

# Today Is the Day

by Mike Gilchrist

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*God is excited about salvation and restoration, and He wants us to take advantage of the opportunity to make things right with Him today.*

**Duration:** 37:14

**Scripture:** Proverbs 8:17, Ecclesiastes 12:1, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 3:7, Hebrews 4:7

**Topics:** "Hearing God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of going to the Holy Land with a man named Charles. They visited significant biblical sites such as the empty tomb and Calvary. During their trip, Charles had a profound spiritual awakening and committed himself to Jesus Christ. The speaker emphasizes that God knows certain things that make Him excited, including the fact that people are more impressionable and open to salvation or restoration of fellowship at certain times. The speaker encourages the audience to seize the opportunity to say yes to God today.

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## Transcript

In the third chapter of Hebrews and verse 7, God said, Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. In the third chapter of Hebrews and verse 15, God said, Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. In the fourth chapter of Hebrews and verse 7, God said, Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart.

Three times in the brief span of just 18 verses, God repeats Himself and says, Today, today, today. Today, today, today. Not tomorrow.

Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart. You know, folks, you get the idea that God is all excited. And then you come to church and you look at us and you get the idea that we're not very excited.

I wonder why God's excited and we're not. We think, next week, next month, later on, after I've had time for more reflection and contemplation, I'll get around to it. God says, every time you open the Bible and He talks about being saved or making things right with Him, God is loaded with enthusiasm and excitement that it must be today, today, today.

Why? What does God know that has Him excited? Which, if we knew, we too would become excited. What does God know? Well, I certainly did not propose to suggest that I know everything God knows, but

I'm very sure of this. I know that I know at least four facts firmly fixed in the mind and heart of God that makes God excited and causes Him to say, Today, mister, today, today, today is the day for you to say yes to Him in salvation or in restoration of fellowship.

God knows some things. May I suggest what they are, please? One, two, three, four, very quickly, very simply. Number one, I am very sure that God had in mind when He said this, the fact of impressionability.

Would you write that down, please? One word, impressionability, impressionability. God is aware that you are more impressionable now than you'll be later. I'd like to prove that to you.

May I prove that to you? Listen to it. The Bible says, they that seek Me early shall find Me. Who's going to find the Lord? They that seek Him when? It's earlier now than it'll be tomorrow.

That doesn't mean early in the morning, it means early in life. And young people, hey, all you teenagers, isn't this a great group of teenagers over here? Guy Linton, Evelyn Linton, and all the other teenagers over here. Raise your head, young people.

You're a teenager over there. Well, hi. Excuse me, son, didn't mean to wake you up.

Fine. All right. What does the Bible say? Remember thy Creator in the days of thy what? Say it.

Youth. When the evil days come not. What are the evil days? The latter years without Him.

The Bible says come to the Lord while you're young because if you don't, the latter years will not be good, they'll be evil. Don't try growing old without Jesus, mister. You're going to be a miserable old man and a mean old lady, yes you will.

But you can grow old gracefully and in absolute beauty in Jesus. God says, hurry and come while you're young. Every time you open the Bible, God says it.

Oh, you remember what Jesus said? Jesus said, let little children come to me. See these little children? You let them come and don't you dare stop them from coming to me. You let them come.

And if you don't come to Him when you're a child, sir, Jesus also said this. He said, except you become as a little child, you will in no wise ever enter the kingdom of heaven. Do you know how a 40-year-old man comes to Jesus? I'll tell you how he doesn't come.

He doesn't come as a 40-year-old man. No 40-year-old comes to Jesus as a 40-year-old. He comes as a little boy.

How is a little boy? I have a little grandson named Paul. I could put him on this table, stand below, and say, Paul, jump. And what does he do? Paul stands there in analytical objectivity, contemplating the ramifications of this leap as he strokes his chin.

Is that what he does? Of course not. Boom! He's gone. How does a 40-year-old come to Jesus? Does he come stroking his chin in analytical objectivity, contemplating the ramifications of this leap? He does not.

He just takes a leap of faith. Same way a little boy is, is the way a 40-year-old man comes. Hey, you can do that a lot easier when you're young than when you're old, because as the years go by without Jesus Christ, you become cynical and paranoid, bruised and bumped, skeptical.

It's more difficult, sir, it's more difficult later than now. And God knows that. May I prove that to you from this crowd this morning? How many of you were saved after 60? Saved after 60.

