

Ryno Oppermann Testimony

Two years ago, I would not have thought that I would stand here and share with you about God's grace and faithfulness. But something beautiful happened during a church service in November 2014. The theme of that particular sermon was 'The coming of the King', and that KING came and stood still by me that day and changed my heart.

But let me go to sometime well before that service...

I grew up in a Christian home, with parents that went to church and prayed as a family together. Although some traditions were followed meticulously which I did not always understand, at least I was exposed to the infallible Word of God since I was young. For this I am very thankful to God. I always had a love for God in my heart and was moved many times as a boy when praising God with others and hearing stories of how people came to know Jesus. For me it just made logic sense to believe in God.

Growing up in South Africa, it is normal to be a Christian. Most, if not all, of my peers consider themselves to be 'Christian', and so it was normal that through my teen years, there were many Christian activities like youth camps and outreaches etc. that one, and myself of course, would be involved in. It was almost as if a Christian was the logical thing to be. During my teenage years, I made a commitment to follow Jesus and then spent lots of time reading Christian books and testimonies. I realise now, although I was sincere at that time, that these things of God distracted me from an intimate relationship with Him. I did realise at that time that I am in need of a Saviour and should rely on God's grace alone, but still it was more logic than a complete change of my heart.

It was after a few years of staying committed, that I became distracted and left my First Love, Jesus. I started to focus on the opinions of people about me, and I wanted to be world and streetwise. And with this, I slowly but surely, allowed temptations and sin into my life. On the outside I was 'a good person'. I did not want to be known as a racist (although I knew I had become one), or as loving money (for I came to love money and feared losing it), or one that has a foul mouth (my children should not hear me swearing!). All the time, I was afraid my mask of pretence may slip, and people may see who I really am. So I tried to address this by self-motivation and self-effort. To no avail.

In addition, I felt that I have brought disgrace to Jesus by departing from Him, and felt ashamed to return. During this time, He kept on calling me in occasionally, but I felt ashamed and would not heed. I would carry on attending church, in my heart yearning to return to Him, but felt too ashamed. But He was faithful and did not stop calling me to repentance and to turn to Him.

So now we are back in November 2014.

Expecting the sermon to be the same. Thinking about the kids I needed to pick up afterwards, how long it may take etc. But the Word of God that was read (Gen 49:8-12, Rev 5:1-6, Rev 19:11-16) cut deep into my heart that day and quieted me. Here I was, cheeky and expecting to be 'entertained', critical of the music, the pastor, the church and whatever.

But then the King came to me.

For when the passage in Genesis 49 that was read, it dawned on me that it speaks about a King and Kingdom that is eternal. I realised that it was written 2,000-odd years before the Word was made flesh, Jesus the Messiah was born and the fulfillment thereof started to take place. This is beyond coincidence. He came in such a gentle way to His people. He did not counsel the high and mighty Caesar (though as the Creator He could!) but rode a donkey. It was highly likely that one would have missed Him as the King to come. And then the glorious return of the King, in Revelations 19: 11-16 was read:

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many crowns, and he has a name written that no one knows but Himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of

the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.”

In that sermon, I understood the King of king’s immenseness and Glory and Grace. I stood in awe as I became aware of my sin and the way God sees it. I realised with deep remorse how loveless I was and how selfish I had become while trying to do things my way. And how terrible my own efforts are to address them. I realised that I have nothing to offer God, even my best deeds were useless to save me. Like Peter I cried out, like many times before, “Lord go away from me for I am a sinful man”, but Jesus spoke strongly but oh, so extremely gently that day: “Come and follow ME. Come to ME. Learn from ME”

The mighty, righteous, holy and immense King, the Ancient of Days, the Creator of everything, came to call ME, a cheeky prodigal son, in such a soft and gentle manner. I then realised it is Him, my Jesus, the Messiah speaking to me! He who cares enough to come after a lost sheep, and bring me back to Him. I just surrendered my life to Him.

He immediately set me free from swearing, and contempt I harbored for people that are different than I am. He set me free from the love for money and the fear to lose it. The following days and until now, I become so aware of His presence and at times would just cry in awe.

You see, I have come to realise how God wants me to be in a personal relationship with Him. That He should be my sole inspiration and support. It is His Grace that will keep me, His Faithfulness. Not my own effort and trying to be good. Not lovely melodies, music, inspirational lyrics, church activities or testimonies. However supportive these things may be and wonderfully used in His Kingdom, it is God who should be my soul’s primary joy and yearning. All this time I was away from God, trying to find my own way, made me realize how fickle my heart is. How easily it can – and did– become distracted by things that seem so pure, so right and exciting, and yet do not lead to intimacy with our Heavenly Father to bring forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is now more than ever, a cry of my heart to cling to Him in order not to stray from Him. It brings to mind the Scripture in Isaiah 66:1-2: “Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool; what is the house that you would build for Me, and what is the place of My rest? All these things My hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My Word.’”

To the King of kings, Jesus the Messiah be all the glory, who is faithful to call and draw straying hearts to Him!