcome of our faith is never in doubt. This could be illustrated by comparing faith to a shield (Ephesians 6:16). Comparing faith to a shield, the author of our definition writes:

When, therefore, faith is shaken it is like a strong soldier forced by the violent blow of a spear to move his foot and to give ground a little. When faith itself is wounded it is as if the soldier's shield were broken at some point from the thrust of the spear, but not in such a manner as to be pierced. For the godly mind will always rise so as to say with David, 'If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evils, for thou art with me' (Psalm 23:4).

Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts.

Fourth, faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts. This knowledge is first revealed to our minds. In our minds, we receive a limited knowledge and understanding of God's mercy toward us in Christ. But faith is more than simply an intellectual knowledge and understanding in the mind. What we know with our heads must also shoot deep roots in our hearts.

The difference between these two kinds of knowledge could be explained as followed. Knowledge in the head could be called knowledge by description. Knowledge by description is simply having information about God's mercy toward us in Jesus Christ.

Head knowledge that shoots deep roots in our hearts could be called knowledge by acquaintance. Knowledge by acquaintance leads you into direct contact with the reality of Jesus Christ that you know about. Knowledge by description tends to just "flit in the brain." Knowledge by acquaintance, however, is a life-transforming reality. Jesus Christ comes to live in your heart so that you live in Him and He lives in you. As a result, He changes the way you think, speak and act. In fact, He forms his own thinking, speaking and behavior in you and through you. Believing in Jesus Christ brings this life-changing reality about in your life.

### **The bond of the Holy Spirit**

How do we receive this firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us in Jesus Christ revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts? Or put differently, how do we receive this knowledge by description of God's mercy toward us in Jesus Christ that shoots deep roots in our hearts so that it becomes a life-transforming knowledge by acquaintance?

The answer to this question lies in the secret working of the Holy Spirit. The author of our definition of faith writes about this in the following way:

[W]e must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the father, he has to become ours and dwell within us.

How does this happen? How does what Christ has done for us become what Christ does in us? This happens through the Holy

Spirit because the "Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself." And He does that through giving us the gift of faith. Faith that is "firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Giving us faith is the Spirit's main work. In doing so, He unites heaven and earth by raising us up to fellowship with Christ in heaven and bringing Christ into our hearts to fellowship with Him on earth.

### **Do you want to receive this gift of faith?**

Do you want this gift of faith? If you do, ask God to give it to you. Then use the means through which He works faith in your heart. Start reading in the Bible. Remember how we compared the relationship between the Bible and faith to the relationship between the sun and its rays. Just like the sun and its rays can never be separated, so the Bible and faith can never be separated either. Also remember that the heart or substance of the Bible is God's benevolence or mercy toward us in Christ.

Then become a member of a church that submits itself to the Bible. Attend the worship services and get involved in the life of the church. Someone once said: the proof of the pudding is in the eating. This also is true for the Christian faith. If you want to know whether the Christian faith is true and want to receive this gift of faith yourself, immerse yourself in the Bible and the life of the church. You will be surprised what begins to happen to you. Thanks for reading.

*Dick Moes*

# The Risen Jesus heals through Peter and John

Bible Story  
based on Acts 3:11-26

People were rushing through the streets of Jerusalem. They hurried to Solomon's Porch at the side of the Temple. They were bursting with curiosity and excitement.

"Have you heard? Can you believe it? Peter and John healed the lame beggar! You know, that man who sat at the Beautiful Temple Gate for all those years. He is now walking and jumping and praising God! Let's go and see!"

Soon Solomon's Porch was filled with curious people. Excitedly they crowded around the pillars to catch a glimpse of the lame beggar. Yes, there he was! He was holding on to Peter and John, his healers. Beaming with joy he stood up straight. His shoulders were strong. Unbelievable! Who would have thought that Peter and John could do such a thing? This was nothing less than a true miracle.

The crowd hushed when Peter motioned with his arm that he wanted to say something. The people fixed their eyes on him and perked their ears. How would he explain this miracle? Where would he have learned how to do that? What powers had he used?

