

The Bible Society

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Hebrews 11:1-10 & 11:17-32

I really appreciate the opportunity to share with you about the work of the Bible Society. Some of you already know me, my name is Warwick and my interests include fun running, cryptic crosswords, collecting Russian Matruska dolls and reading In fact I am a bookworm! My two favourite authors are Leon Uris and James Michener.

Have any of you read *The Source* by James Michener? It is a wonderful book about the history Israel from the time of the Stone Age to the formation of the modern state.

The book has some very interesting things to teach us about faith. In the section set during the time of the Judges, and into the period of the kings, we are reminded that Baal worship was widely practised by Israel's neighbours. And we know from Scripture that many Hebrews were seduced by this false religion.

This section of the book focuses a Philistine farmer who is a Baal worshipper. He is facing crop failure because of unfavourable weather conditions. It seems to him that the fertility gods, who he believes are the suppliers of rich harvests, are angry and he must do all he can to appease them or his family will starve. He has already tried to appease them by visiting the Temple Priestesses. These priestesses were representatives of the fertility gods, and having sexual relations with them was supposed to result in abundant yields. However his harvest was still failing and so he knew it called for far more serious action. The great god Molech needed to be satisfied and the only way to appease him was by offering human sacrifices.

These sacrifices were carried out by the worshippers throwing their children into the mouth of the huge stone image of Molech. so they could be consumed by the fierce flames that burned in his belly.... Can you imagine a god like that? Can you imagine anyone worshipping a god like that? Well many people did and when crops failed this god needed to be appeased to ensure next season would be fruitful.

One day, after again visiting the Temple priestesses, the Philistine farmer came home and bursting into his house grabbed his little daughter up in his arms and started towards the door. His wife realised immediately what was happening and she screamed hysterically as she tried to drag her little child from her husband's arms. But he flung her aside and marched out the door.

When the mother got back on her feet she rushed to the door to see her husband hurrying up the hill to the great god Molech. She screamed in anguish: "If only he had another God he'd be a different man." "If only he had another God he'd be a different man."

Now a more recent story: Some years ago I attended a seminar to hear the Rev. Keith Napper talk about his 23 years as a missionary in Borneo. His whole talk was riveting but one thing he shared really has stayed vividly in my mind ever since.

Keith said he and his wife were living in a very remote village where the local people worshipped idols they had carved out of wood. The people accepted these two white people living in their village and even listened politely as Keith told them about the One True God who sent His only Son to save us. However it seemed that although they enjoyed hearing about Jesus, it was for most of them just a good time of storytelling at the end of a day's hunting and gathering. Eventually a few accepted Jesus into their lives but others clung tenaciously to their idols for security and protection.

Now as we know Borneo is in the tropics and as a result is subject to flash flooding in the monsoon periods. Well one day an unusually heavy downpour started and lasted a number of days causing the watercourses to flood far more than these villagers had experienced in their lifetime. As the waters rose they entered the village, first as a swift flow inches deep and then as a raging torrent.

Soon many of the grass huts were being destroyed and people were clambering to higher ground. Then a villager Keith knew well, waded frantically into the waters panicking as he tried to retrieve his handmade wooden idols that were being washed away. As Keith looked on the man screamed to all who could hear. "Save my gods! Save my gods! Help me! Help me save my gods."

Isn't it a tragedy that some people have gods that need saving instead of knowing the God who saves?

The villagers had faith ... but it was not a saving faith.

So it is obvious that the VALUE of our faith depends on the object of our faith. Let me give you a simple example:

Lake frozen over:

1. Thick ice sign: but a man with very little faith: Not sure — very little — crawls across on his hands and knees, but makes it easily.
2. Thin ice sign: but a man with all the faith in the world. Strides out and crashes through the ice into the freezing water.

What lesson do we learn from this? In the first instance we see that STRONG ICE & WEAK FAITH results in a safe crossing. In the second case, WEAK ICE & STRONG FAITH results in disaster.