Would you raise your hand if you were saved after 60? After 60? Nobody? Saved after 50. Would you raise your hand if you were saved after 50? One. One person.

Saved after 40. Please, saved after 40. One.

Two. A total of three saved after 40. How many of you were saved, came to Jesus, came to know him as your personal Savior and Lord before you were 20? Any time before 20.

Would you raise your hand? Way up high, please. Hold it way up high. You folk in the front, would you look back? Hold them up so they can see you.

I want you to remember this and look at the choir. What is that? That is over 95% of this crowd saying, I came to Jesus before I was 20. And only three people came to him after they were 40.

Now what does that say to you? I know what it says to me. It says God doesn't like people after they're 40. Except me.

Right or wrong? No, it says the opposite. People don't like God after they're 40. Except for three here.

Loved him enough. Withdrawn enough. Knew their need enough to come to him and give their lives to him.

Only three. Are you seeing what I'm seeing? Only three. God doesn't change as we get older.

We change. We harden. We stiffen.

We withdraw. You're older now than when you walked in. And I tell you what, I'm getting excited about it, too, because I realize this thing.

They that seek me early shall find me. Some of you, God told you Wednesday night that you were a tare and not wheat. He said my spirit is poured out on all flesh.

He said the fields are widened to harvest. God's spirit is convicting you. You're part of the fields that are widened to harvest.

You're ripe and you're ready. But be careful. It's harvest time today.

And God says today is the day. Now is the time. Today if you hear his voice, harden not your heart.

But if you harden your heart, you'll miss the harvest time. You'll become, you'll remain a tare and never become wheat. And then you'll be gathered and cast into the fire.

You have to come now. God said today. Today.

Today. God's been talking to you about making things right with him. Settling that controversy with him.

Coming back into fellowship. Being restored. God's been calling you, mister.

In a thousand ways, he's called you. And God says now. Do it now.

It's easier now than later. You're more impressionable. Please hear God this morning.

And make this your service and your invitation today. I want to give you a second reason right quick. I'm very sure that God had in mind not only the fact of impressionability, but the fact of life.

Just write it down. Will you? One word. Life.

L-I-F-E. God is so anxious for you to start living. And some of you never started.

You've never started living. I mean, God is so tired of you having poor arm blood. God wants you to live.

So let's raise a question and answer it quickly. When does life begin? My dad had a book called Life Begins at 40. I never read it quite, but I remember the book.

Life Begins at 40. And I know it isn't true. Maintenance begins at 40.

After 40, it's all maintenance. After 40, they begin to print the telephone directory and find print. After 40, your arms grow shorter and shorter.

After 40, a lot of you get up and go as you got up and went. Life doesn't begin at 40. I know that's not where it begins.

So where does life begin? Well, somebody says life begins at the marriage altar. Wow. I can just walk the aisle with that gorgeous girl, that handsome guy, whoo, going to live.

No, that could be war. That's what it's been for a lot of people. It doesn't have to be.

Marriage can be beautiful, but it isn't life. It can fit into life, but life is not marriage. Well, when does life begin? Well, somebody says when the first baby is born.

Uh-uh, that's sleeplessness. When does life begin? Well, when I go to business for myself. That's ulcers.

That's not life. Come on, when does life begin? Well, when I retire. Oh, just eight years, seven months, and six days, and I retire, I'm going to live.

No, you're going to die. Sixty Minutes said in Tory retirement, the average lifespan of the American male is 30 to 40 months. When does life begin? Okay, you're going to accuse me of being a preacher, so let me go ahead and say it.

Life begins at Calvary. Uh, you say, Mike, I knew it. I knew it.

All you preachers, Brother Sammy says it, you say it. All you preachers say life begins at Calvary. How come you say that? Because life begins at Calvary.

Because that's where you meet him whose name is life. How do you spell Jesus? L-I-F-E. He said, I am the life.

Oh, yes, that's another name for Jesus. And you don't have life until you have him, because he said, I've come that you might have life, and if you don't have him, son, you don't have life. There is no life apart from Jesus.

That's his name. And don't tell me that isn't true. And I'm not talking about eternal life.

I'm talking about having more life in your little finger right now than you ever had in your whole body before you knew Jesus. I woke up one morning in downtown Manhattan, the Big Apple, and I wanted to go to church. It was Sunday morning, and I said, where does a guy go to church in this big old bad city? And I don't know why, it just, the impression came.

And I've never been an admirer. I've never read his book, anything. But it just hit me.

