

The Sutera Life Story

by Ralph Sutera

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being born again and living a life of faith, and warns against the dangers of spiritism and witchcraft.

Duration: 1:15:53

Scripture: John 3:2

Topics: "Testimony"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of knowing Christ in one's heart and life, rather than just having head knowledge or engaging in religious practices. He challenges the audience to not substitute religion, goodness, or churchianity for a genuine relationship with God. The preacher also shares a personal story about two eight-year-old boys who were prone to fighting but were miraculously transformed after accepting Christ. He highlights the significance of surrendering one's life to God and experiencing forgiveness of sins. The sermon concludes with an invitation for those who have not yet received Christ to do so and for backslidden Christians to seek a deeper level of spiritual life.

Transcript

It's all a lifestyle, and I said you might as well enjoy it because we have fun doing it. No animosity there. We know that God has uniquely put this ministry together, and we thank him for it.

So if you kind of think that he's really hard on me, he really is. You need not fear that, but it's a delight to be able to serve the Lord together. Now what was I saying, Lou? All about tomorrow night.

I just really believe that everybody who's been in the prayer room or has responded even where you've been seated, you really owe it to yourself to be here tomorrow night. It is an inspirational hour as well as an informative hour. And I really believe some of the basic things, and I will end that message tomorrow night with what I believe is the bottom line ingredient.

And we here have heard so many things happen. Now what does it all boil down to in one concise concept? And that's the way I'm going to be ending. Yes, Lou? There's one series of tapes that I wish tomorrow night, and if you can't be here tomorrow night, order them.

Call in. Ralph gave a series on spirit-filled witnessing. Four tapes, four hours' worth on what is spirit-filled witnessing, coming off of last night's message on how to have a compassion for lost souls.

Four tapes. He's only done it once in our ministry, and as if God said, do it once, get it on record, and it's gone around the world, and right now it's used as a text in the class of evangelism in London Baptist Theological Seminary in London, Ontario. The professors got their hands on it, and it's a required study, those four tapes.

And in relation to where God wants to take us in these days, having said that, I say this, to the glory of God, I understand that we have had the joy in these days of having at least 800 people fill decision cards in the prayer room in these three weeks. 800. Now that doesn't even relate to the people that have gotten right with God in the pews.

Remember nights we've all gotten right with God here? And Sunday mornings in churches. That doesn't relate to that. Just what, on the nights that we've given invitations to the prayer room, praise the Lord, amen? To God be the glory.

Now in our Bibles, turn together to St. John. St. John chapter 3. St. John chapter 3. We believe this ministry is Bible-based, and so is that which God has done for us personally as a family. There is a perfect example of it in this beautiful story.

St. John chapter 3. I would encourage all of you to listen closely. If you do not have a Bible, just listen as we read, and keep your heart open to what God has said. There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

The same came to Jesus by night and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, he must be born again. It is a divine imperative, it is not an option from the lips of our blessed Savior, it is a divine imperative.

No choice, that is to say, whether or not we want to be born again, it's a must, if we're ever going to see the kingdom of God or enter it. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? If I can translate that into our language, Art thou not such a devout religious leader, and knowest not these things? If I can translate it further, Art thou not such a man, who doth go to church every Sunday, and has the doctrine right, and all of it straightened out, and yet you do not understand these things? And that was true. Here was the religious leader who did not understand the basic ingredient that was necessary to see or to enter the kingdom of God. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, verse 11, We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness.

If I have told you earthly things and ye believe them not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man

which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. And whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

And this is the condemnation, that light is coming to the world. And men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Dear Lord, I pray that as I share this truth and our testimony, thou wilt minister to each one of us in such a way that each one of us here today who will leave this building without being absolutely assured that he knows he is passed from spiritual death into spiritual life and knows that he has been born again by thy Holy Spirit and will thank thee and praise thee for it.

In Christ's name we ask it for his sake. Amen. One reason why I love this portion of Scripture with our life story is because it is symbolic of what our family was like.

Our family was a very devout, we had all the religion a family could want and then some. As a family that was used to spaghetti and meatballs and lasagna and pizza pie, you can understand that we readily had a Roman Catholic background. Now if we were Swedes or Norwegians we would probably say let us share with you how Christ became real to us in the midst or even while we had a Lutheran background.

You see, I'm suggesting to you that being born into an Italian family is exactly the way it happened. As a devout, sincere family that's the way it happened. Now I say that to remind all of us this afternoon that as we share a life story it is not to praise a church or down another.

It is not merely to try to pick anyone apart. Rather a recognition and a sharing with you how it was in our family. It is different.

And I want you to keep that as a frame of reference. And if as we share this testimony today that if you are here and you have had or do have the same background we have had and you would love to talk over anything I'm sharing today feel free to see us. We'd be just delighted to share with you out of our hearts how this became a reality to us so that you too can have a frame of reference.

You see this portion of scripture is the story of Nicodemus that religious leader of the Jews. Our dad was a very religious devout man. In fact in his life he looked forward to the day that his twin boys would act as altar boys in the front of the church.

Now that would be unique would it not? Twin boys, altar boys in the front of the church. But even more than that it was because of the devoutness of our father and our family relationship to religion. Our dad's religious devoutness up against anybody in this meeting and I would dare say that nine and a half out of every ten of you would lose.

We would walk 13 long blocks through the days of the week to go to the church school the same distance on Sunday to go to the mass and go to the church. We were not on the outs with the church we were on the ins with the church. In fact there was a time in dad's life when he and our uncle had a real genuine concern of experiencing as if things were loosening up as far as theological truth in the church was concerned.

