

Testimony

by Walter Gustafson

A Good Young Man

Even though my parents were not Christians, my mother brought me up strictly. For example, I don't think that I ever used the Lord's Name as a swear word. At 17, I became sincerely religious; I joined the neighborhood church and started attending all the services regularly. I became a Sunday School teacher, telling children about the Bible. I didn't smoke, drink or dance.

Preaching to Co-Workers

After graduation from high school, I preached a high standard of morals and ethics to all with whom I worked: first painters, then carpenters and finally, the men at the *Boston Gear Works*. Although my co-workers knew I was very sincere, they kidded me a great deal. This helped me to realize I needed something myself, but I didn't know what it was. I considered becoming a minister, but I thought: "I'm not sure that I'm right with God. Wouldn't it be terrible to preach to others if I wasn't even right with God myself!"

Uneasiness Creeps Into My Thinking

One day I was startled by something I read in my Bible. Jesus Himself said very clearly: "***I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.***" (Luke 5:32) I had thought, up until that moment, that Christ had come for people like myself, who were trying to live a good life. I didn't know that the Bible clearly said: "***There is none righteous, no, not one.***" (Romans 3:10) But even so, I could no longer rest on being righteous and doing the very best I could do. As good as I tried to live, I knew I had sinned.

First Person I Ever Heard Say It

One Sunday, when our minister was away on vacation, some young people from the *Providence Bible Institute*, 40 miles away, were given the responsibility for the services that day. One young man's story really impressed me. He said he was a Sunday School teacher *before* he was saved. He was the first person I ever heard say that he was saved. Being a Sunday School teacher myself, I thought "Maybe he has something I don't have." He surely did, for he had Christ as his own personal Saviour; all I had was religion and good works without Christ. While the young man was speaking, I asked myself, "Why is it that I have been trying so hard and yet I don't have love, or joy, or peace in my heart like he does?"

Didn't Meet the Entrance Requirements

After the young people left that Sunday, I decided I wanted, more than anything else, to get what that young man had. So I wrote to the *Providence Bible Institute*, hoping to go there for that purpose. But I didn't meet their entrance requirements. Students had to be saved to qualify for admission to that school and I wasn't saved.

The Search Intensifies

I still longed to get what that young man had, but I had no idea where or how I could get it. Then it occurred to me: "If God truly offers salvation to people, He would mean it for anyone who desired it, not just preachers. Surely, there must be someplace where a person could get God's salvation without being a preacher." God brought me to such a place in Boston.

Worksite Preacher Invited to a Gospel Service

Shortly afterwards, my employer transferred me to another worksite. As usual, I began preaching good, ethical living and morality right away to my new co-workers. One worker asked Thomas Harvey, who happened to be a Christian: "Did you hear about the young religious fellow who has come over here to work?" That was all the Christian needed to hear. He asked me to attend a Gospel meeting with him at the Gospel Hall. I had never heard of a Gospel Hall, but if there was any possibility that it was what I was looking for, I wanted to go. I'm thankful to God that it was.

Bible is a Mirror – I Saw Myself

The Bible message was about Nicodemus, a very religious man in John Chapter 3 who met Jesus late one night. Jesus told him he had to be 'born again' if he was ever going to be in heaven. Like Nicodemus, I was moral and religious, but I had never been born again. Near the end of the meeting the preacher said: "Don't wait until you're better or you may never come at all." Those were strange words to me, for I had been trying to make myself better for many months. What I heard that night made me want to hear more, so I came back a second night.

Feeling More Vulnerable and More Miserable

The message preached that night hit me hard. It cut deep. One Bible verse they used that especially pierced my conscience was this one: "***But we are all as an unclean thing and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.***" (Isaiah 64:6) The preacher compared sin to a deadly disease. I can't begin to tell you just how miserable I felt when I heard that verse.

After many months of trying to fit myself for the presence of God, I found out that despite:

- all my effort,
- all my good works and good living
- all my Sunday School work and
- all my preaching,

I was only a guilty sinner in the sight of God with the loathsome disease of sin, unfit for God's presence.

Confronted with the Truth about Me

It was a difficult message for me to absorb that night, but I'm thankful to God the preachers confronted me with the truth. Had I never faced the reality of my own sin, I would never have been saved. I am convinced no one ever gets to know Christ as their own Saviour who doesn't first find out, at least in some measure, their true condition before God.

The Walk that Shattered All Hope in Myself

The next Sunday I had dinner with the Thomas Harvey family. We went for a walk afterwards and I kept up my religious conversation – even though my confidence in my religious efforts had been badly shaken by truth from the Bible. When we got to a quieter street, Mr. Harvey asked me the big question: "Walter, was there ever a time in your life when you saw that you were a guilty sinner and received Christ as your own personal Saviour?" I hesitated and then said, "No, there never has been."

Exposed for Who I Really Was

That ended my religious conversation. The nice wrapping was now off my life. From then on, I was on the receiving end. I was feeling terribly miserable as we returned to the Harvey home. Sitting alone in their living room, I asked myself for the last time, "What's the difference between me and these people? They are trying to live a good life and so am I." As soon as I had asked the question, the Spirit of God brought home to me forcefully, "These people have accepted God's way of salvation and you are trying to work your way to Heaven." I fully realized then that I was lost, but did not know how to be saved.

Sinner – That's Who I Am

At the service that evening, I heard Christian men in their prayers asking God to save 'sinners' and that gave me hope because I now knew the word 'sinner' included me. I listened carefully to the Gospel as it was preached that night by Fred Squire from Luke 19:41-44. Then he ended with a closing hymn:

"Is there a heart that is waiting,
Longing for pardon today?
Hear the glad message proclaiming,
Jesus is passing this way."

I Want to Be Saved More than Anything Else in Life

I thought, "If there is any possibility that I can be saved tonight, I want to be saved more than anything else in the world." I went directly to Mr. Squire and told him so. One verse he read from the Bible that night was: "***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way...***" Isaiah 53:6. He abruptly stopped half way through the verse and asked me: "Is that you? I thought back on how I went my own way as a boy and then reformed to go another way, but it still wasn't God's way. So I answered, "Yes, that's me."

Mr. Squire then read the rest of the verse, *"and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* Then we got on our knees and he prayed. I felt a horror of desperation at that point, thinking, "In a moment or two we will be up off our knees and I'm not saved."

Saved in a Second

As Mr. Squire was praying for me, I realized for the first time in my life that when Christ died on the cross, God laid on Him all my sins. I was instantly saved. I was crying for joy to know that at last I had found peace with God, not through any works of my own, but simply accepting Christ as my own personal Saviour.

Singing Then, Singing Still and Singing Forever – What About You?

A few Christians were still in the building that evening. A little old lady, Miss Mulqueen, started to sing a hymn I had never heard before and the rest joined her:

"Happy day! Happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away."

That was November 2, 1941. It was a very happy day for a young man not yet 25. That was over 60 years ago and I have to tell you that the happiest days of my life have been since that day. Now, into my 80's, I can reflect on years of enjoying Christ as my Saviour. I can tell you that Christ not only saves sinners, He satisfies! My future is bright. Heaven is my eternal home.