"All you people of Israel! You have rushed here to see a miracle. You are surprised and curious. You seem to think that John and I have suddenly received superhuman powers. But no. We did not become gods. We did not perform this miracle. It was Jesus who did it. Yes, you know him. It was the Jesus whom you condemned to death. Yes, it was the Jesus who was killed by your leaders. This Jesus is the holy One of God. He is dead no longer.



He rose from the grave. The God of our forefathers called him back to life and graced him with glory. It was the glorified Jesus who healed the lame beggar. It was in the name of Jesus that John and I spoke the healing words."

The people were no longer curious. They were gripped with fear. Did they kill the holy One of God? They listened in dead silence as Peter's voice resounded between the arches and pillars of Solomon's Porch.

"You did not realize what you were doing. Your leaders did not even understand it. You were spiritually blind. But the Lord used your blindness to bring about his plan. From of old the Lord decreed that Jesus had to suffer and die, so his people will live. Repent then, right now. Feel sorry for what you did wrong. Give your heart to the Lord and serve him in all you do. And the Lord will wipe all your sins away with the blood of Jesus."

Peter's eyes scanned the crowd. He saw the sorrow in the eyes of an old man. He noticed the eagerness in the face of a young woman. Some children looked up at him intently

while resting their head against their mother. They were God's special people! To them the Lord had sent the prophets with the promise that Jesus would come to heal them from sin and death. Peter must tell the listening crowd who Jesus really is!

"The prophets of old told you about the Great Prophet, whom God would raise up from among you. Jesus is this Great Prophet. You must listen to everything he has told you. You must believe that he has risen from the dead. You must honour him for healing your sins. You are God's chosen people. You are the first to hear this good news. Through you the good news will be brought to the ends of the earth. It is as God told our forefather Abraham, 'In you all nations will be blessed.' My dear friends, believe that Jesus has risen from the dead!"

Many people in the crowd believed what Peter said. They recognized the words of the prophets. They became as joyful as the lame beggar who was healed. They walked away with uplifted hearts, thankful and smiling and praising God.

By Jane

# Activity Page

## Healthy and Sick

It is nice to be healthy. You can go outside to skip rope or kick a ball. You have a good appetite and enjoy eating your food. At night you go to bed for a long sleep.

But there are many people who are not healthy. A sick child does not feel like playing. People who are not well do not enjoy their food. Many hurting people suffer through a sleepless night. When you are sick, or handicapped, you often wonder how it would be to feel strong and fit.

## Disabled in God's Eyes

But all people, healthy or sick, are disabled in God's eyes. They cannot do his will. The lame man in the Bible story was disabled in his body. He was not able to walk. But all people are disabled in their spirit. They are not able to walk in God's ways.

They disobey God.

The Lord was very displeased when people started to disobey him. He even cursed them. They would all have to suffer. They would become sick and unhappy. Their disobedience is the reason of their suffering.

## The Lord Heals

But the Lord had compassion on his disabled people. Peter and John healed the lame man in the name of Jesus. It is the same Jesus who heals us from our disobedience. With his death he took the curse away. God's people can walk in his ways again!



## From the Bible:

*"Praise the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget not all his benefits –  
Who forgives all your sins  
And heals all your diseases.*

Psalm 103:2 and 3

## The Lord Will Heal

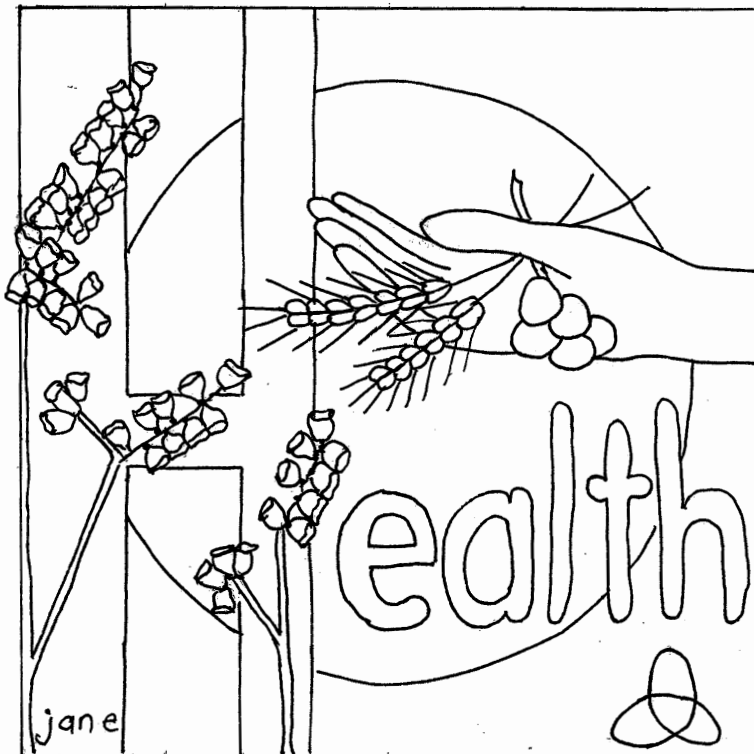
The Lord will heal  
The meek and humble.  
The pure of heart  
No longer stumble.