We were not on the outs with the church. That is important for us to note. Sometimes people think oh they were a renegade family and that's why they are no longer in that religious system today.

No that was not it at all. God used in our family a series of illnesses to bring us to the place of knowing Christ as Lord and Savior. He turned to this rich ruler and he said to him Nicodemus unless a man is born again he can never see the kingdom of God.

And then he turned a second time and he said except a man is born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God. Did you notice the emphasis on both of those different words? That is very important to me. And you might think they are one and the same but I would like to suggest that there could even be a deeper meaning in why Christ might have said it in that way.

That is the idea that Christ was saying to all of us. And let me suggest to you that when Christ said except a man be born again he was not merely talking to Nicodemus at that very moment. But he was using what is known as the generic form of speech.

Literally meaning that as he was speaking to one man who was in his presence he was proclaiming a statement of truth that is typical and important for the entire universe of man and every man in the same category and every one of us. And what God said to Nicodemus literally comes down the corridors of time right into this room today and God is saying except a man except every man in this meeting be born again he will never see the kingdom of God nor will he enter the kingdom of God. Now I said why did he say see the kingdom of God and then why did he say enter the kingdom of God? I like to believe it this way he will never really see the true nature of God's kingdom.

His eyes will be absolutely blinded as to what really are the ingredients that make up God's kingdom. He may have all the religious doings proper and in right order but for the reason of not being born again that will still leave him as absolutely with blindfolds over his heart and mind as to what is the true essence of the kingdom of God. And then he says he will never enter the kingdom of God.

You see Jesus reminded us when he said except if a man try to enter into the sheep fold except through the gate he is as a thief and a robber. And a few verses later in the book of Saint John he said I am the door by me if any man enter in he shall be saved. Reminding us of what Saint Paul writes in the book of Acts where he said neither is there salvation in any other for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved except the name Jesus.

Well a man said to his friend he said when is your birthday? And his friend said which one? Well he said what do you mean which one? Well he said I have two. He said I was born in New York in 1929 and I was born in San Francisco of the Spirit of God in 1948. Which one are you talking about? If you have been born only once you will die twice.

If you have only been born of your parents you will die twice. You will die physically back to the dust from whence you came and then you will die spiritually and eternally totally separated from God throughout all eternity. But if you have been born twice you will die only once.

If you have been born of your parents physically and that is quite evident. And then born spiritually born of God's Holy Spirit you can be born of water and of the Spirit. He cannot enter the Kingdom of God.

The spiritual life of God flooding my heart. If that has never happened if you have never had two births if you have not been born twice if you have only been born once you will die twice. But if you have had that

second birth where you have been born again you will die only once.

Physically your body will go back to the dust from whence it came and you will be throughout all eternity in the presence of God rejoicing around the throne of God about everything the Bible talks about eternal salvation and eternal heaven. Everyone in this meeting is in one of those two categories. There is no such thing as a neutral zone.

There is no in-between place. I'm either saved or I'm lost. I'm either God's child or I'm a child of the devil.

I'm either right with God or I'm wrong with God. I'm either ready to die or I'm not ready to die. And could I say this? That no man is ready to die no man is ready to live until he is ready to die.

And no man is ready to live or die until he can say he knows that he is right with God and ready to meet God. If he were to lay his head in the pillow of death and breathe his last breath right now he is ready to meet God. That's the essence of it.

Well, here's our family. We had all the religion to the place that God had to work in such an unusual way. He used a series of illnesses to bring us to the place of personal salvation.

As our oldest brother was born into the world mother began to suffer. Suffered for 12 years without being able to eat a good meal almost choking to death on food. Several disorders all at the same time.

Five children were born into the family and all of us as five children were on diets, doctor's care and specialist care as we were just young just beginning to grow up. Dad had to go on relief to make ends meet because of the tremendous strain of Dr. Bill's diets and specialist care and I don't want to take the time to talk about the family. Naturally as a sick family we sought help every way we could find it.

Went to the doctors and did everything we could do that way. Went to the church, said prayers lit candles, made novenas the station of the cross. We would have relatives praying.

We did everything we knew to do religiously and yet no relief come. It was all a part of the plan that God had to bring our family together in a very unusual and unique manner. It was in that state of physical illness that it was recommended to us that we go to a woman that was suggested to us as a very saintly woman.

Here is a woman who used a copy of the Bible. Here is a woman who said prayers. Go to her, share your ills with her and I'm sure she'll be able to find a solution.

Men and women, the devil knows how to dress himself up as an angel of light and we must be very aware of his devices. He knows how to use certain portions of the scripture and distort what God is saying. We must be aware of his devices and certainly how we must be alert in these last days.

But here is a woman. We'd go to her farm where she lived. A woman who was supposed to have real powers with God.

We as young children we'd go out and play with the animals in the field, in the farm. And I'll never forget as one day she came out to the field where we were and she put her arms around one of my sisters and she squeezed her tight to herself and she said, you're my child, you're my child and my sister hollered and screamed and tried to get out of her grip and mother and dad couldn't understand why we reacted in such a way as young children. That woman would give mother a piece of cardboard that came right off of her

farm that she had worked in magical powers in her own prayer life.

And in that solution mother was to be drinking into her system the very cure for our family's ills physically. The mother and dad would tell her of their ills. She would say now you just wait here I'll go out on the hillside I'll talk to my God and I'll come back and tell you exactly what to do.

When you go to sleep at night it will be the charm that will break the sickness and the spell of all the illness in your home and in your family. Mother and dad earnestly believed her. Anyone who said prayers read a bible like that certainly must be giving us the truth.

And so mother did it exactly as she was told to do. We as young children became very abnormal. You say well did that change? For some of us it did.