You know, there's a man here, I guess he's a legend in his own time, and it's the only one I can think of at that particular moment. I said, I want to go hear Dr. Norman Vincent Peale at the Marble Collegiate Church. I never heard him, I never read his book.

And I just had that compulsion, so I got a taxi and went down to Marble Collegiate Church, and I walked in, folk, that place was packed. Television cameras were on, and this old man walked out with his collar on backwards, and his specks hanging over the end of his nose, and he sat down, fumbling around with his Bible and his notes, waiting to get up, choir sang, he got up. He didn't look very good to me.

I thought, is that Mr. Positive Thinker himself? Boy, I tell you what, when he opened his mouth, I started feeling some life. You know what he said? He told us about leading a man to know Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and Lord on the streets of Manhattan that previous week. And I thought, does he do that? I didn't know he did that.

But he told about the man coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. And then he told us how we too could know Jesus, and he gave the Gospel. And then he told us how we could follow through in a full and meaningful life after we came to know him.

Boy, that was exciting. And then he told us something I'll never forget. He told us the ten most exciting years of his life.

He said, I'm going to tell you the ten most exciting years of my life, and I wondered, ooh, which ten? And he said, before I tell you, I wrote some letters to some folk and asked them to tell me the ten most exciting years of their life, and I have excerpts here I want to read to you from their responses. And he read a few, and one couple said, or one said the ten when I was in high school and college, dating and having fun. And somebody else wrote back and said, the ten after we got married and were having those little babies and getting started up in life.

And somebody else wrote back and said, the ten after we got rid of the kids. And somebody else wrote back and said, the ten after we retired and started traveling, and they'd made it ten years. And then he said, I want to tell you the ten most exciting years of my life.

He said, I'm 82, and the ten most exciting years are between 82 and 92. And he said, Ruth and I had a vacation last week, went to Phoenix. Had a marvelous vacation, really rested.

I did keynote one convention, he said. We had a marvelous vacation. I did write three chapters in my new book.

We had a marvelous vacation. I did prepare two new sermons. We had a marvelous vacation.

I thought, man, oh man, what does he do on a week when he works? That man had more life in his little finger than a lot of teenagers have in their whole body. And more than I had as a teenager. I mean, have

you noticed a lot of people today, they can't even talk, they can't even walk.

They say, hey man, how's it going, man? Ain't going no good for me, man. My old lady, my old man, this school, take your job and shove it. Got a lot of freaky Johnny Paychecks running around.

Don't have any life. And I think about a man like that, and I sit there with tears in my eyes. I said, God, I want to be like him.

I saw Jesus Christ in that man's life. I got a mom like that. I'm so proud of my mother.

She's 71, 72. I wish you could see her. She's built like a raised horse.

She moves like a raised horse. She started a new career in Columbia, South Carolina about seven years ago selling real estate. She don't know real estate's been bad, and I'm not telling her.

She's selling it like it's going out of style, listing it like it's going out of style. But she doesn't talk about making commissions. She just writes and says, oh, this precious couple came to town and the Lord had them in the office when they called.

She doesn't stay down there a lot, but she goes every day some. And she said, I was just there, and the Lord had me there. And they called, and they said, could you help us? And I prayed and said, God, lead me to the right house for them and the right financing where they can handle it.

And she said, God answered prayer, and they love it so much. And they have some friends now who are moving to Columbia, and they had their friends call me. And I said, Lord, lead me to find for them what they need.

And she said, oh, it's just wonderful, and she's helping here and helping there and helping here and helping there. You know, some of you haven't done one solid thing all week long for anybody else but you. And you've come to church this morning, and you're sitting on your blessed assurance.

You don't care if anybody goes to hell or anybody goes to heaven, anybody hurts, anybody's health. You don't care about that. You know, you don't have any life in you.

And God's so tired of you living like that. God is tired of you being dead. And He wants you to have life.

That's Jesus. So He says, now, today, hey, son, you don't have to be like you are. Hey, mister, you don't have to be like you are.

You can have Jesus and you can live. And I tell you, if there's no hell to miss and no heaven to enjoy, I'd want Jesus just for right here. He's enough right here.

God's excited about you coming alive today. I want to give you a third reason right quick. I know God had this in mind, the fact of influence.

Would you like to write that word down, just influence? I want to say two things quickly about influence. Number one, ladies and gentlemen, all of us are responsible for the influence we cast. Now, hear it.