IT IS NOT THE AMOUNT OF FAITH BUT THE THICKNESS OF THE ICE THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE!!!! The OBJECT of our faith (in this case the ice) determines the validity of our faith.

Now I'm not saying that strong faith is not desirable. I am saying that in who or what we put our faith determines how valid it is. Jesus said: Even if we have faith as small as a mustard seed provided it is in Him we are assured of salvation.

Friends, in our two stories, the faith of the men concerned wasn't valid because it was placed in objects which couldn't save.

The writer of Hebrews tells us clearly that if we make Jesus the object of our faith then we cannot go wrong. Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the creator God, who became man so I He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. A one true pure immortal sacrifice for you and for me

Hebrews tells us that Jesus is BETTER than any other person or OBJECT in which we can put our faith. Yes, Jesus is BETTER than any other person or OBJECT in which we can put our faith but isn't it sad that there are many people throughout the world who have never heard about Jesus.

Just think how many people there are in China who have never heard about Jesus ... countless millions. How can they ever have faith in Him if the Scriptures are never taken to them in a language they can understand and at a price they can afford?

In Australia we are truly blessed. We have easy and affordable access to God's Word. In fact I would be safe in saying that most Australians have over two Bibles or New Testaments in

our homes. Even here this morning, I guess there are many who have more than one Bible in their home.

Let's see if I'm right! Put your hand up if there are more than two Bibles in your home. Anyone with four? Five? More than five? Think how different your life would be if you'd never heard about or experienced the love of God.

In our two stories, one based on history the other one quite recent, we see that regardless of time or culture, people who don't have access to, or know about the one true God who sent His only Son Jesus to die for our sins ... Can never know the God who saves.

How many people, like that man in Borneo cling to 'gods' that cannot save them? They cry out "Save my gods, somebody save my gods." If they knew Jesus, in times of trouble they could cry out like Peter did, as his faith faltered and he started sinking in the lake, "Lord save me!" And the peace that passes all understanding would sustain and encourage them as they experienced the saving grace of Jesus.

How can people who don't have access to, or know about the one true God who sent His only Son Jesus to die for our sins ... ever hope to be any different?

How can they start producing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, humility and self control? They can only do this as they follow Jesus and allow His Holy Spirit to produce these characteristics in their lives. Remember what the mother screamed as she saw her husband taking their child up the hill to be sacrificed to Molech? "If only he had a different god he'd be a different man."

People need to know Jesus, to accept Him as Lord and Saviour, if they are to know the God who saves and then grow into His likeness. That is where the Bible Society comes in. The BS, in partnership with people like you make it possible for people all over the world to receive scriptures in their own language at a price they can afford.

Let me share with you some of the exciting things that are happening in China, as a result of Chinese Christians working in co operation with the Bible Society. In 1987 a group of Chinese Christians joined with the Bible Society to start an organisation known as the Amity Foundation. A year later their printing company, Amity Printing Company, produced half a million Bibles. These were very quickly distributed to the small outlying churches and their people. It was obvious that the demand for Scriptures was enormous. Each year since Amity has produced more and more Bibles and last year they printed a record 4.17 million Bibles for the Church in China. 4.17 million Bibles in one year!

Now knowing how vast China is you will realise that getting the Bibles to remote congregations is a real problem. But God has really blessed this work and through the Bible Society's project called Opportunity 21 (21st Century) a total of 31 vans have been purchased and are constantly delivering Bibles, particularly to the north eastern provinces. One of the places visited by a Bible van was LIANGJIAZLI. The people delivering the Bibles were met by Wang CHUNLONG. He opened his house as a place of worship in 1990 and 6 people attended. Now his congregation is 300 and most have to stand throughout the service. Of the 300 people over 200 did not own a Bible ... until the van arrived!

