

Saved and Changed because Christ Arose

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passing away, behold, all things are becoming new.” — 2 Corinthians 5:17

This Sunday we will recount and celebrate the great and wondrous occasion of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, contemplating with joy that incredible reality. The resurrection is not just a feature of Christianity – it is the main event. It is the cornerstone of gospel promise. It is the primary theme of our worship and praise because the resurrection is the source of eternal life for believers; because He lives, we live also. It is not a postscript, or an epilogue, or appendix to the gospel, but is the climactic high point of the work of Christ.

Because of the resurrection, Jesus conquered death for all who would believe in Him. The apostle Peter reminds us in his first epistle “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1Pe. 1:3) Peter goes on to say we’ve received an inheritance that is incorruptible, doesn’t fade away, is reserved in heaven, and that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. . . In Acts chapter two, Peter stands and gives testimony to the resurrection as fact, and exclaiming that “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (v.21)

With that in mind, I’d like to step away from my usual Bible teacher mode, and take this occasion to share my personal testimony. It was almost two years ago in our morning service that I publically shared the events that led to my conversion. Thus I thought, what better time than on resurrection Sunday to speak of the death and resurrection of Christ, and because of that, how I was saved and changed because Christ arose.

The Bible states in John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the spirit.” In that verse, the Holy Spirit is metaphorically compared with the wind. The Holy Spirit cannot be seen, neither can the wind; but the power of both can be experienced and discovered in one way – in what they move.

The window of time is the early eighties, and I will attempt to summarize the events which seem to have been most instrumental in my coming to Christ. Previous to conversion, my life was consumed with one pursuit; more than anything I coveted the thought of a career as a professional musician. The majority of my time was spent in the development of this one key aspiration. Two to three hours of rehearsals twice per week, four nights of scheduled engagements, working a full-time job, which all resulted in very little sleep. My ultimate quest – fame and fortune. In all frankness, I would have sacrificed anything for the sake of my personal aspirations; marriage, even my own life. I had made a mental assumption that I would not live beyond the age of 30 because of the associated lifestyle and accompanying drug addiction. For a period of eight years I participated in several top forty rock groups as a lead guitarist and vocalist.

During this window of time several events took place which would eventually change my life. I was working at Corning Glass Engineering and was desperately looking for a job in the Binghamton area. After two interviews, I chose an offer with New York State Electric and Gas. One week before my start date with NYSEG, my brother-in-law was rushed unexpectedly to the hospital. By the time I reached the hospital, his wife informed me that he had passed away apparently due to a massive heart attack. He was twenty-nine years old! He was my drummer for many years, traveling with us in the group. I was stunned with disbelief.

I have since come to realize that God sometimes uses a crisis to arouse the attention of those He desires to call to Himself. For the first time in my life I began having thoughts of heaven and hell and in general, the life beyond. Because our lifestyles and drug habits were so similar, it became clear to me that it could have easily been my life instead of his. Thoughts of his life plagued me for weeks. An acquaintance at the time reiterated my exact feelings; people might have been at my funeral instead. They spoke briefly with me of the gospel and saving faith.

As the weeks passed my concern increased to a point where I believed I was heading for a Godless eternity. I began working at NYSEG and met a man who helped turn concern into conviction. He spoke of Christ, the gospel and God's plan of salvation, His terms of salvation, and the essentials of the gospel. He suggested a prayer which basically said if the desire of my heart was to belong to Christ, I could trust Him for the grace to change my life and make me the person He wanted me to be. He often repeated the words of Jeremiah 29:13, "And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." He also frequently pleaded with me using the Apostle Paul's words from 2Cor. 5:20: "We beg you, as though Christ Himself were here pleading with you, receive the love He offers – be reconciled (be made at peace) to God," (TLB), and "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." (Is. 45:22)

After several weeks of sleepless nights, hot sweats, cold sweats, I look back now at that period of time and know that the Lord's hand was pressing heavily on me. My behavior changed, and I became arrogant, combative, and downright unpleasant to be around. My wife was calling her mother, who was calling my mother, who was calling my wife in a continuous three-way barrage of communication. In my mind I was struggling with a double fear; a terror of leaving a lifestyle of fame versus the horror of being eternally lost.

The faithful friend at work had given me a suggested prayer to receive Christ. I woke up one morning after another sleepless night, and in the privacy of my own home, prayed these words:

"Lord Jesus, I come before You now admitting that I am a lost sinner and desperately need the salvation You give. I desire the free gift of eternal life and ask You now to come into my life and save me and change me and make me the kind of person You want me to be. I will trust in You alone for the change You bring. In Your Name I pray, Lord Jesus, Amen."

I stood up. No fanfare, no fireworks. I didn't know what that prayer all meant; but I knew I meant it! Since that time I often compare my experience and conversion to that of the prodigal son who "wasted his substance with rebellious living", next "began to be in want", then "came to himself" (a realization of his desperation), said "I will arise and go to my Father. . . because I have sinned", and "am no longer worthy to be called Your son." The parable, contrary to what many teach, isn't about the son, or the elder son, but about the joy of the Father and the rejoicing in heaven over one who was lost, and is now found.

To the one reading this, I am compelled to extend the same invitation that was shared with me years ago. The Bible states in 2Pe. 3:9 that "The Lord . . . is not willing that any should perish, but that ALL should come to repentance" (repentance = a change of the heart, mind and will). It also reminds and warns us that some will "perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." (2Thess. 2:10)

In closing, if you don't know Christ, let the words of Scripture plead with your heart:

"And you will seek me and find me, when you search for me with all your heart."
(Where there is a wholehearted seeker, and a seeking Savior, they will find each other.)

"We beg you, as though Christ Himself were here pleading with you, receive the love He offers - be reconciled to (be made at peace) to God." [II Corinthians 5:20 - TLB]

"Behold, now (today) is the accepted time; behold, today is the day of salvation."
[II Corinthians 6:2]