We would see all sorts of weird things at night. Coffins against the wall in our sleep and dreams. Animals about to leap at us alive.

We'd get up in the middle of the night hollering and screaming and carrying on. You say that's not abnormal for young children. It became a very abnormal situation when five children began to carry on like that night after night after night when that kind of thing was not a part of the lifestyle previously.

What was happening? Now there was a contact in spiritism, in witchcraft and we were not even aware of what was taking place. Could I also put it in the form of beware. Beware of all the Ouija board business across this country.

Beware of all that which causes you to speak to the spirits of the dead of those who've gone on before you. Beware of that which causes you to look into the future and try to predict what the future is. You say, isn't that a hoax? Isn't that a fake? I know some of it is a hoax, some of it is a fake, but the majority of it is not a hoax, it's not a fake, but it's literally the influence and impact of individuals who have sold themselves over to Satan to do that which is not convenient for your life and mine.

The same way we claim that power of God is power into a contact of spiritism and witchcraft. The people I'm talking about have power to take hair, pronounce curse on hair, and see that which they pronounce come to pass. Power to take pictures, pronounce a curse on a picture, and see that which they pronounce come to pass.

That was the kind of thing that now our family became involved in in our relationships of what we have already been hearing today about the importance of prayer. We had one second aunt who was the only real, born-again, genuine believer who knew that she had been born of God's Holy Spirit who was praying for us. She would come to our home and Dad would say, Aunt, you can come here and eat and drink and have a good time, but don't talk that religion stuff around here.

Dad would run her out. And Dad would run her out again. She continued that way 22 years.

How long have you been praying for your unsaved loved ones? 22 years before God heard and answered that prayer. And I have the idea when I see a sight like we're in tonight, I just wonder if that second aunt may be looking down over the battlements of heaven and looking in on the scene tonight. 22 years.

The next time she came, her family was genuinely born again of God's Holy Spirit. How did it all happen? She was praying. Then, one day, a Jehovah's Witness lady walked into our home.

She had a copy of a book they offer people all over the country and a copy of a Bible in her hand. Mother said to the woman, Ma'am, what do you have that you can offer me that can help my family? We have a sick family. What can you do for our family? I'm sure that if you'll get this Bible out and begin to read it, you'll find the answer to whatever your family needs.

Well, that was good advice. And let me make it clear so nobody misunderstands. Way back there, God was sparing our family from the false cults of Russellism and Jehovah's Witnesses as we know them today.

But it was that contact with that woman that made Mother curious enough to go into the attic and get the Bible down from the attic that had been given to our granddad by a Jewish friend and is now collecting dust in the attic. Now, that's some combination, isn't it? And Mother got the Bible down and began to read it. Why was it in the attic? Because when we were in Romanism in the 1930s as a family, we were not encouraged to read the Bible.

In fact, we were encouraged not to read the Bible. If you don't read it properly, it could be a very harmful book. Therefore, you are a better Romanist, a better religionist if you leave the reading and interpreting up to us.

That's why it was a closed book because we were so devout in our religion. But at that very point, Mother got it down and said, after all, what can I lose? The Church says it was founded on the Bible. I've tried everything else.

We've said prayers. I don't want anybody to know she was reading. Mother read almost one book of the Bible every day in secret, earnestly, hungry, searching, trying to find what God was saying about how something could happen in our family.

Do you know what, men and women? Sure you know. There's power in this book. And God began to speak to Mother's heart through this book.

Mother read the writings of St. John and said, Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No man will ever get to God, the Father, unless he comes by me, said Jesus. Well, Mother said, that's strange.

I've been taught that the Church is the way and the Church is the truth and the Church is the life and no man will get to God, the Father, unless he joins Mother Church. You say, is that what you were taught? Of course it's what we were taught. In the very Latin words themselves, Mother continued to read.

She read the writings of St. Paul where St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy, said, St. Timothy, there's God up in heaven and there's one mediator between God and man. Man here, God there. And that mediator is the man Christ Jesus.

Mother said, if that's true that Christ is the mediator between me and God, then why must I go to share my sins to another man and tell my sins to a priest so that he can judge whether or not I'm worthy to be forgiven for my sins? And some of our relatives often would say to us in the past, they'd say, well, how do you get your sins forgiven if you don't go to the priest anymore? How do you get your sins forgiven? And I suggest something very candidly. Well, I did not say that we don't go to the priest anymore. We just change priests.

That's all. You say, well, where do you go now? Where does he live? And I said, we now go to the one that I love the most. And seeing then, we have a great high priest, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who has passed into heaven, and now, thank God, I love about the one I go to now, he was tempted in all points as we are, yet he was without sin.

Why stop with anything short of the great high priest? That's what my Roman Catholic Bible told me. And then it also went on to say, let us come to him to the throne of mercy with confidence. Some of our Bibles say boldly, with boldness.

But the Douay version that we read said with confidence. And you know, that was exciting to us, because we began to see that there was one thing that Dad never had any confidence about, and that was going to the confessional. And yet, the Bible says let us come to the throne of grace with confidence, boldness.

Knowing that there is grace in the time of need, God is there to minister to us. So, God began to show us that, and show Mother these things. Mother read St. Paul where St. Paul wrote and said, for to be absent from this body means to be present with the Lord.

And Mother thought to herself, well I'm taught that to be absent from this body means to go to a place of burning, a place of purgatory, a place where St. Thomas Aquinas said, the fires of purgatory are no different from the fires of hell. The only difference is the fires of purgatory will one day come to an end, but the fires of hell are forever and ever. But they are just as hot in purgatory as they are in hell.

