

April 2017 Italy

The *Bible Companion* readings for this Sunday include John 19 ; there is an MP3 file about this at <http://www.christadelphia.net/audio/jn19.mp3> You can see the archives of our MP3 files at <http://christadelphia.net/audio.htm> and on iTunes at

<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/christadelphian-bible-talks/id987163468>

Download the *NEV Bible* with commentary and *Bible Companion* bookmarks at <http://n-e-v.info/NEVBIBLE.pdf>

Thank you for your prayers for the mission in Italy this week. In the last few days, 3000 migrants were rescued from the sea and entered **Italy**; as the Mediterranean becomes calmer after the Winter, there are thousands arriving on the beaches of Italy each week. And Italy can't cope. They are housed, and allowed to stay for some months. But food and clothing aren't provided by the state, and we have been doing what we can to take food to the "camps", as they are called, where the migrants are located. And we spread the Gospel to them. After the traumas of crossing the Sahara, abuse in Libya and then the risky sea crossing, where many drown, they all say the same- that they wouldn't have come if they had known the risks. They all say that they prayed to God during the crossings, of the desert and the sea, and vowed to serve Him if they survived. And then they encounter us, offering some food, free Bibles and Gospel teaching; and explaining that baptism, going back to the water they nearly drowned in, is the way to connection with God and His Son. They really are a fruitful segment of society to preach to and assist.

On this trip, we baptized ELVIS in the Catholic stronghold of Cattolica. We first met him last Summer when distributing *NEV Bibles* at the bus station one evening in Cesena. Taking God's word out onto the streets does bring forth fruit .. and Italy is full of Africans on the streets. Elvis was baptized at brother Joseph's home; and he gave a wonderful account of his preservation by God's grace on his journey across the Sahara.

It's at <https://youtu.be/Auz26WEU4Vo>. He speaks of how in Libya and on the desert crossing he saw many Christians beaten and killed, and how he refused to convert to Islam. He describes the Mediterranean crossing in great detail. The migrants are put into huge inflatable dinghies called "lapalapa", or "balloon boats". The people smugglers don't accompany them. The migrants have to steer the boat. They sit balanced around the balloon boat, which is disposable and intended to be abandoned after its use. One large wave will capsize it:



They had no life jackets, and up to 200 people were on their balloon boat, and they left in a flotilla of nine boats. Women and children were on the "boat", although "dinghy" would be a better word. They left at night; but a wave capsized them, and many drowned, including the parents of two small children. Elvis made it back to shore. He tried a second time, but they were attacked by pirates who brought them back to the Libyan shore, beat them and put them in an enclosure, ordering them to contact their families and ask for money to be sent for their release. This kind of thing happens often. In that enclosure, Elvis and his friend prayed to God and promised to serve Him with their whole heart, strength and soul. They managed to escape and tried crossing again- and this time, they were successful, and were picked up and rescued by the Italian coastguard near the island of Lampedusa.



When the coastguards come to them, they give them life jackets, and then guide the "balloon boat" or dinghy to a pick up station or vessel. There are many pictures of this on the internet, with the migrants all wearing life jackets. But that is not how they left Libya and made the crossing. The shores of Libya and southern Italy are full of bodies and damaged "balloon boats" washing up on them. The brethren commented that they had seen the bodies, and yet they were the ones who survived; and burial in water in baptism seemed so appropriate; to die with the Lord Jesus, and yet to rise again with Him:



Further South, we baptized KING. The effective advice of Italy to the thousands of migrants turning up is to go north to Germany. Many do so, but are not accepted there. And so they return to Italy, where they are given documents allowing them to remain; but they get no state support and are left without accommodation and food. There is a huge underclass of such people, and King is amongst them. Often they move out of the competition in the larger cities to small towns, in King's case, in the mountains of central Italy. The economy in southern Italy isn't strong; there aren't jobs for local Italians, let alone these thousands of young migrants. Many of them have no documents enabling them to return to where they came from; Liberia, in King's case. So they are stuck in an awful limbo, with no income, nowhere to live and nothing to eat. These people are really hungry. Many turn to crime, especially drug dealing, or the women to prostitution. King has a room in a tenement block inhabited by other Africans in the same situation. But he clearly was different. Amongst those petty criminals, this African migrant is different. Instead of crime, he literally begs for money and food on the streets, and gets clothes from garbage cans. And he sells socks, caps and umbrellas. Whenever there's a downpour of rain, he rushes outside with his umbrellas to sell; despite notices being put up, warning against buying things from such people:



He lives on a few Euros / day. Health care isn't free for them; problems with teeth have to be endured with pain or by wrenching out the troublesome tooth. King is deeply disillusioned with the churches attended by many such Africans, promising them prosperity and health- if they tithe to the pastor. And so he turned to the Bible, and came across our free *NEV Bible*. It was a cold, very windy day when he was baptized in the sea- in the pouring rain. Usually, he would be out selling umbrellas on such a day. We entered the water in rain and wind, with him shivering; as soon as he emerged from the water, the sun very suddenly came out and the wind ceased. It was quite amazing



Our brother gave a very simple and haunting account of what it is like to be a beggar on the streets of Europe, with no family or food or state support; no safety nets apart from the Lord. It's at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YtSuf8DiZuY> . We made the movie in his tiny room, where he has a mattress on the floor and nothing else. He explains in the movie the need to be grateful for whatever one has; in his case, he says, the mattress could fit three bodies, and it is all for him. He sees a blessing in that. But he doesn't seek to disguise the fact that living like this is tough and depressing; and racism is rife in small town Italy.

We usually seek to avoid giving help in terms of cash, but it is really necessary in some of these cases to pay for basic rent of a room. We are very open to your donations towards this. But provision of food and some clothing, especially shoes, is perhaps the most appropriate way to help; and it gives us a great opportunity to talk to folks and teach them. We are planning a week or so of this at the end of August; your donations and prayerful support are welcome. We visited a new "camp" with brother Joseph which has just been opened. 66 Africans are crowded into a villa on a mountainside quite far from any other houses, with little food. These people are hungry- both physically and spiritually. We sat with a group of them in the courtyard and explained the Gospel, and passed out what tracts, *NEV Bibles* and *Bible Basics* we had; they were really interested:



Joseph is untiring in his efforts to teach the Truth and care for these dear people. Please pray for him, and for more response to the message preached.

You can donate towards the work in Italy through our local representatives, see <http://carelinks.net/doc/donations> , or *PayPal* to tiybible@yahoo.com

PRAYER POINTS:

- For our newly baptized brethren
- For our brethren and contacts who are living on the street, that they will not fall into sin but may be given a way of escape; and the faith to believe this is so
- For our future plans in Italy
- For wisdom and encouragement for brother Joseph on the ground there

With love from your brothers and sisters of Carelinks