

Testimony

Tony Hughes Tells His Story

I started life on 15 November 1964. My family owned a scrap and recycling business near Bicester so I grew up climbing in and out of old cars! Once I left School I moved into the business and developed a role in repairing machinery and ‘making things’.

I was a typical young lad in Bicester in the 1980’s. Life was about having fun. I got into all the usual things; going out on the town on the weekends, drinking and all that goes with it. I didn’t grow up in a Christian family and I never heard the gospel as a child.

I fancied going abroad, and Canada really attracted me. I decided to go there to live and work. I had a friend in Vancouver but he turned me down when I suggested staying with him! Another Canadian contact opened up through a man called Harry who rented a shed in our ‘yard’. Harry was a Christian, and had a brother called Jim in Portage La Prairie, Canada, who was also a Christian. Contact was made and Jim offered me room and board! So, with my passport, bags and high hopes, off I went. It was August 1990.

On the first Sunday in Portage, the family I was living with told me they were going to the ‘Gospel Hall’ for a meeting. They said I was free to either stay at home or go with them. I wasn’t used to going to ‘church meetings’, but I decided to go. I hadn’t seen anything like it before. There were hymns, prayers, Bible readings and the Christians took the bread and the cup to “remember the Lord”. Later on that day there was a Sunday School and a ‘gospel meeting’ where I first heard the message of salvation.

The weeks passed by. Soon it was the ‘fall’. The hot summer gave way to a freezing winter. In early November the people at the Gospel Hall started a series of nightly ‘gospel meetings’. That meant a meeting every night for a few weeks! Two evangelists, Al Christopherson and Murray Pratt, were preaching each evening and visiting during the day. I invited them round to the house where I was staying! I asked them loads of questions and they did a great job of answering from the Bible.

It was during these gospel meetings that I decided that my future was not in Canada. I planned a return to the UK. But what about what I was hearing from the Bible about salvation? Some of the ‘believers’ in Portage warned me, “God is working in your life. You are here for a purpose. These meetings could be the time when you get saved, but if you leave now you might never be saved”. But I had already booked my flight some days before. So I had to face the question: did I really want salvation or not? What is most important? My schedule or my soul?

There’s a verse in the Bible which records the words of the Lord Jesus saying, “Strive to enter in at the strait [narrow] gate...for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24). I thought, “They are right. If I go back to the UK I might never be saved.” So I cancelled my flight and stayed on, so that I could keep going to the meetings.

That same night I went to the gospel meeting again. God really spoke to me through the preaching of His Word. I can only say that my sins were made known to me that night. I got home and went to my room. As I sat thinking it over, for the first time I saw my sins for what they were. As I looked back at my life of “fun and pleasure” it all just seemed like darkness to me. With tears I got ready for bed, conscious that God is a holy and righteous God and my sins are evil in His sight.

It was then that I remembered that Murray Pratt had said one night in the meeting, “Why don’t you take a piece of paper and write on it ‘If I die tonight I will go to H...’ and you honestly fill in the blank.” So I got out a pen and wrote. When I got to the end of the sentence I wrote “hell”. My red pen seemed to make it worse. I came to the point where I accepted I deserved God’s judgment. I knew that hell was the place for me, like the man in the Bible in Luke Ch 16 who “in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment” (Luke 16:23). As I just sat there thinking about where I would spend eternity I was in despair. I really felt totally lost at that moment. I desperately wanted to be saved. It was then that the saving grace of God came into my life. The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see the truth

of the finished work of Christ on the cross. This is how it came to me. As I sat there I simply thought to myself – and understood for the first time – “He died to save me. The work is done! So I don’t have to go to Hell!”

My tears were turned to joy! I couldn’t even sleep I was so overjoyed! It was 11th November 1990 and I was saved by the grace of God – “a brand plucked from the burning”. The folks at Portage were so happy for me. Another 11 souls were saved in those meetings. It was a real time of blessing. How glad I was that God overruled and allowed me to come in contact with the gospel and find salvation all the way over there in Canada.

I came back to the UK 2 weeks later – not running away from the gospel but coming home to tell others about it. Back home I started going to meetings in Bicester to learn more about the Bible and the Lord Jesus. In fact, I really learnt to read by reading my Bible. I hadn’t bothered much with reading before, but now I had a reason to read! I was baptized on 20th January 1991 and then received into the assembly meeting in Hebron Gospel Hall a couple of weeks later.

Let me close by asking you the question I had to face: “If you died tonight, would you be in heaven or hell?”

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31)

. . . . Gleaned from Hebron Gospel Hall