No wonder when our loved ones would pass away there would be such weeping and wailing and groaning because we had to visualize our loved one in a burning place of purgatory. Just as hot as hell. And Mother read where St. Paul said, to be absent from this body means to be present with the Lord.

And Mother began to recognize that what God was saying to her through the blessed saints as they recorded the words was contrary to that which she had lived by as a devout Christian. A devout person. And there came a day as a result of the reading of God's word.

And let me suggest as I've often told people with our same background when some will say, what one piece of advice do you think is the best to give to anybody with your background? If it were one piece of advice, here it is. Take your Bible and begin to read it for yourself. What God says to you.

You see, Jesus reminded us of the importance of that where he said in his first illustrated sermon to the world after he came out of that point at the point of being tempted by the devil he turned and he said, man shall not live by bread alone but by what? Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The importance of making sure I know what the words are the living word and the written word and as a result of mothers reading the Bible faith was imparted in her heart. Saint Paul says, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Faith was stimulated. One day when all of us were out of the house in the simplicity of childlike faith mother looked up and said, God, I haven't eaten a good meal in 12 years. My children are as sick as can be.

We've been on diets, doctors care, specialists care and on and on. Mother began to tell God all about it. Mother looked up and said, God, I've gone to the church.

I've said prayers. I've made candles. Mother told God that she'd gone to this one, gone to this one, to the other one, and yet no relief.

To believe what God said, that Christ was the way. Mother looked up and said, God, from now on I'm going to trust Thee and trust Thee alone for my salvation and for our family. And mother said as she looked up and said, God, from now on I'm going to trust Thee and trust Thee alone.

Mother said, I felt something begin to roll within my being and before I knew it, hallelujah rolled off of my lips. I was not used to that in my worship. I was used to going to the church where the priest would do the priesting, the altar boys would do the altering, the choir would do the singing and we would sit reverently by and worship.

But mother said, for the first time in my life I had come into an awareness that God had become alive in my life. I'd made contact with heaven. The assurance of heaven filled her soul that there was a divine transaction that had taken place.

We did not know what had taken place. The next day mother said, children, what would you like for breakfast this morning? We'd never heard that in our life. What do you think we ordered? Spaghetti? We waited until dinner to get that.

But we put a good order in for breakfast. Mother said, children, now let's bow our heads, close your eyes, we're going to pray today. We're going to pray differently.

We would never touch any food without prayer. We were too religious to touch food without prayer. We would cross ourselves in the sign of the crucifix and say the prayers.

But mother said, we're going to pray differently today. Bow your heads, close your eyes. Mother looked straight up and mother began to pray.

God, I haven't eaten a good meal in 12 years. My children are sick as can be. We've gone to this one, we've gone to the other one.

We've done this, we've done this. And when she got finished, she prayed this way, and Lord, bless this food to our bodies. And she prayed, then Lord, and let us eat.

Bless this food to our bodies and let us eat. What happened? That was the beginning of miracle days in our family. The problem is we've been eating good meals ever since.

And none of us have had a problem with being undernourished. We do fight another battle. It's called the battle of the bulge.

Merely to say that God began His work in such a divine way. Let me just tell you some of the things that happened. God saw fit to undertake for Lou when he had a condition of Master Order of the Year when specialists in New York City said only surgery would save the hearing in one ear.

God completely undertook without the use of surgery. Grandmother was delivered of sugar diabetes which turned into gangrene. Specialists said she'd have to have her foot cut off or else gangrene would go through her system and kill her.

God completely undertook that gangrenous infection burst and she lived to her dying day, able to walk to her dying day. As a testimony to the power of God, able to deliver. Grandfather was delivered of a heart murmur when specialists in Brooklyn, New York said only surgery would give him a 50-50 chance to live.

God completely undertook without the use of surgery. Mother was delivered of tumors that came out of her system without a doctor's knife. See, the rest I could believe, this I cannot.

Neither could a Jewish specialist in Elizabeth, New Jersey believe. Mother went and told him what had happened. He said, Lady, you're crazy.

You're off your rock or there's something loose upstairs. You need to go for a ride. Mother did go for a ride.

She went back home, got the tumors which were at home in a bottle of alcohol as testimony to the fact of what I'm saying was so. Went back to the specialist, said, Here, doc, look for yourself. That doctor had no time for God or anything religious.

He tipped his sword and his eyes were as big as marbles as it truly was a miracle from the hand of Almighty God. No doctor's knife has ever touched these tumors. God saw fit to cause mother to pass them right through her system and completely deliver.

You say, you mean you believe that God can touch the body as well as the soul? Of course He can. If I deny that, I deny my own existence, deny the existence of our family. You say, well, why did God do it? You believe God always works that way? No, I don't believe He always works that way.

I believe God has uniquely given us the skilled hands of physicians and surgeons and medical care to aid the needs of mankind. And if you talk about God-given genius, I never cease to marvel at the way God gives men and women the ability to be able to handle the human body. That's God-given blessing to every single one of us.

But in this situation, it was as if God was saying to us by what He was doing that I want to show you living signs in your family especially being you're a family that is used to all of the externals of religion. We equated reality and religion to the externals. The images, the idols, the scapular medals, the incense, the beautiful stained glass and the beautiful cathedrals, and that was reality.

All of the externals. It was as if God was saying, now I want to show you living signs of who I really am. And also when our relatives would come up against us and would seek their utmost to discourage us and to persecute us for that which God had done in our family, it was the evidence of those living signs that could never be denied and cause mother and dad to be able to stand up for what God had done in our home and in our family.

That was the way God saw fit. That was the plan He took in our family to make it that much more real as to what had happened in mother's life. Well, mother and my aunt made their way to an evangelical service.

