

Amsiggel and Bubker

The months and years passed by, and boys and girls were born to Amsiggel and Honey. One day a visitor came to see him. It was Ayt-Zawit Bubker, the chief leader of the mosque in town. Amsiggel shook hands with him as a friend and invited him into the house "We've heard, Mr Bubker," he said, "that you're a good man and always try to please God."

"May God lengthen your life, Amsiggel," replied Bubker. "We have also heard that you're good people and kind to everyone."

Then Bubker continued: "Forgive me, Amsiggel, if I ask you about what you believe and how you worship God."

"Thank you, Mr Bubker," replied Amsiggel. "I'll tell you what I know."

They sat down and Honey brought them mint tea. Bubker raised his glass. "In the name of God!" he said.

"In the name of God!" Amsiggel replied.

Bubker was pleased; he sipped and said, "Very good tea you have in this area! And I notice you said 'In the name of God!' like we do."

"Well," replied Amsiggel, "everything we do, Mr Bubker, we do in the name of God. Without his help we could do nothing at all! He it is who gives us health and intelligence and everything we possess."

Bubker was pleased with this, and they talked on together about the wisdom and love of God.

Then Bubker asked him, "Tell me, brother Amsiggel, how do you pray?"

"I'll tell you what our prayer is like," replied Amsiggel. "Of course, a person must first of all prepare himself, knowing that he's going to speak to the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But tell me what you think, Mr Bubker. Before we pray, which is hardest: to wash our hands, or to wash our heart?"

Bubker looked at him a moment then said, "It's our heart which is hardest to wash."

Amsiggel continued. "Whenever we wish to pray to God, we first search our hearts to see if there's anything to shame us. Then we pray in the name of Masih who came to purify us from all evil."

"Do you pray in Arabic?" asked Bubker.

Amsiggel replied, "God knows everything that can be said, and he understands every language. We speak to him in Tashelhayt."

"What do you say in your prayer?" asked Bubker.

"We praise God," replied Amsiggel, "because he created the world and everything in it. And we thank him for his mercy and love, and for all the good things he does for us every day. We ask him to guide us and strengthen us in the Way of Goodness, and then we ask him for anything we might need. We ask him on behalf of any neighbours who might be ill; we ask him to bless our friends and our enemies."

"That's very good, Amsiggel!" said Bubker. "Would you like to show me the words you say when you pray?"

"One day," replied Amsiggel, "the people asked Masih to show them how to pray, and he said to them, 'Pray like this and say to God: Our Father who is in heaven, may there be great honour to your name! May your kingdom come! May there be what pleases you in the world, as there is in heaven! Give us today the bread we need for today! Forgive us for the evil we have done, just as we forgive those who do us evil! Keep far away from us everything that might entice us to do wrong! Rescue us from the devil!'"

When Amsiggel had said this, Bubker raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Amen, O Lord God. Amen!"

Then Bubker asked him, "How many times do you pray each day?"

"Hours of prayer aren't prescribed for us, Mr Bubker," he replied, "but we pray whenever we want. We praise God when we get up in the morning. And whenever food is set before us we thank him for that blessing. I pray with my children before each of us goes off to work. I pray along the road and in the workplace. Then I pray too with any of my friends who come to see me, and I pray with my wife before I sleep."

Then Bubker asked him, “Do all the people of your village follow this way, my brother? Do they all do like you?”

“There are those who’ve chosen this way, and there are those who’ve chosen other ways. There’s the Jew, Yaaqub Ben Isshaq – he prays his prayers – and there’s the Arab, Si Mhammed Shrif – he also prays his prayers – and there are others too.”

“But don’t you have any conflict with one another?” asked Bubker.

Amsiggel smiled. “Oh no,” he said, “we are brothers. Thank God, we all live in peace together. They respect us and we respect them; they help us and we help them.”

“But what about your children,” he asked. “Don’t they get into fights with one another?”

