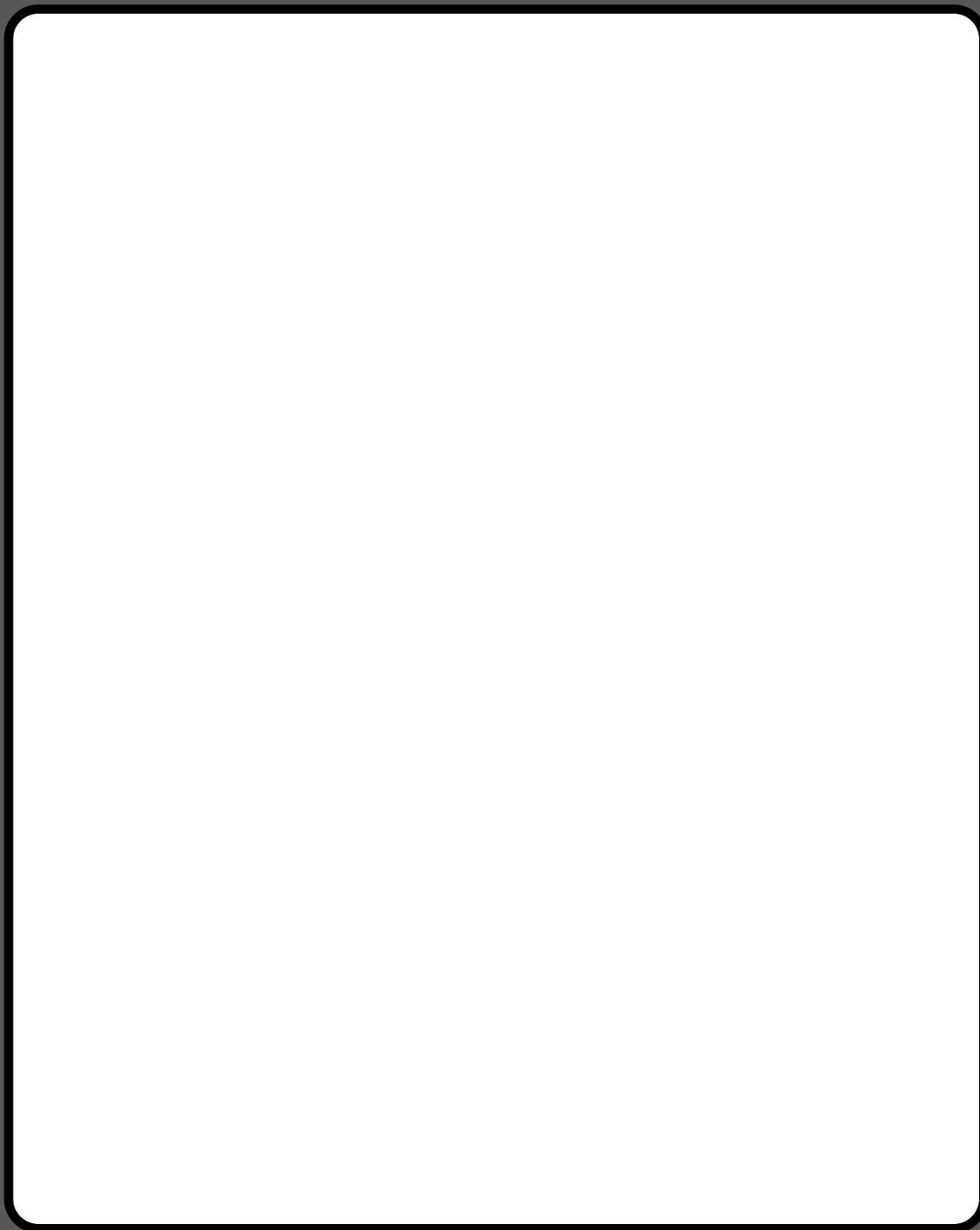


# Evangel

*The Good News of Jesus Christ*



# The forgiveness

**The forgiveness of sins. Have you ever considered your need to be forgiven of your sins? Did you know there is one who has the authority to forgive your sins? That is what the Bible story in Mark 2:1-12 is all about. It is about the authority of Jesus Christ to forgive your sins. If you have a Bible I encourage you to read this story before reading on in this column. If you don't I will try to retell the story for you. The story has Jesus preaching in a house, probably his own house. There are so many people there to listen to Jesus that there was no room left, not even outside the door.**