Mother wanted to find out what was this thing that happened to her. Went into an evangelical service, heard a man preaching the gospel, gave the invitation for people to respond, and mother recognized that the very thing that man was talking about, a personal living relationship with Jesus Christ, was the very thing she'd experienced in her own home that week before. As the opportunity was given, mother made her way forward and came to the front of the church and got on her knees and made a public profession of her faith in Jesus Christ.

My aunt walked out of that service never again to be into an evangelical service to this day. It's over 40 years later. The difference between our families is as the difference was between Lot and Abraham in the Bible.

One responded God's way and received the blessing and the other went his own way and suffered thereafter. And in this situation, one family has known the blessing of God in so many ways and the other family sorrow, sickness, tragedy, and death through the years. But what happened when mother came home and told dad that she had made a public profession of her faith in Christ in an evangelical service? Keep in mind I'm talking about the 1930s.

When at that point it was absolutely considered a mortal sin for any one of our faith to be found in any other church but our own church. Mortal sin, punishable by death, not even purgatory, punishable by hell alone unless that was dealt with. But what happened when mother came home and told dad what she had done? Dad was literally furious.

He was fit to be tied. Very much contrary to him by nature. Fit to be tied.

He could not stand his religion being affected. Could not stand his grocery business being affected. Of all the Italian trade, what is everybody going to say? What is the whole family going to say? He could not stand it.

Dad was furious. Literally pots and pans began to fly. You can't appreciate that.

You'd have to be as devout as our dad was and an Italian on top of it. Not suggesting that he had a temper because he was Italian. Some do.

But our dad was a very mild-mannered man. In fact, when people know our dad then take a look at us, they just say, what happened? And that's true. He passed away just two years ago.

A very godly man. Greatly admired and loved in the Lord. But touch his religion, that's what I'm talking about.

As devout and Italian religionist, that he could not cope with. Well, what happened? Mother would make her way to prayer meeting on prayer meeting night. Dad would have to take her to the church and then have to pick her up.

Mother would get a hold of one of the men after the prayer meeting, come on outside, say a word to my husband, he's outside waiting for me. Good evening, Mr. Sotero, it's a beautiful evening tonight. But it's much more beautiful if you can say, thank God, I know all my sins are forgiven.

Good night. Sunday morning, dad would take mother to church and then he would go to the mass, he'd come pick up mother, mother would get a hold of the pastor, come on outside, say a word to my husband, he's outside waiting for me. Good morning, Mr. Sotero, it's a beautiful day today.

Much more beautiful when you can say, thank God, I know if this were to be my last day in the world, I'd go straight to heaven. Good morning, good day. What a combination, what a combination.

Dad carrying on like a tiger at home, the people praying faithfully at church, and every time dad would come to pick up mother at church, somebody else would give him another shot in the arm. How do you win? It was all a part of God's plan. God's love in our dad's life.

Dad got so mean and ornery, he turned to mother and he said, I can't stand the disgrace, I'm going to leave you with the five children, I'm leaving, I'm not standing the disgrace on my family name, on my business, on the church. He was ready to leave mother with five children and they were all under age ten. What did mother say? Well, I'd better forget about what I've experienced.

Thank God that God gave mother the right answer and the courage to be able to say it. Turned to dad and said, Dad, as much as I love you, if it means you're leaving me with the five children, I'll still take the five children and Jesus. And she stood right there.

Dad continued to carry on like a tiger. During this period of time, God saw fit to bring my grandmother to Christ, grandfather to Christ, and after dad's conversion, one of the most amazing miracles of the new birth that I can ever talk about, the conversion of a great grandfather when he was 85 years of age and went singing into the arms of Jesus, a real born again believer at the age of 92. What about dad? He got so mean, so ornery over the whole situation and yet there was enough European, Italian blood in him to hold him at home.

Love for the family. He turned to mother and said, Mother, what can I do to prove to you that I love you in spite of what you're doing to me? And again, you can't appreciate that. Mother turned and said, Well, there's only one peace pipe left and that's go to church with me.

Well, if that's what it must take, I'll take a Thursday night. That's when they have Bible study and that's when they meet in the basement of the church. It's not like going into the main sanctuary upstairs.

And you go in first and you sit down and after that service gets started, I'll sneak in the back row and before it gets finished, I'll sneak out so nobody will say anything to me. Well, dad started out with good intentions. Walked into that meeting that night and he began to listen to a man share the reality of the living God.

You can know that your sins are forgiven. You can know that if this were to be your last night in the world, you could lay your head in the pillow of death and know that you're ready to meet God. You can know that.

You don't have to be a slave to that sin anymore. You can be absolutely set free from all of that. And my dad kept saying to himself, well, I promised the priest and the confessional on Sunday morning that I would try a little harder this week to get over some of those habits I've had.

Here's the man saying, you can be set free. You can be delivered. You can know that Jesus Christ lives right within you.

You know that was so important for dad to hear? Well, we had been raised in religion that told us that Christ was in the mass box in the front of the church. And that's why the cathedral is such a sacred place because Christ is in the mass box in the front of the church. And the closest we could ever really get to Him would be the altar rail down in front.

And that's where the communion would be served. That's as close as we could get to Him. The priest and the altar boys could get closer, but that's as close as we could ever get.

That's why there's such reverence for the cathedral. It houses the body of Christ Himself in that mass. Now here's a man saying, you can know that Jesus is not only near you or around you, but He lives inside of you.

And he shared that from the Word of God. That night, when the invitation was given, my dad forgot where the exit sign was. Instead, he was the first one to raise his hand for prayer.