Their tears he dries.  
Yes, death will vanish!  
A new world comes  
Where life will flourish.



## Word Picture

True health is received from the hand of the Lord. It is given to us in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Jesus gave his life for us. His body was broken like bread that is baked from grain. His blood was shed like wine that is pressed from grapes. Grain and grapes are pictures of God's healing love.



# He has Risen, so Sleep Easy in Jesus

*“We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.”*

## 1 Thessalonians 4:14

I'm grieving. Someone I loved deeply had passed away. I miss him and find it hard to come to grips with the fact that he's no longer around. You probably know what I mean. Most of us have gone through it before, and maybe you're grieving too because someone you love has recently died.

That's just the way it is. Life and death have equal parts here in the world under the sun. We know that. Sometimes it's hard to accept, but we just know that it's true. We live in a fallen world where death keeps invading our lives until we ourselves are taken.

There was, however, a period in history when people didn't know about death. When people started to die of old age, everyone was shocked. They didn't know what to think. Death was a new and unwelcome experience. It happened with the very first people, Adam and Eve and their children. They grew old (some of them over 700 years old!) but eventually, they became feeble and weak and then died.

*“What's going on?”* they thought. *“What does this mean? Where did the person go? Is he gone? Will he come back? What do we do with a human body that no longer has breath or a beating heart?”*

Like I said, when death came and invaded the land of the living, people didn't know what to think. Eventually, faith in God filled the gap, somewhat. It was a vague hope, but they did come to believe that the Creator God would take care of them in life and in death.

This faith in the Creator God became richer and richer as God revealed his love for the human race, and finally, the richest of his love

was revealed fully in Jesus Christ. He too died, just like everyone else. Death invaded and took him too. But something unusual happened. Jesus became alive again. Death had been able to hold everyone else in its icy grip, but not Jesus. He was stronger than death. He rose from the dead by the sheer power of his own righteousness. Death is the wages of sin, but Jesus had never sinned, so death had no power to keep him dead. No power on earth can resist life in Jesus.

This is the good news which the church proclaims. Jesus has the key to death and hell, and he can open or close the door whenever he wants. If you believe in Jesus Christ, he will open the door for you so that death cannot keep you.

In the city of Thessalonica, people taught, therefore, that Christians wouldn't die anymore. *“You are in Jesus, and his power will prevent you from dying. You will live forever!”* they said.

But people in the church started to die. Some died from accidents, other of diseases, and others just got old and weak. But they died just like all other people.

*“What does this mean?”* they said. *This isn't supposed to happen anymore. Jesus has conquered death. Our life is not supposed to fail. Death is not supposed to invade the life of those who are in Christ!*

That was a false hope. Jesus didn't deliver us from death. Believers still die, just like everyone else. The body dies but the spirit goes to the Lord, and when the last day comes, he will bring all those who have gone to him, back to the world. So whatever joy people had with Jesus when he lived in Palestine 2000 years ago, that is what believers who die have because they go to be with Jesus, the Lord.

It is still upsetting when people we love die. But the world is not collapsing. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. He has the key to death and hell. When we die, we don't go to hell but the Lord, and one day, he will turn the key and death too will be totally overcome. The dead in Christ will rise and live forever.

I feel a lot better, now that I have thought about that. I hope you do too.

Paul Aasman

## EVANGEL

**Volume 28, No. 3** 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: