



PASTOR TOM'S TESTIMONY

Words cannot express how much the great God of heaven graced me by birthing me into a very Bible-based culture that not only taught the Bible but lived the Bible. Many people hear very little about Jesus, but that was not so in my case.

I began attending church when I was only two weeks old, because mom and dad never missed church. We were there every time the doors were open: Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, Saturday night business meeting, the three week revivals (we never missed a night), and the occasional Monday night Ladies Missionary Meeting which was the most boring church service of all to me as a little boy!

During this time, I was blessed to hear so much about God. I sang in the choir, memorized the Bible, participated in the children's Christmas program, and did all kinds of other things that church kids do. However, as I became older, I realized that I did not have a personal relationship with God.

I listened to the church folks talk about knowing God as if He was their best friend, but I didn't know God like that. They talked about having peace with God when they went to sleep at night, but I didn't have peace. I just felt guilty, because I knew that I had sinned against God; that meant I was in big trouble with God.

The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) That word "all" included even me as a little boy. The worst part, though, was the Bible also says, "The wages or paycheck of my sin is death." (Romans 6:23) Death in the Bible is pictured as eternal separation from God in the fires of hell.

Some parents shield their children from the sad truth of eternity without God. I thank God, though, that my parents did the exact opposite: they made certain I knew the truth! They knew I might not listen to the truth when I became older, so they made certain I was taught the truth when I was teachable!

The Bible also taught that my eternity without God was not set in stone. John 3:16 was one of the first verses that I memorized as a child; it told me the way to God's forgiveness and a much different life.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world – that world included a little nine year old boy by the name of Tommy – that God gave His only begotten Son – His very own Son named Jesus - that whoever believes in Jesus would not perish but have everlasting life."

What was I to believe about Jesus? Two things: one, that Jesus is God's eternal Son come down to the earth. Jesus wasn't just a normal person like one of us, but He was actually God in a human body. The Bible says that the, "Word or the Expression of the invisible God became flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus was that Word or Expression of the heavenly God to the earthly man! As Jesus, He had His beginning in Bethlehem, but as the Son of God He is described as "from everlasting to everlasting...always been and always will be." That's why He could perform so many miracles during His time on earth. It is because He was God walking among mortal men! God the Father loved me so much that He sent His only Son to this world.

What, though, did Jesus come to do? That brings us to item number two! The Bible says, "Jesus died on the cross for our sins – for everything I have ever done wrong. Furthermore, He was buried, then He rose again on the third day also according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:1-3)

The wages of my sin was death, but the precious news is that Jesus died as my substitute to pay the punishment of my sins! I was the guilty party, but He freely took my guilt upon Himself! He could do this because He was a pure, innocent sacrifice! In so doing, the guiltless died for the guilty! He was then buried, and some people thought He was gone forever! God the Father, though, accepted the Son of God's sacrifice for my sins (and your sins), and God the Father raised Jesus from the dead on Easter. Forty days later Jesus ascended from the earth to sit in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. He has not returned to the earth since that day...but the Bible says that He will someday return as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to establish His worldwide kingdom! The Bible assures us that in the end "every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is truly Lord to the glory of God the Father!"

Today God the Father is willing to accept every person of every age and race who believes or trusts in Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Savior. The Bible says, "But as many as received Jesus to them He gave the

right to become the children of God, specifically to those who believe on His name or in Him.” (John 1:12)

Do you remember how I began my testimony? I began by pointing out that I had plenty of religious background, but I did not have a personal relationship with God like the older people in my church. That totally changed when I received Jesus into my life, allowed Him to take away my sin and to change my entire future! On January 14, 1965 I bowed my head and asked Jesus to come into my life, take away my sin, and make me one of His children. The place was unimportant, the people around me were unimportant, the time was unimportant, but what was important was that I moved from unbelief to belief. I believed Jesus was truly enough! I trusted or committed my soul to Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior.

There were no fireworks to mark the occasion, but there came a peace that I still know to this very day. The warfare was over! I now belonged to Jesus, and He now belonged to me.

The Bible says in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, being declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I did not trust in my baptism, church membership, the Virgin Mary, good works or even good intentions. I put my faith for my soul’s salvation solely in Jesus Christ and asked Him to do what He promised He would do: save my soul and help me to live a life of devotion to Him! I want you to know that God did exactly what He promised!

That happened when I was only nine years old. I have had the opportunity on a daily basis since that day in 1965 to experience God in my personal life! Jesus said, “I have come that you might have life – not live like dying people – but experience true life – the life of heaven – and have it more abundantly,” and that is exactly what Jesus gave to me. The closer I live to Jesus, the better that life is!

I want you to know that Jesus has been with me ever since that day. In the years that followed, Jesus helped me through my difficult teenage years, He introduced me to my future wife in a church which I previously did not know existed, He led me to Chattanooga to study for the ministry, He led me to the church I am now pastoring, He kept food on my table and a car in the garage, He even led me to the house we live in (that, too was an awesome event, but that is a story for another time).

Through the years I have often reflected that Jesus has preserved me from ruining my life. So many others in my school went down a different road only to now have scars and so many regrets. Some ruined their lives.

On the other hand, I am very pleased to say that my life has indeed made a difference for many, many people. My ministry has never reached the level of a Billy Graham, but it has been a good ministry with the help of my Savior and Friend, Jesus Christ. I have lived a very blessed life.

The wonderful truth is this experience is indeed real. It can also be just as real to you as it is to me! Will you right now commit your heart and soul to Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior?