

Salvation

(Part 2)

Last week we talked about why we need salvation and how it is obtained. This week we are going to take a look at what it looks like in real life. To do that I am going to share my testimony with you and tell you of some of the things God has done in my life and what it means to serve Him and what it means to fail Him.

First of all let me start out with my childhood. When I was young, until about age 6, we went to church every Sunday. I don't remember a lot about it but I do remember going. Then there were some problems in the church and we quit going. I never set foot inside a church service with the exception of one vacation bible school until I was almost twenty one years old.

In our home we said we believed in God. We prayed before each meal and at bedtime but it was just a recited prayer that really had no meaning for me. It was more of a ritual. I knew we were supposed to be Christians but I really had no idea who Jesus was. Then high school came along. I had some science classes and learned that the Earth was actually billions of years old and God was probably just a myth. So for a while I gave up on believing in God. But even during this time God never gave up on me. Even at my lowest point there were things that happened in my life that I could not explain without God.

After some time I was beginning to realize that maybe there was a God. After I graduated high school I started watching church services on television on Sunday mornings. I even corresponded with some and I still have some of the books I bought during that time. But even through that, it was all just an intellectual gospel. I was getting a mental understanding of Christianity and I even prayed their prayer a few times. I was beginning to learn who Jesus was but I didn't know Jesus. The first time I came face to face with Him was at a football game after I graduated. A friend I went to school with was there. His name was Russell Miller if you want to look him up in my yearbooks. He was a Christian and he witnessed to me and told me about Jesus for what seemed like an hour. He tried to get me to pray with him but I was not ready for some reason and I declined. I have looked back at that night many times and wanted to kick myself. My next encounter with God came in 1984 at University Hospital in Little Rock a month or two before my mother (your other Granny) passed away. There had been a Baptist preacher visiting the hospital that day and I was trying to avoid him. Somehow I found myself face to face with him and he proceeded to talk to me. He told me many of the same things we talked about last week. Then he asked me if I wanted to pray and accept Jesus as my savior. Inside a part of me wanted to say no like I did that night at the football game but another part of me said no this is the time. I prayed that day and asked God to forgive me of my sins. When the prayer was over I didn't feel a bolt of lightning pass through me or anything like that. But somehow in my heart and my mind I knew that something had changed. My dad walked up just after I prayed and I told him about it. What happened next was like something out of a movie. My dad walked back to my mother's room and I was not very far behind him. I walked up to the hospital room door and I saw my mother talking to him. He looked up and saw me and motioned quickly for me to come over there. When I got there he told my mother

to tell me what she had just told him. She was weak from the medications that she had been taking. She looked up at me and told me what had happened. Following is as close as I can remember of what she said:

I opened my eyes and Jesus was standing beside my bed. He asked me if there was anything I wanted before I came home. I told him Randy is a good boy but he is not saved. I want him to be saved. He looked at me and said "He was saved when he was twenty.". I couldn't understand what he was saying or what he meant.

At the time it was about three or four months short of my twenty first birthday. So I was twenty. I told her what had happened no more than 30 minutes earlier and cleared up her confusion about what He meant when he said I was saved when I was twenty. I knew the God I had just prayed to was real. I knew at that moment that I had crossed a line of no return. As you will see in this lesson I have stumbled and sometimes looked back but I could never return. You know I am not sure why that happened. Except that maybe God knows me. He knows that I am one who is prone to doubt and needed it. If I would have said no that day when I was presented the Gospel that would have not happened. My life path would have been changed forever. There have been a lot of these little things during my life that have happened. Sometimes it seems like God is saying "I'm still here." One of the most memorable occurred about four months or so after I got saved. Following is a description of what happened:

My dad and I were working doing concrete work at a steel mill there in Newport. They manufactured the steel plates that sit between the train track rails and the cross ties. They have four holes in them for the spikes to go through. They start out at one end of the conveyor as pieces of steel about ten inches wide, six inches thick and ten feet long. They weigh probably a thousand pounds or more. They spend several hours in a reheat furnace and come out glowing a bright red. From there they start rolling down the presses and getting slowly flattened and molded into shape. At the lower end of the conveyor they are about fifty feet long and are traveling at a speed just slower than a jog and are still glowing a faint red from the heat. We were working toward the lower end of the conveyor. They had always told us if there was an accident on the line to head for the generator room beside where we were working and get behind the generators to be shielded from the steel. We set our forms up late one evening and went home. The next morning we went back and there had been an accident overnight. Just feet from where we were working the steel jammed at one of the presses in the conveyor. It came off the track and went across our forms and through the steel wall behind us and into the edge of generator room. Our forms were burned beyond use from the heat of the steel. So we had to replace them. I was in the hole getting things ready to go and I heard a commotion behind me. I looked around and everyone was running. I turned and looked toward the conveyor line. There had been another accident in the same place as the night before. But this time the steel didn't come across the hole where our forms were. I looked up there was a fifty foot long piece of glowing red steel looped up like a horse shoe above the hole I was in. From down in the hole it looked like God's hand was holding it up because there was nothing else supporting it. It was just sitting up there perfectly balanced on the conveyor. I remember calmly climbing out of the hole and walking away.

I have told you these stories for a couple of reasons. The first reason is that I want to tell you that God is real. I have seen things happen in my own life that are only explainable by His presence. The second reason is to show you some of what we talked about last week. Some people would say if they had seen the two things I just described they would believe and be God's faithful servant ... bla bla bla. I am here to tell you that on that day my sins were forgiven. Something changed in my life. But with all that said, I still live in a flesh and blood body. I am still subject to the same doubts, fears and temptations as anyone else.

I will not get into details here but I will say that in the years after I was saved I got involved in some things that went against God's word. In other words I sinned. But as time passed things worked out and I always considered what I did a part of the journey to get where I was going. You ever heard the saying the end justifies the means? That would be like if you wanted to get me a nice Christmas present. So instead of working hard and saving your money you went out and stole the money and bought the present. I open it and I am very happy with it. But you know in your heart that you did wrong to get it but since I am so happy it must be ok. That is kind of where I was. The only problem is God did not share that view with me. What happened next? Let me share the following verse with you:

Hebrews 12:6-8 (NASB)

FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

In other words if God would not have taken me to task for what I did I would not have been His son. But He did. That discipline was that He completely withdrew from me. To me when I prayed it was as though He didn't exist. There was only a silent emptiness. No matter how hard I prayed and wanted to be close to God as I once was. But I could not get near him. Years passed and it got no better. Then in the early 1990's there was a group that came to Lakeside Baptist Church and held a revival. It was called Life Action Revival. It went on for a week or a week and a half. We went about every night. One night the speaker talked about being away from God. My ears perked up. He went on to talk about things that cause it. He got to the one that hit a nerve. He said unconfessed sin in your life or in your past. I realized that night what the problem was. I prayed a simple prayer that night there in the pew that brought it all to an end. I don't remember the exact words but it was something simple along lines of this. You are right God, it was sin and I am sorry forgive me. If God impressed one thing on me that night it was this. There is no right sin. Sin is sin no matter what its bad. At that moment I felt the peace and presence of God I had not felt in years.

So now you see someone who has seen God's hand in their lives. You have seen that person wonder away from God then find their way back. You must be thinking surely he learned his lesson and will follow God faithfully. Well unfortunately it's not that simple. Let me share this verse with you.

John 20:29 (NIV)

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Does anyone know who Jesus was talking to? He was talking to Thomas one of His disciples after He had risen from the grave. That is where we get the phrase doubting Thomas. Thomas had been told by the other disciples that Jesus was risen from the grave but he refused to believe until He saw Jesus for himself. Sometimes I believe that is why God has shown me so much because I too doubt sometimes.

There was a time in the spring of 2008 that I had a period of doubting. There was a time that I wondered if God really existed at all. I have learned there is one thing I have to do when that happens. I have to look back on my life at all that has happened. When I do that, I have no alternative but to believe that He exists. You might say how could someone who has seen all these things still doubt. Let me share this verse with you. Maybe it will share a little light on the situation:

Ephesians 6:12

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The answer is there are spiritual forces beyond the five senses that influence us. They can influence what we think and how we perceive things. It is during those times that we must be diligent and remember the things we know to be true.

Let me share one more of those miraculous "God" moments I have experienced. Before and after James was born your mother went through a lot of pain from the surgeries. One day about eleven in the morning your mom called me up at work. She said we are going to have another baby. That baby was you Kaity. After she called I was panic stricken with fear of what could happen. Then lunch time came. I went outside and got in the car and started it. The radio was on from when I drove to work that morning. The radio was silent for second after I started the car then the music started as if it had been waiting for me. I didn't recognize the music bit I listened. These words came to me as if straight from God himself:

This is no time for fear

This is the time for faith and determination

Don't lose the vision here carried away by the motion

Hold on to all that you hide in your heart

There is one thing that has always been true

It holds the world together

If you have wondered why I like that song "God is in Control" so much, now you know. At that moment I knew everything was going to be ok.

I have shared these things with you to show you that life even as a Christian is filled with struggles too. The difference is that God is there with you every step of the way. You have seen where I have been. I have come through all of that and God is now called me to do this bible study with you. But you see there is something none of you know. God impressed upon me to do this bible study a long time ago, back in 2001 or 2002. I even prepared the first lesson. It was going to be "This Means War". But I backed out and never started it. I wonder how much things would have been different with our family had I obeyed God. In this lesson I have said a lot about being separated from God and being in God's presence. I have said a lot about sin and repentance. Let me leave you with this:

It's not the _____ of our _____ that _____ us
from God, it's the _____ of our _____ that brings us
_____ to God.

Even though you walked _____ steps away, its only _____ step back.

Each of you will have to make that decision of whether or not to follow God for yourselves. I cannot make that decision for any of you. Some preachers try to make people walk aisles in front of the church and say a prayer to be saved. In reality there is no magic formula. All you have to do is say to God, I am a sinner, I am sorry, please forgive me. If you say that prayer and mean it you will be saved. Then you need to learn what God expects of us as Christians and try to serve and obey Him to the best of your ability. I am here any time you want to talk.