We're responsible for our influence. I can help you or hurt you. I can be a blessing or a burden.

I can be a lifter or a load. I'm responsible for which I am. Jesus said, no man lives to himself, no man dies to himself.

You can't live by yourself. You can't die by yourself. Everything you do affects others.

Everything you don't do affects others. Jesus said, he that's not with me is against me. He said, he that's not gathering with me scattereth abroad.

There is no position of neutrality. Watch. My dad was lost.

My dad was a drunk. He never took me to church. He took me to the bar.

My dad would walk into the bar, put his right foot on the rail. I'd watch his every move. I'd put my right foot on the rail.

When he switched and put his left foot on the rail, I'd put my left foot on the rail. Little bitty guy. My dad smoked Lucky Strike cigarettes in the days of LSMFT.

That'll date you. And he smoked Bull Durham Roll Your Own. And when he would leave, I would go get a Lucky and stand in front of the mirror on my tiptoes so little I could hardly see in the mirror and look up in the mirror and see if I could hold it like my daddy.

I'd take a Bull Durham wrapper and some tobacco out of a little white bag and I'd put it in the wrapper and I'd try to roll it and lick it like my dad did. I wouldn't smoke it. I just tried to be like my daddy.

He drank Calvert's whiskey. He always left a bottle of Calvert's on the table beside his bed. And I'd go in there and pick up the bottle and stand on my tiptoes and look in the mirror and see if I could hold it like my daddy did.

I wanted to be like my dad. You know, my mom tried to talk to him. Oh, he said, I'm not hurting anybody but myself.

He was killing me. I grew up. God saved me.

I grew up and had a little boy. One son, five daughters. We've lived in a girl's dormitory all our lives.

Silk jungle. I walked upstairs one day, looked into his room, took a double take, couldn't believe what I saw. I caught him red-handed.

My son, standing in front of the mirror like I did. In his hand, he had a Bible. He was going like this.

Like this. I got tears in my eyes. Went off and got on my knees and said, thank you, Lord Jesus, for saving me.

For his sake. It wasn't a Calvert's whiskey bottle. You're responsible for your influence, mister.

Every day you stay away from Jesus, you cast a bad influence. And God wants you to come on into Christ today so you can be a blessing and not a burden. And I promise you, every day you stay away from him, out of fellowship with him, you're a curse to those you love best.

I got time to say the second thing I want to say about influence. Huh? Can I have three minutes? You're not only responsible for your influence, you're responsible for your response to influences around you. And I wish some of you just get in Jesus so you'd quit copping out on life.

Where'd you get all this junk? My old man, my old lady, man in this school, this town. You copped out all your life. You're just a big old cop-out, aren't you? Let me tell you something.

All you're ever going to be is a cop-out, blaming everybody for everything. When you come to Jesus Christ, and he gets into your life and gets control of your life, you will be a good influence. And you will be empowered to respond to any kind of influences around you, no matter how negative they are.

I didn't have to be a drunk like my dad. Jesus came into my life, and I didn't have to be a drunk. I could be a preacher.

Amen. But only by the power of Christ can you respond to influences around you that are negative. What I'm telling you is this.

In Jesus Christ, if you get him in your life, in him, you can make lemonade out of every lemon you get. And you don't have to spend your life being a lemon sucker. Have you noticed how many lemon suckers we got? All they do is go around saying, I got a lemon.

Suck that lemon. But you don't have to. In Jesus, you can take that lemon and squeeze it and make lemonade.

I know a fellow who did. He was sowing the Lord. Boy, he got a lot of lemons.

His brothers threw him in a pit. That's a lemon. He was sold to slave traders.

That's a lemon. The slave traders sold him to Potiphar to be a slave in his house. That's a lemon.

It's a handsome young man. One day Potiphar went on a long trip. Potiphar's wife had been fixing her gaze upon this young man, Joseph.

And when her husband was gone, she made her move. And Joseph didn't want to dishonor God or himself or his master or his master's wife. And so he fled.

That crazy, violent woman screamed, Rape! Rape! Rape! For the servants came, they grabbed him, they chained him, they threw him in a dungeon and held him for Potiphar to get home. When Potiphar got home, he locked him in the deepest cell he had. Another lemon.

Lemons. Lemons. Lemons.

Lemons! Hey, not one time in the whole Bible, in all the pages about Joseph, not one time do you see him sucking a lemon. Every time he got a lemon, he was sowing the Lord, that he squeezed it and made lemonade. And hey, God would cause somebody to see his commitment to the Lord.