All of a sudden the scene shifts. There are group of men walking toward the house where Jesus is. Four of them are carrying a paralyzed man. There were no wheelchairs in Jesus' day so they carried him on a stretcher. Why are they carrying a paralyzed man? Because they believe Jesus can heal him so that he can walk again. But they cannot get in the building. In fact they cannot get anywhere near Jesus. What are they going to do? They climb up to the roof.

Now the roofs of buildings in Jesus' day had stairs up to them and were flat. So it was not too much work to do this. But what they did next was surprising. They dug through the roof. Can you imagine that happening in church? You are

listening to the preacher and all of a sudden there is a hole in the ceiling! Well that is what happened in that place where Jesus was. The tiles on the roof disappear. For a moment the sun shines in through the hole and then this paralyzed man is lowered down on his mat.

At this moment Jesus looks up and he sees those four men peering down through the hole that they had made in the roof and the Bible says *he saw their faith*. He saw that they believed in him to heal their friend. You might ask how can you see faith? Faith is not an object like a chair. You can't see it in that sense. So how could Jesus see faith? He saw faith because he saw the man lying before him. Remember, these men believed Jesus could heal their paralyzed friend. When they came to that place where Jesus was preaching and saw the crowd they did not look down at their friend and say, "Sorry man, not today." No they said, "*We'll find a way to get you in the building even if we have to dig a hole in the roof.*" And they did and that was the proof of their faith. They so strongly believed that Jesus could heal their friend that not even a crowded house stopped them from getting him to Jesus.

You see here something of the heart of faith. Faith knows Jesus Christ and his healing power. Faith is confident in Jesus Christ. When you have this faith you will not let the obstacles of life turn you away from Jesus Christ. You will go to him because only he can provide healing for your body and soul. These friends and this paralyzed man had shown Jesus faith. And so he says to the paralyzed man, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"

Do you think that this was what the paralyzed man and his four friends were hoping to hear? Do

you think the man on the mat might have been tempted to say – , "*uhm, forgiving my sins is not going to help me walk anytime soon.*" Maybe he was tempted to say this. You might be wondering, "*How come Jesus did not heal his body?*" There are those who would teach you that Jesus Christ wants to heal you. You just have to have enough faith. And so when you are not healed you get depressed because apparently you don't have enough faith. This man had lots of faith. His friends had lots of faith. They had come in faith looking for healing of the body. But what does Jesus say? He says, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"

With this story you learn that the most important need we have in this life is not to be rid of our wheelchairs, our medicines, or the other struggles of life – although I think we can all say that we would like that. No, the most important need we have is the healing of our souls. The most important words we could ever hope to hear spoken to us are not the declaration of a doctor that we are free of cancer or free of depression but the words of the great physician Jesus Christ that we are free of the punishment for our sins. *Son, your sins are forgiven.* We are all sinners. We all need to be forgiven. I do and so do you. And what the Bible is teaching in Mark 2 is that Jesus has the *authority* to forgive your sins.

