

Testimony

Mrs. Lucy West Tells Her Story

Coming from a family of 7 children, we had a fantastic time getting into all sorts of trouble and feeling the sharp end of mum's hand; but we never doubted we were loved. Mum told us God was watching us and we were sent to church every Sunday morning – more to give mum a rest than to learn anything! But that was pretty much it as far as religion was concerned. We were raised nominal Roman Catholics, just knowing little bits and pieces about the Catholic Church and its many beliefs.

Lots of things happened growing up – which will remain secrets! Life progressed. I left School with good grades and started work firstly in a transport café near home, then at a bakery, then an office, finally leaving my home town to marry and follow my husband to Bicester.

Life was busy and fast paced. We had 5 beautiful sons in our first 11 years. With my husband working full-time in the week and doing an extra job on weekends, and with me taking on evening work, we were like ships that passed in the night, but thankfully we managed to make ends meet.

In February 1985 things took a turn. My sister was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She was 29 and had 3 young children. She turned 30 on April 14th of that year and passed away on the 30th. My parents became guardians to her children and supported them through life.

Then in November 1991 my 60 year old dad came home from work, sat down, reached for his tobacco and fell to the floor. He died from a heart aneurysm. Once again we were left devastated. Then in September 1995, the middle child of my late sister (who my mum was caring for) joined the Army and just 2 weeks after his 18th birthday was sent to Bosnia, where he was killed. All this time I wondered why? Why? Why did it happen? I was angry with God – a God about whom I knew so very little.

I started to drink around that time, believing it was helping to bring me some sort of relief. By this time I was also working full time. With more money, I drank more. I was also claiming from social services by saying I was on my own with my children, which I wasn't.

In March 1999 it was my son's 18th birthday. We hired a hall, staged a big party and had a great time. The next morning, while tidying up, I took a small handful of peanuts and popped them in my mouth. Within a couple of minutes I was itchy and hot all over, my voice had gone and my tongue had started to swell, along with my eyes, ears and my whole body. When I next opened my eyes I was in hospital. I had had a severe anaphylactic shock. It was an earthquake in my life. I could no longer work with food, so I stopped working.

We lived round the corner from a convenience shop. One day, on their return from the shop, my boys were talking about a big tent that they'd seen in the park. "Can we go?" Of course they could! I got an hour's peace each evening for a couple of weeks! The tent was a yearly event to which they went, but only if they wanted. The same for the weekly Sunday school – only if they wanted to go. They were collected each week in a minibus. The people seemed nice when they called for them, so off they went.

One year when the tent came again I thought to myself, "What do I know about these people that take my boys every week?" The answer was absolutely nothing! So I put my youngest in his pushchair and marched off to find out! I met an elderly gentleman at the door of the tent. He asked who I was. I told him I just wanted to see who was taking my boys to Sunday School each week. He asked if I would like to go into the tent. "You'll never get me inside that tent," I replied. "That's a shame," he said.

By 1999 I was drinking *a lot*. I drank on my own or with my neighbour. I drank throughout the day and was usually drunk by the time my husband came home. I hid the bottles anywhere I could, to cover up my habit (who was I kidding?) and so my life went on from one drunken day to another. My neighbour was having marriage problems, so we drank all the more.

One day my neighbour, whose children went to the same Sunday School as mine, told me that a lady from the “church” had asked her “Does Lucy know where she would have gone if she had died eating those peanuts?” Of course I knew. I would be in hell...but it would be OK because people would pray for my soul and I would eventually be in heaven (or so I had been told from my childhood).

The tent came back again, and this time my neighbour decided to go. A couple of days later she told me, “My husband was in the tent when I got there last night and he walked out when he saw me coming. If he’s there again tonight I will walk out.”

“No you won’t,” I said, “because I’ll sit on the end of your row and stop you leaving!”

I asked my husband if it was OK to go and he said yes. And so I found myself in the ‘Gospel Tent’ for the first time in my life.

It was all new to me. First a hymn, then a prayer, then another hymn. A man in a suit with a Bible. The man who spoke in the tent that evening was called Geoffrey Guile. He said he would “tell his testimony” (how God saved him). He had been a Roman Catholic. Now that got me interested! As he told his story, I found myself crying silently – but I had no idea why.