God would cause somebody to see that commitment and he'd be promoted and God would take him right out of what he was in. And the last time you see him, he's on the throne of the Pharaoh feeding the whole world. And God wants you in Christ so you can give a good influence and respond rightly to influences around you.

And if you'll get Jesus in your life today, you won't ever have to go down to the red light and turn left. You can go down to the go light and turn left. I mean, you won't have to go to the stop light.

Have you noticed how many, how people give directions? How do you get there? You go down a second stop light. Why don't they call it a go light? It's green as much as it is red because they're negative. You know, even the newscasters are negative.

They always say, 20% chance of rain. I never heard one time one of them say, 80% chance of sunshine. Why? Negative.

I'm being silly, it's true, isn't it? A pessimist everywhere you go, churches are full of them. Somebody said a pessimist is a bird that's swallowing an egg. He's afraid to move for fear it'll break, afraid to stand still for fear it'll hatch.

That's a predicament to be in. And I want to tell you, sincerely, Jesus can change that. God wants you to live.

You're more impressionable now. God wants you to be a good influence, and God wants you to have the power within you in Christ to respond to influences around you. And I want to give you a fourth reason why this is your day, your day of salvation, your day to come back to God, your day to make things right with Him.

And listen, last time, last point, last reason, death. You're going to die. You're going to die.

Yes, you are. I told somebody this week, I called a friend of mine from the Atlanta airport, had him on my heart, called and visited with him on the phone. He said, hey, we're coming to see you at Sagamore Hill in Fort Worth, three weeks.

Oh, I said, great, we'll have fellowship. I'll clear it that night and we'll go out for dinner. He was bringing his wife and another couple, and we're going to have fellowship.

I continued my trip home, got on my connecting flight to Shreveport, had a long-distance call, and the phone said Bill died of a heart attack while I was traveling between Atlanta and Shreveport. Precious friend. Couldn't believe it, still in his 40s.

You're going to die. You're going to die. Yes, you're going to die.

The Bible says it's appointed on a man who wants to die. The Bible says there's a time to be born and there's a time to die. You have a birthday and you've got a death day.

It's coming, mister. You're not here to stay. Don't tell me you're here to stay.

I'm not here to stay. I was a youth revivalist a month or two ago. Seems like just that short a time.

Life is but a vapor. It appears for a little while and vanishes away. You notice that? Every year it flies by.

Have you noticed how it flies by a little faster every year? Boy, when you're five years old, you think Christmas next year will never come. You know why? Next year is one twentieth of your life. When you're five years old, a year is one fifth, one twentieth of your life.

Ah, but when you're fifty, a year is only one fiftieth of your life. Big difference. And every year it goes zip, zip, zip, zip, zip, zip.

And pretty soon you're gone. You're going to die. Hey, it's okay.

It's okay. Just be sure you die right. If I passed out little slips of paper, what would you put on the paper if I asked you, when are you going to die, choir? Everybody in the choir tell us how many years you got left.

Hey, young people, how many years you have left? How many years you have left? Everybody write down on the slip of paper, how many years? I know what you'd say. I really do. All the young people would say, well, I will live to a ripe old age, I'm sure.

I'll live to forty. When you're twenty years old, a forty-year-old is like an Egyptian mummy, pressed for time. You'll get it later.

And what do you forties say? You forties say you silly children. Forty is an old. Really, what's old, Mr. Forty? Sixty! Oh.

So you're going to live twenty more years. Hey, I smell some sixty-year-old hair burning, what there is left of it. What are you thinking, Mr. Sixty? Oh, I see.

Sixty's not old. What's old, sir? Eighty! Oh, really? Let's check with the eighties and see what they have to say. Do you know what they say? A lot of people live to be a hundred.

I think I'll make it. Everybody's going to live twenty years, but the truth is five people just died. And every time the clock ticks, somebody dies.

And you're going to die. It's okay. You die right.

Just be sure you die right. I grew up in south Louisiana, in the Cajun country. A lot of clover, bumblebee.

Hey, we boys would capture bumblebee, put them in a jar, watch them until we got tired. We'd take off our leather belts, moisten the inner portion of the belt, take the lid off, turn the bottle over, little bumblebee go crawling across the moistened portion of the leather belt, and it'd sting the belt! Pull his tail out, and the stinger stayed in the belt. We'd reach in there, we'd reach out and take the little bumblebee in our hand.