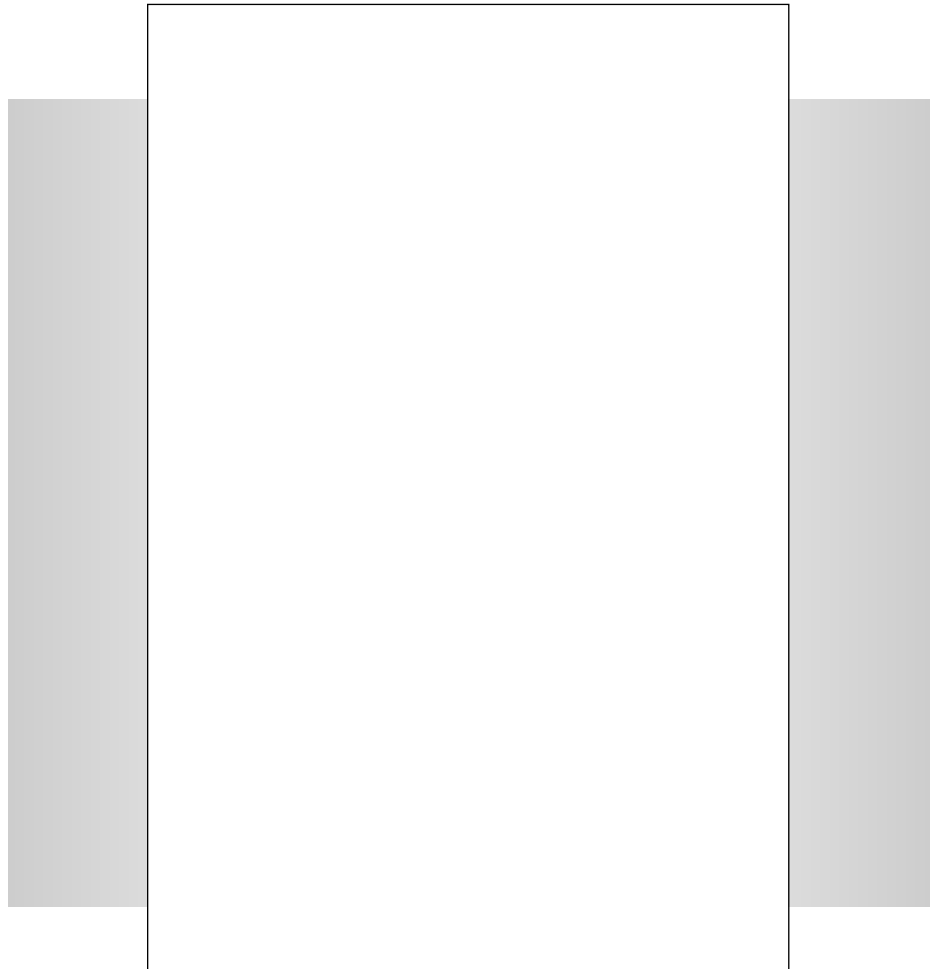
Sometimes we don't like that word authority. We don't like authority figures. It speaks of power and struggles with power. It speaks of those who have power and those who don't. Well, when it comes to our sins we need to realize that there is nothing we can do about them. There is no self-help program we can engage in. We are as powerless to do anything about our

# of sins

sins as that paralyzed man was to get off his mat and walk. But Jesus has the power and he has the *authority* from God to forgive your sins. And if you would have him address you as his son or daughter you must put your faith in him.

There were some people in the room that day that did not like what Jesus had to say. They were the teachers of the law. And they were thinking to themselves, *“Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* They were right. Only God can forgive sins. What they could not accept is that Jesus was God. Eventually this is what got Jesus killed. He said he was God and they would not believe him. But Jesus, because he was God, immediately knew what they were thinking in their hearts. So he asked them, *“Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’”*

That’s an interesting question isn’t it? How would you answer it? From where the teachers of the law were sitting it was easier for Jesus to say, *Your sins are forgiven*. It was easier because no one could disprove it. There was no change in the person that they could see with their eyes. It was harder to say, *“Get up, take your mat and walk.”* Why? Because if the man did not get up Jesus would look really bad. Remember the issue is: can Jesus forgive sins? And so that everyone there would realize Jesus had the authority to forgive sins he told the paralytic, *“I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”* He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. Jesus did the harder thing. With the harder thing he proved that he did have the authority to forgive sins. Now the



question facing the crowd is: how are they going to respond to Jesus? He has just proven by the miracle that he does have the authority to forgive sins. What is going to be their response?

The Bible says, *this amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”* They praised God because they had never seen anything like it before. This story has been included in the Bible so that even though you have never met Jesus personally you may believe that he is Christ the Son of God who has the authority to forgive your sins. If you believe in him he will meet your greatest need – he will heal your soul. But you

may ask what about my body? What will he do for that? The Bible makes no specific promises for this life. I have no authority to say if you believe in Jesus you can throw away your wheelchair, your medicines or you can regain your sight. But I can and must tell you about his promise for the life to come for all who believe in him. When Jesus Christ returns again he will give a new body to all who have faith in him. That body will be perfect. Let us together praise God for what he has done for us in Jesus Christ his Son and what he promises to yet do. Amen.

