

FAMILY TALK

Continue to remember the health concerns of *Gerald Eaton, Joey Avance, Jerry Schnelle, Bonnie Allgor, Pat Buls, Sonny & Cathy Monaghan, Beth Ellen, and Pete Rowland.*

If you have any announcements, please call or text Bryan.

forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins (2 Peter 1:9). What do you remember about your forgiveness?

A time of darkness and hopelessness

One cannot come to God without first seeing their need. I can remember the masquerade of living in the world and giving the appearance of happiness. The world did provide a series of escapes and highs that left my basic needs unmet. The world's "purpose" was found in short term pleasure that changed depending upon the desires of the moment (1 John 2:15-17).

The world also had a "carrot and stick" approach to keeping you "in line." If you were to be accepted by others in the world, then you must accept that there are no real standards and no real "truth." I learned very quickly that in order to have associations with some people I had to accept their "personal lifestyle" and even become a partaker in it. "In regard to these,

they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:4).

It did not take me very long to realize that a life with no standards is a life with no purpose. Also I came to realize that those in the world who claimed to be my friends, were in fact ruled by the "god of this age," and were walking in darkness too (2 Cor 4:4). I sadly knew that they would discard me in a moment.

The bright light of a living faith

Within my own heart I knew that God existed and that He ultimately could erase the pain of an aimless life if I could but find Him. I remember praying a simple prayer to God on a beautiful starry night. "God, please let me come to know You." This was a serious prayer for light. As I would come to know later, our God will always answer such a prayer (John 7:17, Acts 16:9-10).

My search began with a daily reading of the Bible. As I read, I came upon verses that deeply touched me as they attested to the power of a living faith. The optimism of Paul in the face of adversity astounded me. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). This was a verse that I read and reread, marveling at how real purpose and joy can be found regardless of outward circumstances. Was it possible that I might one day have such a faith?

The day of my death

As I continued to read the Bible, I came to see how men received Jesus into their lives. My reading of the book of Acts helped me see how people like me were able to turn from the world to serve a living God. Conversion was no casual process. It was a death! "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Without exception I found that men that would come to Christ had to surrender all. Those at Ephesus that became Christians burned their books of magic and gave up the practice of it which had an enormous monetary consequence for them (Acts 19:19-20). Did they complain about this? No, they would speak as the apostle Paul would about the things he gave up for Christ. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Phil 3:8).

It was the love of God that showed me that I needed to deal with the issue of my own sin before God. Jesus died on a Roman cross to provide the only possible sacrifice for my sin. It was good news indeed to know that God has provided that which I could never provide on my own. "For the wages of sin is

death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

How was I to receive this free gift? As I read through the book of Acts I plainly saw the answer. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins... Acts 2:38). "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Every time one came to believe and turn to Christ in the book of Acts, they were baptized immediately (Acts 8:34-39, 16:30-34).

The day of my baptism was the day that I died. It was a day similar to that of the prodigal son who, because of an utter disgust over his aimless life, came back to his father with nothing to offer but his willingness to be a slave. He just wanted to be with the father that loved him! "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19). God responded to my death just like the father of the prodigal did, with a full restoration of fellowship and great rejoicing (Luke 15:20-24).

Why I need to remember

What a joy it is to remember the escape from a terrible slavery to a present life in the grace of God! I need to remember both the darkness of the past and the power of