We'd go find a pretty little girl. And we'd say, look here, and she'd say, ooooh, you are so brave! We knew something she didn't know. We knew the stinger had been removed.

She didn't know that. Hey, O death, where is thy sting? Says the Bible. And what is the answer in the Scriptures? The sting of death is sin! Oh, but wait a minute, sir.

Two thousand years ago, God came from heaven to planet earth. God became a man. God was six feet tall.

God had brown hair, brown eyes. And God let cruel men take Him and nail Him to a cross. And the sting of sin came and stung Jesus.

And the stinger was left in Him. For all who come to trust Him is Lord and Savior. The stinger has been removed from the bumblebee of death.

And I happen to be one of those. And listen to me. I want to tell you, the bumblebee has no stinger left.

I cannot be stung. And if you ever hear that I died, forget it. It isn't true.

It's a false rumor. I did not die. I am not ever going to die.

I'm going to live forever. Jesus said, He that doeth the will of God abideth forever. Jesus said, They that live and believe on Me shall what? Never die.

You can't kill Me. I can't die. I got eternal life.

Thirty-five years ago it started. Thirty-five years ago and I've already used up thirty-five years of it. But it's okay.

It's eternal. I'll never die. I'll go out of sales to the home office.

But I'll just be promoted into management then. And I won't die. Well, I'll be watching my own funeral from above.

Somebody comes by and cares enough to say, He's dead. I'll say, No, I'm not dead. I've tried to tell you that for years.

It's wonderful to know you're not going to die. That's going right, folk. Let me wrap it up with this.

I'm through. Please hear it. Since you're going to die, die right, please.

I had a birthday. It was in Atlanta. Friends had a reception for me.

They had Betty Durham come and sing. It was a birthday reception. I never met Betty.

She was with the Atlanta Chorale. Her husband, very lost, very much a swinger, charmer, one of these guys that charms the birds out of the trees, came to check out the preacher party. Never heard of a preacher party.

Came to check out the Elmo Gantry. His name was Charles. Charles walked in.

The wallpaper started curling up. That guy was some kind of charmer. Every head turn.

Didn't notice Betty that much, but everybody noticed Charles. Strange thing happened. We all liked him.

Couldn't help but like a guy like that. Strange thing happened was that God made him like me, and he did not like preachers. He had a brother who was a preacher.

Never heard him preach. Wouldn't go. But God made him like me.

He stayed with me like glue. Every time I shook hands, I'd feel Charles up my side, and I'd have to introduce him to this person. Every time I moved to another room, Charles moved to the other room with me.

It got so bad after a while, I said, Come on, Charles. We're going in the next room. When that thing ended, he invited me to his home.

And I went and got to share with him a little bit. To Betty's amazement, the next morning, Sunday morning, when they got up, he said, Let's go hear that guy preach. When he picked her up off the floor, they got ready, and they came.

He came back that night. She was greatly amazed. We knew God was after him.

Six months later, I went to the Mount Vernon Baptist Church in North Atlanta just off Riverside Drive to preach. And that was Betty's church. They had her as the soloist for the week.

To be sure he wouldn't come, Charles set up a buyer's appointment every night, a dinner, to entertain a buyer. He had Rudy Farm Sausage. He had 167 salesmen and a lot of buyers coming in.

So he set up conflicts every night. He could not stay away from the meeting. He canceled every one of them and came and got behind the woman with the biggest hairstyle.

He'd look out and when I'd catch his eyes, he'd look back. He'd look out and when I'd catch his eyes, he'd look back. He was miserable all week long.

Sunday morning came. No decision on his part. Last service was leaving Sunday afternoon.

I said, oh God, this is it. This is God's, this is God's day of salvation for Charles. Oh Lord, let it be it.

I just feel it in my heart. I preached, I prayed. He didn't come.

I gave a little more invitation, he didn't come. I gave another stanza, he didn't come. I said, one more stanza just for you and he ducked and he didn't come.

I said, okay God, you don't have to run your train on my track. I just thought it would be today. I said goodbye.

I asked Betty to come and sing our theme song one last time. I sat down where Brother Sammy is. Betty stood and sang Abundant Life.

She got through a stanza, got into the second stanza and in the middle of it she stopped. I thought she'd forgotten the words and then I realized her face was focused on this side of the auditorium and I saw a couple of tears begin to trickle down her cheek. So I turned over there and Charles had gotten up from way in the back and was coming down the aisle against the wall, double time, really hurrying and I was petrified.

