

My Testimony

by Rowan Jennings



It was in 1944, approximately eighteen months before the end of World War II that I was born in the city of Belfast, Northern Ireland. Being the first boy of a new generation my name was called Rowan! Of that there was no debating for since 1690 there has been a Rowan Jennings in each generation.

I had the privilege of parents who prayed for me long before I was born. To those prayers were added that of Grandma Milne, who would intercede to God for each of her ten children, grandchildren, and those who had yet to be born.

Mum and Dad took their children's spiritual welfare very seriously, consequently I and my siblings were taught the scriptures from earliest days. On Sunday morning going to "the morning meeting" was an automatic, followed by Sunday School in the afternoon, then a gospel meeting in the evening. Looking back, those were days of wondrous instruction for not only were we taught the scriptures at home, but I can recall learning Bible verses for Sunday School, scriptures which have stayed with me these many years.

I can never remember a time when we were not gathered around Mom and Dad's knees in the morning where we were taught, not just bible stories, but bible lessons. We were taught "A" for Abel, "B" for Belshazzar, "C" for Cornelius, "D" for David, etc.

While Mum's family were Christians, Dad's side were not. When Dad gave his testimony he would often say that none of his family were ever saved. Of course, he was speaking of those he knew, however, several years after his going to Heaven I got a surprise.

I was in the city of Sydney Australia for ministry meetings when I met a Mr. Jennings. The same surname as myself! After some discussion we discovered that we were, in the distant past, related to each other. Both families originally came from a small town called Portadown and had lands near a place called Newry, Northern Ireland. The difference was, the Jennings family in Australia were all Christians saved by God's grace, whereas our side of the family, no one was saved at all. What a tragedy, many of the same family now in hell for all eternity and others enjoying the bliss of Heaven.

In 1947 my Uncle Joe and Aunt Georgina left Ireland with their two children, Ashley and Rhoda, to go to Venezuela as missionaries. I shall never forget that night, for although I was a child of only three years of age, God burned aspects of it deep into my heart.

When missionaries were leaving Ireland in those far off days they normally sailed from Belfast to Liverpool. Standing on the deck of the ship many saints would stand on the quay. It was a bitter sweet experience. The saints would sing hymns and the missionaries would call out Bible verses. That night I sat on Dad's shoulders, I recall it ever so plainly, the believers sang:

Jesus keep me near the cross
There a precious fountain
Free to all a healing stream
Flows from Calvary's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross
Be my glory ever
Till my raptured soul shall find
Rest beyond the river.

Uncle Joe quoted one verse that stayed with me, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life". (John 3:16)

On Sunday nights after the Gospel meeting Mum, Dad, my sister Betty and I would go to Mum and Grandpa Jennings' house in Belfast, and I, their first grandchild, would have a gospel meeting. We would sing the hymn, "Jesus keep me near the cross, but there is a precious fountain, close to all the healing stream, down from Calvary's mountain". I would then repeat the gospel verse, John 3:16, and the meeting was over.

When I was approximately eight years of age, Dad had a record made of some family members and I was part of it. At that time my voice was high and sweet so I sang:

There is a city bright, closed are its gates to sin
Naught that defileth, can ever enter in.

Savior, I come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I pray
Cleanse me and save me, wash all my sins away.

Lord, make me from this hour, Thy loving child to be
Kept by Thy power, from all that grieveth Thee.

Till in the snow white dress, of Thy redeemed I stand
Faultless and stainless, safe in that happy land.

Sadly I had no interest in God or salvation and despite the lovely words, they meant nothing to me.

When I was thirteen years of age, the elders in Ballyhackamore Gospel Hall Northern Ireland, Belfast, had a one week series of special children's meetings. Of course I was sent, which I did not mind, because it meant a time of "carry on" with my friends. I was not interested in Uncle Dan who was the speaker, nor the gospel!

It was on the Monday night after the singing of some choruses that Uncle Dan began to speak. From what I learned afterward, he once had a little child who died very tragically and from then on, this dear man devoted himself to winning boys and girls for the Saviour.

When he began speaking I began misbehaving. My feet were up on the seat in front of me and I was kicking it so that the children were being jolted up and down. It was most distracting! Part way through his message, Uncle Dan stopped speaking and looking at me said, "Young man behave yourself". I knew that if my father heard I would be in major trouble, so I thought I would just sit, be quiet, and perhaps they would forget about everything.

Within minutes of that happening, Uncle Dan said the word, "eternity". God took that word and burned it deep into my mind and conscience. Almost instantously an illustration was brought to my mind of the beach at Portrush in Northern Ireland. It is a magnificent strand, some seven miles long, of fine golden sand. In the illustration a bird came on the first anniversary of my death and took away one grain of sand. This was repeated year after year, century after century, until all the beach was gone, but eternity had only begun.

I was stunned!

Thoughts flooded my mind and I knew I was going to hell and Christ was the only way of salvation. I reasoned in my mind:

"I ought to get saved"

"Yes, that's a good idea for if I died now I would be in Hell for all eternity"

"Why not get saved right now?"

"I will"

Sitting there, and within minutes of being told to behave, I bowed my head and, as if God was sitting beside me, I just spoke to Him and confessed, "God I am a sinner, Jesus died for me, I accept Jesus as my Saviour". That was

the first Monday of September 1957. Three simply steps, my confession to God of personal guilt, the recognition that all depended on Christ and His work at Calvary, and my voluntary acceptance of Christ for salvation.

From those early days there was granted to me an unsatisfiable yearning to know the scriptures. Every opportunity was grasped to learn the scriptures and spread the glorious message of God's redeeming grace. When I was able to drive, Dad would let me take his car and I would go up the country, and going alone door to door, I would seek to sell gospel literature as well as giving out thousands of tracts. One summer evening, while walking down Cranmore Park giving out gospel tracts, I met an older gentleman, Frank Meechan, to whom I offered a gospel tract. Graciously he accepted it and began to tell me his story. He had been a priest and was pondering the meaning of life. I invited him to gospel tent meetings and the next night he came. It was the first time he had ever been in a gospel meeting, and hearing the gospel of a free salvation he accepted Christ as his Saviour. I shall never forget him and what a joy it will be to meet him again in Heaven.

There was a man in Lower Windsor Avenue by the name of Mr Jebb, and he led a missionary meeting every month. Stirring reports were given and the Lord made me aware of the need in far off lands. Because of this, I came to Canada in 1966 and soon found myself in the company of a lovely brother and sister in Northern Ontario, Lawrence and Doreen Buchanan. They were missionaries in Cochrane and they kindly let me work with them, learning the meaning of serving the Lord. The Lord will reward them for the opportunities and encouragement's they gave me. Soon I began speaking on a regular basis and I enjoyed it. By the time I went home to Ireland in 1967, I knew I wanted to serve the Lord.

Through the years the study of the scriptures was combined with my work in Woodward's bakery, as well as preaching and taking series of Bible teaching meetings. In 1989 I stopped working in the bakery and began travelling full-time throughout the USA and Canada, preaching and teaching the scriptures. In 1995 the elders in my home assembly came and told me they were going to commend me to full time Bible teaching. I never asked for commendation but they were enough in fellowship with God to detect the mind of God, and spiritual enough to do it.

In the kindness of God I have had the privilege of ministering God's Word in 22 countries of the world, but the greatest joy I have is in telling others of that night in September 1957 when I took the step of faith and accepted Christ as my Saviour.

To this I can simply add:

“To God be the glory great things He hath done”