“Not at all,” replied Amsiggel. “They all chat and play and have a happy time together.”

“But surely people must be all the same,” insisted Bubker, “if they’re to avoid falling out with one another!”

“Look at the birds pecking in the fields,” replied Amsiggel. “Some of them run and some of them hop, but they don’t quarrel about the best way to get along. They all live happily together. If there’s respect and courtesy among us, we’ll all be at peace.”

“God be praised for you, Amsiggel!” declared Bubker. “Forgive me if I ask you about another thing.”

“No problem at all!” he replied. “Just ask me.”

“Some people,” he said, “maintain that you have changed the Injil which Masih brought.”

Amsiggel looked at him a moment, then said, “What would you say, Mr Bubker? Would the disciples of a prophet really be able to change his words for other words? Wouldn’t his words be more precious to them than their own lives? For he would have entrusted what he said into their safekeeping. Masih himself said, ‘The heavens and the earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.’ When Masih was living in this world, he went everywhere doing good. Crowds of people came to him in those days and they saw what he did and heard what he said. Would they all be able to forget his words and his deeds? Would they accept some words that were different from the words they’d heard?”

“No,” agreed Bubker, “they would not accept them.”

“And when the Injil of Masih was written down,” continued Amsiggel, “it was taken to every corner of the world. Even if they’d wanted to change his word, would they have been able to change what was written in all those books in every place and make them all identical so they all said exactly the same thing throughout the whole world?”

“No,” agreed Bubker, “they could never have managed that.”

“Well then, Mr Bubker,” concluded Amsiggel, “this Injil which we have is the true Injil. It has never been changed, for God has guarded it, and he would not allow people to cast aside the word of his command to them.”

Then Bubker said, “When I studied the history of our land, I was surprised at how peaceful the early Christians were. They didn’t get weapons or fight against other people. They didn’t try to defeat others or convert them by force. They just spoke to people about the way of Masih and helped them with the problems of daily life until their message had spread throughout the whole world.”

“You’re right, Mr Bubker,” said Amsiggel. “Masih never took a weapon or stirred up a fight. He commanded his disciples to be peacemakers, and then he sent them out to fill the world with the loving kindness of heaven. The meaning of the word Injil is ‘good news’ and the Injil shows us how to do good to everyone with the joy that is real and lasts for ever.”

“I have another question,” said Bubker. “Why do those who believe in Masih call him the son of God? What can be the meaning of that word? – because God does not get married or have children!”

“You’re quite right, my brother Bubker,” replied Amsiggel. “God isn’t like man: he doesn’t get married or have children. This meaning isn’t as you’ve understood it. Do you know how Masih was born?”

“We all know that,” replied Bubker.

Amsiggel continued, “God sent the angel Gabriel to a girl called Mary, and the angel said to her, ‘You’ll become pregnant and give birth to a boy!’ Mary asked him, ‘How can that happen to me? I haven’t got a husband.’ He told her, ‘The Spirit of God will come down on you and the power of God will cover you. That’s why we’ll call the special boy who’ll be born to you the Son of God’”

“What you say is correct,” said Bubker. “We know that Masih was born through the Spirit and power of God. That’s no different from what we say.”

Then Amsiggel said, “But one born from the womb of a virgin girl without a man would not be like other people, would he!”

“We know,” replied Bubker, “that Masih did miracles more than any other prophet.”

“What you say is right, my brother Bubker” agreed Amsiggel. “He made the blind to see, the paralysed to walk, the lepers to be clean, the deaf to hear and the dead to rise. Vast numbers of people believed in him because the spiritual power of God was seen in him more than in all the prophets of past times. He could do all this because he wasn’t like us. His body was a human body, but the spirit in him was the spirit that descended upon him in his mother’s womb. His appearance was that of a man, but the power in him was the power of heaven.”

Amsiggel continued, “That’s why Masih never did anything evil or blameworthy.”