And he got down on his knees in the front of the basement of that church and guess how he prayed? He prayed, God, will you please give me what my wife has? Please give me what these people have. I have been religious all of my life. I want to know now that the life of God fills my heart.

Who are we talking about? We are talking about a man who was religiously devout, morally clean, baptized, confirmed church member who did everything he knew to do. And you know what it was? God was saying to him, God was saying to him what He's saying to us tonight, right here now. He's saying this, that your morality can keep you out of jail, but it will never keep you out of hell.

It takes the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, to cleanse us from all of our sin. And if you've never entered into that relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ, you can be as devout as any man has ever been. You can have a perfect Sunday school record with all the ribbons or with all the chains or whatever you may have and yet be eternally lost.

And may I say very sincerely, I don't know of any more tragic way than to slide into hell than to do it by way of a church pew and a baptismal fount or pool or a church membership and moral decency. Being so close to being saved and yet not being saved. Depending on your own righteousness, depending on your own religiosity, depending on your own morality, and never opening your heart to receive Christ personally as your Lord and Savior.

That night, Dad opened his heart and received Christ and entered into the verse that Saint Paul says, Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. See, Dad had been in the church. But that doesn't make a man a new creation.

It doesn't make a bit of difference which church it is. People often say to us, Which is the church that you think is the right church? Which is the church that you think saves? Which church saves? And the answer to that is very simple. No church saves.

God's plan of salvation is not confined to the four walls of anybody's church. It's Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God who makes all the difference. Dad had all the religion in the hand, all the doctrine that he thought was right, but all the reality of a living Christ who becomes real to the inner life.

That's what we're talking about, being saved. Well, when Dad got up off his knees, spring in his step, the joy of salvation in his soul, the assurance of heaven was his, and as such, a desire to share that with as many people as possible. Within the first year after Dad's conversion to Christ, he personally was responsible for bringing over 300 Italian people into an evangelical service.

He'd be a grocer every day, taking orders and inviting all of his customers to come to be in his church on Sunday. And I still have a mental picture of Dad standing at the front steps of the church on Sunday evenings, Sunday after Sunday, waiting for another customer to come from Brooklyn, New York, or from New York City, or from somewhere in New Jersey where the store was in New Jersey at that time, waiting for a customer to sit with him in church on Sunday night. Many of them he led to the Lord.

After that period of time, God saw fit to touch Dad's life at a deeper level. Mother and Dad found themselves ministering to Italian Roman Catholic people that they had the privilege of leading to Christ. In fact, Dad would get his sermons in the back of the grocery store.

A grocer every day, and a preacher almost every night. You talk about tasty sermons, highly spiced and seasoned in flavor. He would be getting his sermon with his Bible open, and he'd drop some of that olive oil on a certain page.

And then some of those other cold cuts would kind of drip on there, and God would give him the Word in the back of that grocery store. And oh, how he memorized the Scripture. It became such a part of his life.

The reality of the living God absolutely changed. Within one week's time, Dad could not stand the smell of another cigarette when he had smoked almost two packs of cigarettes a day ever since he was a young man. Completely delivered from all those old fleshly habits as well.

You say, well, can a man be a Christian and smoke? I don't know whether he can or not. But I know this, the kind of salvation I'm talking about tonight and the kind of deliverance that God has for you tonight is enough that it's able to deliver you from all of those old bondages of the flesh. God's able to do it for you.

He's able to set you free. Just surrender totally to His will and to His way in your life. And Dad was completely changed.

What about Lou? We were five children in the family at the time. We fought like cats and dogs. Lou and me.

Mother never told us which one was the cat or which one was the dog. I know. We had a line down the center of our bed.

You couldn't see it, but we could see it. It was there. If he got that much of his elbow over the line, we were in for an all night fight.

You talk about being jealous of each other. Once in a while, we have some people come up to us and they look at us and they say, my, I wish I had twins. And under our breath, we say, ma'am, you don't know what you haven't missed.

You ought to talk to our mother about that. We were the ultimate, the epitome of jealousy. We constantly were fighting with each other.

If the little young lady friend we played with on the street winked at him a little nicer than she winked at me, I'd give him a black eye so she wouldn't want to wink at him again. You don't know how nice he looked with a black eye. Constantly fighting.

Just think of the worst in eight year old boys and then look at him. How many eight year olds are here? How many are eight years of age? That's the best age to be. Thanks so much.

Because that was the age, boys and girls, that was the age when mother sat us on her knee and told us that God loved us and Christ died for us. And that if we would ask him to come into our hearts, he would even put love in our hearts and even put enough love in our hearts to make us want to love our twin brother. I knew that was impossible.

You can laugh, you don't know how mean he was. And there that night, as eight year old boys, we would sing that chorus, come into my heart, come into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus. We would get finished and mother would say, sing it again boys.

And we would sing, come into my heart, come into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus. We would get finished and mother would say, sing it again boys. And we would sing, come into my heart, come into my heart, come into my heart.

It seemed like we sang it a hundred times that night to eight year old boys. Mother wanted to make sure he was in. And then we would sing it one more time, sing it again boys.

And we would sing, come into my head, come into my head, come into my head. Whoops. You say, Ralph, don't insult our intelligence.

We heard you the first time, don't need to repeat it. It may be an insult to your intelligence, but I dare say that in a congregation this size, there could be a good number of people that all you have ever done is let Jesus Christ come into your head. You have the doctrines straight and your morals straight and your morality is straight and you're a good person.

You say, Ralph, I am not good, I am not bad enough to go to hell. I dare say there are people here tonight who believe that you're on your way to heaven because you're not bad enough to go to hell. Hell is only for bad people.

Will you allow me in all sincerity and love to say something to you that could absolutely revolutionize your thinking about personal salvation? Here it is. The question is not whether you are bad enough to go to hell. That's not the question.

