

Real Life Stories *Reuben's Story*

BY MYRON MARTINSON IN GRACE AT WORK · SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

Troy's small hand wrapped around my finger as we entered the hospital room. The patient was gasping for breath. I guessed Reuben to be only about 40 years of age—and yet the doctors said he was dying of sclerosis of the liver. His life had been filled with drunkenness and the gross neglect of his family—including his son who clung to my hand.

The doctor had told the family and friends gathered in the room that Reuben might have two hours or two minutes, but whatever, his time on earth was short. The urgency of our mission was not lost on me.

Troy had heard the gospel many times while attending kids' outreaches at our chapel. He knew that salvation came only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The squeezing of my hand told me Troy also knew that if his father died without trusting Christ he would be in hell for eternity.

There was silence in the room as Troy and I made our way past the others to the head of the bed. Not knowing if Reuben could hear me, I found myself speaking louder than normal.

“Reuben, the doctor tells me that you're going to die very soon. I don't know if you can hear me, but if you can, listen to what I've got to say.

Reuben, the Bible tells us that we are all sinners, and that the wages of that sin is death. You are a sinner, Reuben, and the wages of your sin are about to claim your life. There is only one way to be assured that your sins are forgiven—and to know that you'll go to Heaven. You must trust the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. Acknowledge before God that you are a sinner deserving of hell, and that only the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross can save you. Reuben, thank the Lord Jesus for dying for you.”

I rose up from leaning over the bed and immediately realized another reason I felt compelled to speak louder than usual. Not only had Reuben's friends and family given audience to the message, but also several members of the nursing staff who had gathered at the door of the room.

After praying with those gathered in the room, I left the hospital. As I did, many questions flooded my mind. Had Reuben heard me speak? Did he understand the simplicity of the gospel? Did he realize that his only chance to be right with God was while he was still living? Though none of these could be answered, I thanked the Lord for the opportunity to share the gospel—not only with Reuben, but also with his family and friends, as well as the hospital staff.

Reuben proved the doctors wrong, and was discharged from the hospital. Some of his children saw it as a miracle from God. Unfortunately, shortly after being discharged, he began drinking again. Less than two weeks later, he was readmitted to the hospital. I tried several times to see Reuben. I wanted to visit with him privately about his soul. However, each time his room was full of family and friends.

One morning, as I was driving past the hospital, I sensed an urgency to see Reuben. I had not intended to stop on this particular morning, but I later thanked the Lord for His Spirit's prompting in my heart.

Reuben was alone in the room. I introduced myself and asked him if he had any recollection of what I had said to him just two weeks before. He said he remembered me talking over his bed, and apologized that he was unable to respond to me. He also said that he had not asked the Lord for forgiveness from his sins.

“Reuben,” I asked, “can we talk about your need for a Saviour? Can I share with you again God's perfect plan of salvation?” Reuben responded with a simple nod.

I opened my Bible and again presented the gospel as clearly and simply as I could. When I asked Reuben if he was ready to be forgiven, he said that God couldn't forgive him because his sins were so great.

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I opened to the Epistle of 1 Timothy 1:15 where Paul explained that he was the chief of sinners. At once there seemed to be a change in Reuben as he realized that if the chief of sinners could be forgiven, surely he could be forgiven as well. That morning Reuben bowed his head and asked Christ to be his Saviour.

SAVED RIGHT AT THE BRINK

When he had finished praying, he thanked me with a smile found only on the face one newly saved. I asked him where he would spend eternity. With confidence in his voice, he said, "Heaven!"

I left the hospital with expectations of seeing Reuben again. Yet within an hour of my leaving him, Reuben passed into eternity, but not before he professed to his oldest daughter that he had trusted Christ as his Saviour. Even now I marvel at how God, in His mercy, had given Reuben one final chance to respond to the gospel message.

In the days following Reuben's death, the family, though Roman Catholic, asked me to take his funeral. It was my privilege to again present the gospel to his relatives and friends. I shared Reuben's testimony with the gathered crowd, delighting to tell of God's graciousness to a poor lost sinner, saved only hours before his death.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Following the funeral, as I stood looking over the group gathered to eat, I noticed a woman who was crying. I went to her and asked her if I could help. She grabbed my hand and proceeded to tell me who she was.

"I was Reuben's first wife," she said. "Twenty years ago, I trusted Christ. When I started to live for Him, it was too convicting for Reuben—and he divorced me."

By this time, tears were rolling down her face as she continued, "I have been praying for twenty years that Reuben would be saved. These tears are tears of joy."

By this time, she wasn't the only one crying. I wiped at my tears too as together we rejoiced in the fact that her prayers had been answered. Reuben was now in Heaven.

ANOTHER LAST MINUTE RESCUE

Perhaps you're wondering why I'd bother to tell Reuben's story, after all, his life was essentially wasted in sin. But the Bible also tells the story of a man who was saved only hours before he died. Like Reuben's, his life also was one of sin—sin that would eventually cause him to be condemned to die. But as he hung on a cross, his simple prayer, "Lord, remember me..." was heard and answered by the Man on the middle cross. You see, it was there that the Lord Jesus, Saviour of the World, was dying for the sins of the world. The moment he believed, that repentant criminal was promised a place in Paradise. That very day he died and was with his Saviour.

Maybe in one important way you're like that man" for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-23). The Bible says that if you haven't believed on the Lord Jesus Christ you stand condemned for the sins that you've committed.

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). That condemnation will eventually take you to Hell and the Lake of Fire for all eternity. As Jesus said to people in His day, "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

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COMING DOWN TO THE WIRE

Perhaps, like Reuben, you think your sins are too many—that God could never forgive a sinner like you. The Bible says that, “The Lord not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). You see, as the Lord Jesus hung on that cross, the sins of that criminal were paid for, Reuben’s sins were paid for. By the grace of God, my sins and yours were paid for, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NKJV).

Won’t you trust the Saviour today? In the same way that He waited for Reuben, He has waited for you. The Bible says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). Remember, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy,” but, “He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever” (Psalm 103:8-9).

**“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation”
(2 Corinthians 6:2)**

. Gleaned from Uplook Ministries