Doug Vandeburgt

# Blessed are You when your Rope

**At one time or another, you must have felt at the end of your rope. You've invested a lot of love, time and energy into a friendship, but your friendship dissolved and fell to pieces. You've tried your best to get through to one of your children, but you just had no success. You've gone to doctor after doctor, but your pain and discomfort just would not go away. And you felt as if you were at the end of your rope. You felt empty and powerless, crushed and defeated. You felt you could do no more yourself. Whatever you did, did not help. And so, you stopped trying all together.**

## **An oxymoron?**

Jesus tells us that such a situation can be a blessing. But that's hard to believe for it sounds like an oxymoron, a figure of speech in which contradictory ideas are placed together such as hopelessly optimistic, pretty ugly, old news, sure bet or clever fool. Likewise, being blessed when you feel at the end of your rope seems like two contradictory ideas placed together. Being at the end of your rope seems to cancel out being blessed. At least, so we think.

And yet, it doesn't! For when we are at the end of our rope, there is less of us. And when there is less of us, there is more of God and his rule. Allow me to explain.

## **Feeling empty**

In his Sermon on the Mount which you find in the first book of the second part of the Bible called the New Testament, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). When you are poor in spirit, you have no inner resources left. You've run dry. You're empty. You're spirit is in need. You're at the end of your rope. You need to be moistened and filled, enriched and encouraged. You need to receive a gift, for you feel totally dependant.

This is not always the way you are. There are times when you are rich in spirit. You are full of energy, resources and ideas. You do not need to receive a gift, for you do not feel dependant at all. You feel you can manage quite well on your own.

The people sitting there listening to Jesus were once like that. At least, their ancestors felt like that. They belonged to God's chosen people Israel and they were proud of it, too. God had entered into a special relationship with them. He was their God and they were his people. One day, God would decisively act in history and defeat all the other nations so that they, his chosen people, could inherit and rule the earth.

But things turned out much differently than they expected. Instead of the other nations being defeated, they were defeated by the nations. Instead of them ruling the nations, the nations were ruling them. And this had gone on for a long time! Almost 500 years!

And so, there they sat: empty, dry, in need, at the end of their rope. And Jesus says they're blessed!

## **What an oxymoron!**

How do you feel when you imagine yourself to be at the end of your rope? It can be so discouraging to have to go to doctor after doctor and continue to have to live with your discomfort. It can be so disheartening to seek your child's wellbeing day after day, only to see your child insist on going his or her own way. It can be so crushing to have invested a lot of love, time and energy into a friendship only to watch this friendship disintegrate and dissolve. And the last thing that comes to your mind in situations like these is that you should consider your situation to be a blessing and not a disaster!

## **The foundational principle**

And yet, that's what Jesus tells us to do. What does He mean, anyway? In order to understand what Jesus means, I have to remind you of the foundational principle of life.

The foundational principle of life is God's action, not our own. God is the creator, sustainer and ruler. He is the One who holds the whole world in his hands. He also holds your life in his hands. God is also the Saviour. He is the One who rescues this world from sin, death and decay. He is the One who sets things straight in this world. He is also the One who is willing and able to do this in your life. God ought to be the center as well as the circumference of our life. In Him we live and move and have our existence. Our human tendency, however, is to eliminate God from our life or marginalize Him. Either we do not reckon with his existence at all or we push Him to the margin and allow Him to occupy only a small corner of our life.

# You Feel at the End of

We tend to do something similar with our worship of God. Worship is holy for it is our response to the presence of God. Our human tendency, however, is to manipulate God. We have certain needs that we think have something to do with God. And so, we arrange a setting in which these needs can be met. Then we try to meet these needs on our terms with God as an accessory. We construct religious forms or engage in religious practices that gratify ourselves. But worship is placing ourselves in a posture of attentive submissiveness to that which is already there: the God who is already there and who has already spoken. In other words, worship does not make anything happen at all, but worship is placing yourself in the presence of God. You look, listen, sing, pray and marvel so that you can be operated on by God, moved by God and blessed by God.