“We know,” Bubker replied, “that each of the prophets asked for God’s forgiveness, just as we do ourselves.”

“You’re right, Bubker,” agreed Amsiggel. “One of them asked God to forgive him as many as seventy times. But Masih never asked for forgiveness, not even once. One day he asked the people, ‘Which of you can prove me guilty of a sin?’ No one replied – there was nothing they could say. Another day they testified concerning him, ‘He never did any sin!’ All this goes to show that he wasn’t like other people.”

“Now I understand,” said Bubker, “why you call him the son of God. Firstly, because he was born through the spirit of God. And secondly because in him was the power of God.”

“You’re right, my brother Bubker!” agreed Amsiggel, “but there’s still a third reason – because God appointed him to do something that the prophets could not do. He sent the one who was blameless to bear the blame of others. He sent one who wasn’t liable to the judgment of death so that he could die in our place.”

Bubker thought about this, then he said, “I understand what you’re saying Amsiggel, but some of us argue that Masih did not die: the Jews thought they’d killed him but in fact it was someone else.”

“If you permit, my brother Bubker,” replied Amsiggel, “I’ll show you what Masih himself said before the Jews captured him. He said, ‘We’ll go to Jerusalem and they’ll deliver me into the hands of the Jewish leaders. They’ll condemn me to death. They’ll mock me, spit on me, beat me and kill me. But on the third day I’ll rise from the dead.’ Masih knew what would happen to him, and he told them three times so they’d not forget it. When the Jews and Romans agreed together to kill him, they all knew that the one in their hands was the son of Mary. And when they killed him, his mother and brothers and his disciples were standing beside him. They knew very well that it was him. And when he rose from the dead, he spoke with them and ate with them, and showed them the marks which the nails had left in his hands and feet. How could one stand before his mother and brothers and friends without them recognising who he was?”

Then Bubker asked, “But would God leave a prophet to die like a thief or a murderer?”

“God intended this from the beginning,” replied Amsiggel. “In fact, all this was recorded in the writings of the prophets long before. God had shown them that the Saviour would die because, through the blood of Masih, he wanted to make a new covenant between himself and mankind. And when he died Masih bore the judgment which the world deserved. He suffered the Torments of the Grave so that we’d not have to suffer them. He himself said, ‘This is the truth. It’s the truth I’m going to tell you. If a grain of wheat does not fall into the ground and die, it will remain a single grain. But if it dies, it will produce a great harvest.’ He did not remain a single one, for he rose on the third day, just as he’d told his disciples he would. Then God lifted him up to heaven where he will be until the end of the world. Then he’ll come back to gather together all who believe in him, and take them with him into eternal life. And so he’ll have a great harvest.”

Then Amsiggel continued: “Look brother, this is what it’s like. When a strong wind blows, it uproots the dry grass from the surface of the earth. The words of the prophets are like a strong wind: they sweep away the primitive ignorance of mankind. But the earth needs more than wind that uproots the dry grass. It needs rain for new grass to grow. Man is not just in need of

prophets bringing commands and obligations. He also needs some way of being filled with the spiritual power of heaven and the strength of God. Masih showed us that he is able to do all this for us. He has granted us to be filled with the spirit of heaven which helps us continually. His spirit moves us, strengthens us and give us great joy. He fills us with his wisdom and his kindness, and guides us in all we do. And we thank him greatly for this blessing he has given to us.”

Bubker continued thinking about all this. Then he said, “Thank you Amsiggel. I don’t want to be one of those who oppose what they don’t understand. Now I know what your beliefs are. If people would only ask, they would not say foolish things about you all.”

Then Amsiggel said, “It’s a great pleasure, Mr Bubker, to see such patience and love between us. We’ve spent a good time together.”

Then Bubker rose, hugged Amsiggel and they shook hands. Amsiggel accompanied him as far as the road. Then he went back home and called to Honey so they could pray together and ask God to bless their friend Ayt-Zawit Bubker.