Back home I wanted to know why. Why had I cried? The next day I phoned the lady from the “church” who organised the tent and asked if she was going to the meeting that night as I would like to go again. She said she would collect me. In the tent that night I cried again. Once more, I wondered why I had cried. I agreed to go the next night which was Friday. That night the gospel message really hit home. I knew I was a sinner. I understood the theory of how to be saved. I could see how the people in the tent were saved. But I couldn’t seem to see it for myself. Saturday and Sunday there was no tent meeting so I was left thinking things over to myself.

On the Monday I went to the Post Office and withdrew the money that I wasn’t entitled to. I went shopping, still mulling everything over in my mind. On Tuesday the boys were off to School. Back home, after dropping them off, I went back to bed unable to do anything except hide under the duvet and cry. I knew. I knew why I was crying. It was because in the eyes of God I was a drunken lying thief (although I was still in denial in many ways). The lady from church came round. She opened the front door and called my name. The next thing she was up the stairs in my bedroom asking why I was in bed crying. I couldn’t tell her. I just couldn’t. It was just too horrible. “You are coming to my house. You can help me with some housework. We’ll have lunch together.” She pulled the duvet back and that was that. At her house I was still crying but I couldn’t tell her why.

“Right” she said, “Come and help me hang the washing out.” Outside she asked me; “What are you crying about? What is it you want? If you are crying for yourself I don’t want to know.” “I want what you have!” I said. “What on earth do I have that you can possibly want?” “Peace! You have peace. That’s what I want.”

I told her about taking the money. I felt such a hypocrite – saying I wanted to be saved, but carrying on with my stealing. She explained the gospel to me again and soon it was time to go. “You go home and get before God and tell him everything.”

She dropped me off at my house. I stood at the door – my mind in a turmoil. I had a little book in the house about the way to heaven. I skipped through it, reading this bit and that bit, but nothing helped.

That Monday evening the lady’s husband came round and gave me a cassette tape about a man called **Peter Orasuk** from Canada who had been a drug dealer but God had changed his life through the gospel of Jesus Christ. One thing from his story really stuck in my head. He quoted a Bible verse: “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15). The words “of whom I am chief” stood out. How could he say that, for now I knew that I was the chiefest sinner! I had come to realise what I was before God. I knew that God saw everything I did, and said and thought. I felt sick in the very pit of my stomach. I went upstairs and knelt down at the bottom of my bed. I closed my eyes. Where do I start? What do I say?

I told God everything. I mean everything. I had been blaming Him for the deaths of people I loved. I told Him I was sorry. Sorry for not believing the gospel that I had heard in the tent. I had basically been calling God a liar by not accepting what the Bible said about me. I asked God to forgive me, to have mercy on me. Me a drunken lying thief! He in turn showed me His Son. He revealed to me that when the Lord Jesus died on a cross it was for me, a worthless drunk. And why? Because He loved me, a love so undeserved yet unconditional. His blood – shed for me! His death, the sacrifice to end all sacrifices! *My sin forgiven forever*. I am never going to be in Hell because of Him.

I got up from my knees. I was shaking. I knew I was forgiven and saved. I went downstairs to set the table. I prepared tea for the family. I went to the bottom of the stairs to call the boys. “Come on boys it’s done,” I said. And that is when it really dawned on me! At that moment I absolutely knew for sure that “It is done”! I am saved! Christ died for me!

I picked up the phone and called the lady from church. I said, “Cherith Penfold, this is Lucy West. I will never be in hell!” She said, “How do you know that?” “Because I have been calling God a liar, but now I know Christ died for me.”

To God be the glory for His grace to me. He saved me and gave me new life. He delivered me from drinking and smoking. He cleaned my mouth up. Nearly 20 years later I’m still rejoicing in His salvation. Where would I have been today without His loving intervention in my life? And I have *peace*! Peace that rests on Christ and on God’s unchanging Word the Bible. “His word is settled forever in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

Gleaned from Hebron Gospel Hall