It is in the context of this foundational principle that what Jesus says makes sense. For all of life is worship. All of life is being in the presence of God: watching Him act, listening to Him speak, fellowshiping with Him in prayer and being amazed at what He is doing in this world, your family life, your marriage life and your personal life. Our human tendency, however, is not to watch and listen, pray and marvel. Instead we close our eyes to what God is doing and we talk a lot, do a lot, completely filled with our own agendas, not God's. We burn out, reach the end of our rope and become totally frustrated.

## The empty are filled

And Jesus now says you are blessed when you find yourself in a situation like that for with less of

you there is more of God and his rule in your life. This is not an oxymoron at all. On the contrary, this is the way things ought to be. Someone once said, "God sometimes puts us on our backs to make us look up." And we can add that God does this so that we will watch Him, listen to Him, pray to Him, marvel at Him. God does this so that He can operate on us, move us and give us grace. God does this so that He becomes the center and circumference of our life, the One in whom we live and move and have our existence and not someone who is eliminated from our life or pushed away into some distant corner of our life, only to be pulled out of that corner and manipulated when we are in need or distress.

When you watch and listen, pray and marvel at God like this, you are blessed. You hang in there because you know you have hope. You believe things will turn out for the better. Perhaps, much differently than you had expected, but they will turn out for the better. For with God operating on our life, moving us and giving us grace, we learn to see what ultimately counts in life: not what I can do and achieve, but what God is doing and achieving in and through me.

## The empty are not filled

Is it possible not to be blessed when you are at the end of your rope? Yes, it is! Just remember those people sitting there listening to Jesus. They were at the end of their rope. They had had it with all that foreign occupation for almost 500 years. They were thirsting for deliverance and freedom. And they were hoping that Jesus would do this for them on their terms. But Jesus'

agenda was different than theirs. To be sure, He would offer them freedom. But it would be a freedom from the guilt and the power of sin, not a freedom from their foreign oppressors.

Thus, most of the people of Israel at that time were not in tune with what God was doing through Jesus Christ. They looked and listened, but it was a looking and listening that was filtered through the expectations of their own erroneous agenda. They failed to let Jesus operate on them, move them and give them grace. In doing so, they were not blessed. They did not persevere and believe that things would turn out for the best. Neither did they learn to see what ultimately counted in life was not what they could do and achieve, but what God could do and achieve in and through them.

## Which will it be?

I would urge you not to make the same mistake as they. When God puts you on your back either figuratively or literally, I would advise you to look up and allow God to operate on you so that He can set your priorities straight again. He rules! He is in control! He is the One in whom you are to live and move and have your existence!

When you do this, what a difference this will make in how you experience life in general. All of your life will become worship. All of your life will become being attentive to what there already is: the God who rules, saves, has spoken and still speaks.

Thanks for reading. May God bless it.

*Dick Moes*

# Joseph brings God's Word to Egypt

## Bible Story based on Genesis 41

It started out like a regular night in the palace of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. After his servants had attended to all his needs, Pharaoh had fallen asleep. But what had begun as a regular evening, turned out to be a very disturbing night for Pharaoh. While the palace was enjoying the peace of the night, the Lord interfered in Pharaoh's sleep with a very frightful dream.

Pharaoh dreamt that he was standing at the river Nile. Out of the water emerged seven fat cows, who right away started eating the grass at the riverside. Just then Pharaoh saw another seven cows come up from the water. These cows were very thin. To his horror the seven thin cows ate the seven fat cows. Amazingly, the thin cows did not look any fatter after their strange meal.

With a start Pharaoh woke up. What a disturbing dream! In spite of his fright Pharaoh fell asleep again quickly.

As soon as Pharaoh was asleep again, the Lord sent him another dream. From the ground seven ears of grain sprouted up, full and luscious. They were a picture of health and growth. But immediately Pharaoh's eyes were drawn to seven other ears of grains rising from the soil. These grains were so withered and limp, that they would be of no use for anything. In spite of their weakness the skinny ears went over to the fat ones, and ate them up. Yet, they did not increase in size.