The question is, are you good enough to get into heaven? That's the question. Why you say, how good must I be to get into heaven? Here's the answer. One word.

Perfect. Perfect. Anybody qualify? Anybody qualify? You mean we're all guilty? No wonder God reminds us that if a man keeps the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of the entire law.

God's standard is absolute perfection and not a one of us measures up. That's why we cannot save ourselves. That's why we must have a Savior.

And that's why God in His love and in His mercy and in His goodness reached down and sent His only begotten Son who was the only one able to satisfy the demands of God's justice for our sin. The perfect Son of God could take our place on the cross. And as we open our hearts and by faith in Him receive Him into our hearts.

We too now can know that we can pass from spiritual death into spiritual life. That's the reality of the plan of salvation. And there that night eight-year-old boys sang that song at mother's knee.

And when we got up off our knees went to bed that night it was the first night in our life we went to bed with our arms wrapped around each other. Isn't that a sweet story? It may be that to you but it's more than that to me. I challenge the best educator child psychologist the best parent or the best bachelor who thinks he knows how to raise children to take two eight-year-old boys off of the street who love fighting with each other who reveled in it who rejoiced in it and stop them from fighting over night forever.

Try it. That's a miracle. I've had parents say if I could keep my children from fighting one week I would think it would be a miracle.

You're looking at two ever since the age of eight have loved each other in the Lord. The age of ten and eleven began gathering boys and girls in the basement of our home began having children's meetings on Saturday mornings and leading boys and girls to Christ when we were just ten and eleven years of age. The age of sixteen when just seniors in high school began holding revival crusades and now for thirty-two years after graduating from university it has been our privilege to travel across this land across North America and many countries of the world telling people what? To leave one church and join another one.

If we had to do that we'd be in a fight with people every day and we'd get nowhere in the process. Telling people what? Here's what. Make sure you do not substitute religion for reality.

Make sure you do not substitute goodness, decency, morality for spirituality. Make sure you do not substitute churchianity for Christianity. Make sure you know Christ in your heart and life.

Not only in the head but you've surrendered all the rights of your life to Him. You've opened your heart you've repented of your sin and you've yielded yourself to Him. And you can say you know just as surely as you know your own name that if this were to be your last night in the world you're ready to meet God.

You see those are the two things our dad could never know for sure in Romanism. He could never know for sure on Wednesday night that all his sins were forgiven. He'd been to the confessional on Sunday hadn't been back since Sunday.

He had Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. He could never really be sure about that even though he said prayers at home. Never know for sure that if he were to die right now he'd go to heaven.

Why? Because of having to go to a place of burning. And can I say that every individual in this meeting tonight those are the two questions you need to be sure about. Do you know that all your sins are forgiven right now? Do you know that if you were to die right now you'd go straight to heaven? The word religion comes from the word reliance.

And your reliance or your religion is no stronger than the thing you are relying upon right now to know that your sins are forgiven and you're ready to meet God. Do you know it? After Mother's salvation there came a time where all of those things that had infested her life in witchcraft had to be dealt with before there was a complete setting free in her spirit. And for a number of weeks God's people were at Mother's side as all of that witchcraft and all of that contact and all of that connection with spiritism was dealt with.

And there was a final release where Satan was completely delivered. Satan was completely defeated and Mother was completely delivered in such a way that she was set free to be able to serve the true and living God. In the midst of that something unique was revealed.

Mother had a wedding band with five wedding stones in it. Two of those stones fell out and were missing. So she had two places in her wedding band that were empty of stones.

It was clearly revealed in the midst of that deliverance time that those two stones that fell to the ground as bright diamonds were symbolic of a curse that had been placed on her twin boys marked for death in witchcraft by the age of ten. And that was further verified. How old did I say we were when we found Christ? Eight years of age.

I thank God that He in His love and mercy saw fit to reach down into our family when we were just eight years of age and break that spell and curse that was placed on these lives. Way back there, Satan was

seeking to snatch us out. He is not omniscient, but I wonder how much he really knew about this site tonight and what has been taking place here.

Way back there, he was out to snatch it out. But thank God for what He has done. And after all He has done for us, that's why you're not here just by a divine accident.

If you're here and you've never opened your heart to receive Christ, you're here by a divine appointment. And God is here to meet your need. And if you're here as a Christian and you're in a backslidden condition, you're here because God Almighty wanted you to be in the presence of His people who are entering into the life of God at a deeper level than some of them have ever been.

Don't be exposed to the fact that God wants to quicken your Christian life. This can be an hour that can absolutely transform your life. After all He has done for us, how can we do less than not only give Him our best, but give Him our all and live for Him completely.

After all, He's done for us. Amen. Let's stand as we pray.

Dear Lord, I pray that in Thine own way Thou wilt reveal Thyself to those who are here who need to know what it means to pass from spiritual death into spiritual life. I pray that every one of us will examine ourselves whether or not we be in the faith. Make sure that we know that we are genuinely Thy children.

O God, I pray this will be a night when men and women who have any doubt, any question as to whether or not they've ever passed from spiritual death into life will make this the night of genuine salvation and assurance, victory and release. Have Thy way. While we pray, where are those all over this congregation who can say to me, Ralph, if I know my heart the way God knows me, there is no doubt about it.

I know that if this were to be my last day in the world, I am ready to meet God. I know I'm saved. I know I have been born again of God's Holy Spirit.

I have experienced that divine birth. And my life is a testimony to the fact that I've been changed by God's power. How many can say, Ralph, there's no question about it.

I know it's settled between me and God. I'm not trusting in my religion. I'm not trusting in my good works, my morality.