I mean, I was just so stunned. He walked across, he walked up those steps, he dropped to his knees right in front of that chair. He threw both arms around me and he said, oh my, thank God it's all over.

It's all over. And what he meant was the battle was over, the resistance was over and I dropped out of my chair and knelt with him and prayed for him and he prayed and committed himself wholeheartedly to Jesus Christ the Savior and Lord. We looked up and Betty was there.

Wow. She grabbed him, he grabbed her, they grabbed each other, they had a hug and cry and kiss and good time. She was on her knees, I was on mine, he on his.

When they got finished with each other, they grabbed me and I grabbed them and we did it again. We had a hug and cry and kiss and good time. You can imagine what it was like in church that morning.

It was beautiful. We became friends, very close friends. I never went through the Atlanta airport without Charles finding out my time of arrival and departure and he'd meet me there and we'd have fellowship together.

I gave him a family Bible. One night he called me at home. He said, Mike, this family Bible you gave us is beautiful.

These pictures of the Holy Land are beautiful. How does a fellow get there? I said, I don't know Charles, I've never been but I get information. I'll find out and pass it on to you.

I looked at some of the info I had and I got bitten by the bug. For the first time in my life, I really wanted to go to the Holy Land. So I called him back after a few days and I said, hey, we've begun to make our plans and to save our nickels and you get ready and we're going on a certain day.

The four of us went. Watch me. The four of us went.

Charles and I knelt in the empty tomb. We stood at Calvary. He said, Mike, is that where he died for me? I said, not for you, for us.

He said, oh yeah. He said, I'd like to pray here. We knelt and prayed, held hands, prayed together.

Betty sang The Stranger of Galilee out on the boat on the Sea of Galilee and I saw Charles put his head over the side of the boat and raise the water level a little bit with his tears. We had a fantastic night, an exciting time. No rest.

We were exhausted when we got home. It's not a vacation. It's just raw excitement.

A few days later, I felt great. He called me. He said, how do you feel? I said, great.

He said, I don't. I'm not feeling well. I'm not coming out of it.

I think I'm going to get a checkup. I said, good idea. He called me back.

He said, doctor doesn't like some symptoms that he saw and wants to run some tests. I prayed for him. They ran some tests.

He called me back. He said, doctor sees some things very disturbing. It may call for surgery.

The bottom line is, folk, they cut him open. He was full of black melanoma, head and neck. I went to see him.

They did another surgery. I went to see him. Shortly after I returned, Betty called.

It only lasted a few weeks after that. Betty called and said, Mike Charles has gone to the holy, holy land without us. And he left two messages for you.

And I said, what did he say? He said, honey, you call Mike and tell him that he beat me to Jesus, but I beat him to heaven. He was a competitor. And he said, you tell him when he gets there, I'll be ready to take him on tour.

How are you going to help him like a guy like that, huh? And then he said, ask him if he'd preach my funeral. If he can't, I'll understand. And I said, I can't, but I will.

And I did. And I got to tell you this. This is what I want to tell you about, folk.

When I got there, we wore more color in those days than we do now, but I went to the funeral home and he was lying in that casket and he had on a red coat and a red tie with a white shirt and white pants and white shoes and he had a red Bible in his hand and a big smile on his face. I looked at him and I said, Charles, you're not dead, are you? And he said, no way. Well, I think he said that.

Little old Melissa was nine years old. She has twisted legs. I picked her up and carried her in front of the casket down the aisle and put her in Betty's lap.

I got up and preached. I cried a little bit. It was beautiful.

I'm going to give an invitation. I gave an invitation. Little Melissa came hobbling out of her mother's lap.

She can hobble a little bit and she came hobbling to me like this. She threw herself in my arms and said, Uncle Mike, I want to give my heart to Jesus and be a Christian like my daddy. Oh man, I heard Charles say, Hallelujah! Excuse me, choir.

No, he wouldn't have said that. He was a Baptist. He would have said, Amen.

But he said something. Henry came. Henry was his leading salesman.

Henry was saved. Owner of the Big Apple Chain there in Atlanta came. He wanted to be saved.

Said Charles had witnessed to him. Man, talk about a guy being alive at his own funeral. I heard, Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! He's having a party up in heaven watching his own funeral.

Don't you know that? Since you gotta go, that's the way to go. And you may go awful soon. Let's bow our heads, please.

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