In the morning Pharaoh sent for all his wise men. With anguish in his voice he told them his dreams. Though the wise men shared Pharaoh's understanding that these dreams would have a dreadful meaning, they were not able to explain them to Pharaoh.

The king of Egypt was devastated. The Lord's message terrified him, yet he was not able to grasp what the Lord was telling him.

The gloominess of the king descended over the whole palace. All the servants felt the weight of the mystery. Suddenly the chief butler

remembered that he had met a man in prison who was able to tell the meanings of dreams.

In a hurry he went to Pharaoh. He spoke with agitation. "Pharaoh, when I was in prison I met a Hebrew slave, whose name was Joseph. This man was able to tell the meanings of dreams. Things happened exactly as he had predicted."

Without delay Pharaoh called Joseph out of prison. The prison keeper quickly groomed Joseph, giving him a shave and clean clothes. As soon as he was ready, Joseph was led to the royal courts.

"Can you interpret my dreams?" Pharaoh asked.

"No, Pharaoh, I cannot. But my God, who has given you these dreams, will reveal their meaning to me. Please tell me your dreams."

Pharaoh told Joseph both dreams. Joseph listened respectfully. Then he spoke.

"God did reveal the meaning of your dreams to me. Both dreams mean the same. You received two dreams with the same message because it will surely happen. This is the meaning of the dreams. The seven fat cows are seven years of rich harvest. The seven thin cows are seven years of drought. Likewise the ears of grain: seven good years, seven

bad years. For sure, the Lord will first give Egypt seven years of plenty, and then seven years of hunger. But let Pharaoh be wise. Let him appoint a wise man to store the grain in the seven rich years, so that the people will have food for the years of draught."

Joseph's words pleased Pharaoh much. "You are a wise man", the king of Egypt exclaimed. "You surely have the Spirit of God in you. You speak the words of the Lord. You shall be the wise man whom I will set over all of Egypt to oversee the gathering of the crops in the rich years. After that you shall oversee how the food will be divided during the years of hunger."

Pharaoh beckoned Joseph to come closer. The king of Egypt took his special ring from his finger and put it on the finger of Joseph, the Hebrew slave. Then Pharaoh ordered his servants to dress the slave Joseph like a prince. To show everyone that Joseph was no longer a slave, Pharaoh took a gold chain and hung it around Joseph's neck. Joseph was now a mighty man in the palace of the king of Egypt.

This big change did not make Joseph proud. He knew that it was the Lord who had led him from the despair in prison to the glory of the palace. It was the Lord who had given Joseph the wisdom to explain Pharaoh's dreams. It was the Lord who would continue to be with Joseph. Moreover, the Lord would use Joseph to provide food for the Egyptians and for many other nations and tribes. Also Joseph's own family would come to him for food.

Everyone who believes is like Joseph. He is called out of the prison of sin to the glory of God, the King. The King gives his children all the wisdom they need to do their work well and to serve him in all they do. The Lord, our King, will use us to spread the Good News to those around us. God will forgive our sins and dress us in holiness for the sake of Jesus, our Saviour.

*Jane*

# Activity Page

## JOSEPH IN EGYPT

Joseph was a son of Jacob. Father Jacob taught his large family the ways of the Lord. One day Joseph was taken away from his father's house in Canaan. He was sold as slave in Egypt.

But Joseph did not forget the ways of the Lord. He did his work for his heavenly Master. As a result his Egyptian master was very pleased with him.

Joseph learned the ways of the Egyptians. He learned their language and their customs. Yet, he did not forget the Lord. Whatever he did, he obeyed his Father in Heaven.

One day Joseph ended up in prison, because he served the Lord. That might sound strange. But it is not. Sometimes people become angry when a child of God tries to stop them from doing evil.

That happened to Joseph. One day the wife of his master wanted to sleep with him. Obedient to both his heavenly and his earthly master, Joseph said no to her. His master's wife became very angry and told lies about Joseph. She turned the truth around and said that Joseph wanted to sleep with her.