Mr Wang said: 'Our brothers and sisters are overjoyed to receive these Bibles. Although our place is small and we are not wealthy, our hearts are full of joy and gratitude.' When the Bible van visited a bamboo shed where people in SANTAIZI met for worship they heard how the woman Preacher, BI KEQIN had been changed after hearing about Jesus. She used to be very quick tempered and hard to live with before she met Jesus. She said:

God is amazing! The first person in my family to believe was my mother. It was because of three miracles in her life that I also came to believe in the Lord. Firstly, with prayer, my mother's illnesses disappeared and she was completely healed. Secondly, she was illiterate, but she learnt to sing every song in the hymnal in just 15 days after coming to the Lord. Thirdly, my parents used to quarrel often, but after my mother's conversion they no longer fight as they used to.

Then she said: "This congregation was started 12 years ago when my mother became a Christian and has since grown to 400 worshippers. This is all because of God's amazing salvation."

Do you remember the severe flooding that occurred in China in 2003? Well last year in April, the HENAN Christian Council asked KUA WEE SENG from the United Bible Society if the Society could replace the Bibles lost by Christians during those terrible floods. Mr KUA described what happened: "I will never forget the scene that awaited us as we pulled into a small village tucked away in LANKAO county in HENAN province, China's most populous province. Instead of finding a village of a few hundred people, we were exuberantly greeted by 8,000 Christians who applauded as we entered the village compound. (Many of these people had walked miles or rode over extremely rough roads on the back of trucks in the hopes of getting a Bible)

Mr. KUA said: This was meant to be the first stop on a trip to 10 villages to distribute 5000 Bibles. ... We were moved by the overwhelming need for the Bible by these people, but we were unable to provide a copy for all 8,000 of them. Mr. Wood from the GRACE FOR CHINA project, who was travelling with me, is a strong supporter of the Bible Society, and he promised that he would fund another 5000 Bibles for these Christians who had gone to such lengths to obtain a copy.

As we were leaving the village, many people came to shake our hands and thanked us for the gift of the Bible. There were tears in the eyes of some. We thanked the Lord for the opportunity to help provide Bibles for some of them, to meet our sisters and brothers and to be inspired by their fervent love of the Bible in the midst of their poverty and difficulties. We returned home with a stronger commitment to do what we could to continue to support the Church in meeting the Bible needs in China."

Isn't that wonderful? Wouldn't you like to be part of this exciting ministry? Well the Good News is you can and you can start right here and now!! There are many ways you can partner with the Bible Society. This little pamphlet "God's Word @ Work" will give you a great overview. It has a fascinating account of how the Bible Society started, in 1804, because of the love a 16 year old girl had for the Bible. It explains the work of translation ... How many projects are currently in operation (700). It reminds us that parts of the Bible have been translated into 2,300 languages. It outlines the various ways God's Word is made available: On tape, CD, special Sports editions, The Aussie Bible, in Braille, The Auslan (Australian Sign Language) Bible on video. It mentions how you can supply a Bible a month, help Literacy programs, bike for Bibles, invest your savings in a deposit fund and even leave money in your will.

We would love you to become a partner with us in this exciting and life changing work. So how can you become involved? Pray for the Bible Society. For over 200 years faithful supporters have prayed for our work. Prayer partners receive a monthly News Update to encourage them and help them focus on particular projects.

Decide today to become linked to one of our projects... Why not join our Bibles 4 Kids' scheme?? Imagine being able to give a child the Word of Life. You can be responsible for

connecting a child and most likely his/her family, with the Living God...and not just one family BUT one family every month of the year. By filling in this pamphlet and agreeing to contribute \$10 per month you are ensuring that each month another child will have God's Word placed in their hand in a form they can read. Some people choose to supply 2 or 3 or more Bibles per month ... the choice is yours.

To put it into perspective, it will cost you less than one cappuccino a week. But it promises to bring hope and blessings to a child and his family. Isn't it worth a cup of coffee a week to become a partner with us in this life giving project?

Friends, if you want to be involved could I ask you see me after this service, fill in the form and next month another child will be blessed simply because you cared.

If you don't choose to partner us in this way, please take the pamphlet God's Word @ Work or a copy of Bibles @ Work, read about our projects and share them with your friends. May God bless you as you respond to His call on your life.