Joseph ended up in prison, but also there he served his heavenly Master. The Bible Story (see the previous page) shows that the Lord did not forget his faithful servant, but raised him to honour.

## EGYPT IN THE BIBLE

In the Bible Egypt is taken as the place where the Lord is not served. Egypt is called the house of sin and evil. The Lord calls his people away from Egypt and leads them to a place where they can serve him.

You can read about the rescue from the sins and misery of Egypt in several places of the Bible.

Exodus 20: 2

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Matthew 2:15

"Out of Egypt have I called my son."

## Psalm 81

*Sing to me your laud.  
Out of Egypt's power  
I the LORD, your God,  
Rescued Israel;  
So on you as well  
Blessings I will shower.*

## WAYS OF THE EGYPTIANS

Joseph learned the ways of the Egyptians. The Egyptians had no alphabet. They wrote with picture-words. An example is shown on this page. Can you recognize some of the picture-words?

The Egyptians had a very unique way to draw people. They always drew them so that you see the body from the front; but the face, arms and legs are shown from the side.

If you like to, you can colour these pictures. You can also try to write a sentence using pictures instead of our alphabet. It might be more difficult than you think. Many words are not so easily captured with a picture!

# The Idol of Appearances

*He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites – a head taller than any of the others.*

1 Samuel 9:2

*Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him.  
Man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart.”*

1 Samuel 16:7

The Bible often warns us to be careful about appearances.

*There will be pretenders saying, “I am the Christ, follow me.”*

*There will be boasters saying, “I am God, listen to me!”*

*There will be liars saying, “I am your friend, trust me.”*

There are anti-Christ's who would lead us onto the way unto death. There are so-called “gods” who would make us their slaves. And there are hosts of liars who want to win our trust so that we lose our soul.

We live in a dangerous world. We need to train ourselves to look at the substance of a matter, and not just at the appearance of it.

When Israel first saw Saul, they were deeply impressed with his appearance. He was a head taller than most men. He was an impressive young man. His appearance quickly won the trust and admiration of men and women, young and old alike. Mothers look at him and said, “He will keep our towns safe.” Soldiers looked at him and said, “Here is a king we will follow to victory or to death.”

But what a mistake! They should not have been satisfied with Saul's appearance. They should have cared about deeper issues. They should have inquired after his substance.

You should think about that. Do you care too much about appearances? Are you the kind of person who wouldn't be caught dead in public wearing clothes that are out of style? Do you pay too much attention to outer beauty, or desire to be physically attractive? Do you envy the lithe girls in advertising and think often about dieting in order to make yourself thinner? Do you pump iron

in order to appear more muscular?

Paul writes, “Physical training has some value.” Indeed, it does. But when we care too much about outward appearances, we stop serving God and we start serving an idol, for Paul goes on to say, “but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:8)

Worst of all, if you judge by appearances, you reject the things that are really important. Why, you would reject Jesus Christ himself, because

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,  
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*

*Like one from whom men hide their faces*

*he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* Isaiah 53:2, 3  
You can believe in Jesus Christ only if you are willing to look beyond appearances. Though Christ Jesus is king of glory, yet to all appearances, he is irrelevant to the modern world, and his body, the church, seems as weak today as it ever was.

Why should we believe in Jesus Christ? Why should we trust him to keep us safe? Why should we take

orders from him?

Because he reigns. He is God. He saves our souls from death. Anyone who sees him as the Bible describes him, will see his glory and will trust and serve him.

Every now and then, God shatters the idol of appearances. After the kingship of Saul (the king of appearances) failed miserably, God chose David. David was not tall and handsome like Saul. He was a young lad, perhaps 15 years old, the youngest of seven brothers, a mere sheep herder. Nobody would have thought he could be a king. But he was. God could tell, because God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart.

Train yourself to care about the heart more than about outward things. Go ahead and train your body, dress well, adorn your self, but give much more attention to training your heart to fight against evil, and to adorning your faith with holy living and respectful attitudes.

It will be better for you to be beautiful to God than to your neighbour.

*Paul Aasman*

## Evangel

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