I'm trusting in the finished work of Christ alone on the cross for my salvation. I know I'm genuinely born again of God's Holy Spirit. People who have experienced that are not ashamed of it.

People who have experienced that have no doubt about it. I wonder how many say, Ralph, I can thank God that that's settled in my heart tonight. Would you quietly slip your hands up and hold them up all over this congregation? Heads are bowed, eyes are closed.

A personal matter between you and God and the preacher. That's wonderful. You may place them down.

So many, many hands. I am so glad about that. What a thrill to know that we are brothers and sisters in the faith.

I am so glad about that. But I'm also glad about something else. That there were people in this meeting who were honest enough with themselves and with God not to raise your hand on that simple question because you have a doubt about it.

For some reason, you could not and did not raise your hand. And I'm glad that you were honest about that. But let me remind you that your honesty is not enough.

That's only a first step. Why not take that next step? Where you say, God, I'm not only going to be honest about my need. I am going to make this night, November the 18th, the night where I will agree with God and open my heart and receive Christ as my Lord and Savior.

I want to pray the sinner's prayer. God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me for Christ's sake. I want to know the doubts are removed.

I want to make sure that it's right between me and God. That's my desire. And it matters not what anybody else does in this meeting, nor am I asking anybody to join a church or to leave a church.

I'm asking something far more important. Do you know that you're ready to meet God and do you know that you're God's child? All across the congregation, those with hungry hearts who have any doubt about that most eternal question, let me pray for you now. Why don't you quietly slip your hands up and place them down again, that I can see them and pray for you all over this congregation.

All over the congregation, quietly slip your hands up, place them down again. I want to see them and remember you now before we pray. Yes, God bless you.

Yes, three here in one section. Yes, God bless you, ma'am. Yes, sir.

God bless you. How many others all over this congregation? Say, Ralph, I am not sure. Yes, teenager, I see that.

I am not sure. I want the doubts to be removed. God bless you.

Ma'am, God bless you. On the side, another hand being raised. Others from all walks of life.

Yes, God bless you. I see them. God bless you.

Ma'am, another one on this side, on my right-hand side. Are there others saying, yes, I want to be included in prayer. I don't know I'm saved.

I don't know that the sins are forgiven. I have a doubt about it. God bless you.

Several children are expressing that desire. Oh, it's never too young to make that thing right. How many others? You may place them down.

Are there others before we pray? With men and women, young and old, who express a desire to know that your sins are forgiven, to know that you're God's child. Let me include you now in prayer. Are there others before we pray? From all walks of life, from every church background, it matters not.

Let me pray for you now. Are there others before we pray? I wonder how many. God bless you.

I see a hand being raised close to the back. Are there yet others before we pray? Are there others? Not sure you're truly God's child. How many can say, Ralph, I am sure I'm God's child, but I am ashamed of the way I'm living my Christian life.

And I've been a bystander to what God is doing. And I know that I need to come to the end of my own striving and let God be God in every single area of my life. And I know you've spoken this message about how you were saved and what happened in your family.

But tonight I want to get something settled. And that is to make sure that I will begin to walk a spirit-controlled life such as I've never done before, or maybe I've known in the past, but I've allowed the devil to defeat me. I want to surrender every single area of my life to God tonight.

I've been holding back certain areas for myself, and I want God to have it all. Pray for me. That's my desire.

I don't want to be passed by in these revival meetings. Pray for me. Are there others? Slip your hands up.

Pray for me. Hands being raised all over this congregation. That's wonderful.

How many others before we pray? That's wonderful. Hands being raised. Yet others.

Are there others? That's wonderful. Let's pray. Wonderful.

Hands still being raised. And even if you've not raised it, yes, hands still being raised. God bless you.

I see it way in the back. God bless you. Hands are still being raised.

Let's pray. Lord God, Thou art here to do Thy work. We're so glad to be in Thy presence.

And I pray for every individual who is not sure he's saved. Give him such a determination not to leave this place today until he knows that's settled. That the angels in heaven in Thy heart should be made glad, and our hearts can rejoice as others find faith in Christ.

Lord, I pray for those as Christians who know exactly what Thou art saying tonight. They too might recognize the divine moment in which we find ourselves, a moment in Thy presence. They will make their way to a place of prayer and get all the doubts removed.

Have Thy way. Have Thy way. We believe Thee for it.

While we're praying, all across the congregation, let me just encourage you just now, those who raised your hand for prayer, on either of those questions, why don't you in a moment make your way to the back of the auditorium. The ushers will show you into the place where is a place of prayer. Go to your knees and begin to pray.

If you've never been converted to Christ, pray, God have mercy on me a sinner. Save me for Christ's sake. Repent of all your sin and then open your heart and receive Christ as your Lord and Savior and thank Him.

Surrender your life totally to Him. Ask Him to take every single area of your life. And if you're here as a Christian and God has spoken to you about the kind of life you're living and you don't want to be passed by, why don't you go to your knees and ask God to forgive you from all those areas of sin that you've not dealt with.

Surrender every single right of your life to God and by faith claim the fullness of God's Holy Spirit. Thank Him for it. As we quietly wait this moment, all across the congregation, just slip right out from where you're

seated, make your way to the aisles, to the back of the auditorium and to the place of prayer.

Folks are already going. That's wonderful. Just slip out, move past anybody near you.

Ask to be excused if necessary. Wonderful to see many people already moving to the place of prayer. Whatever that doubt is, God wants to meet you tonight.

You're not sure you're truly God's child. I'm not asking you to join anything. Folks are making their way to the place of prayer from all across the congregation.

Make your way to the back of the auditorium. The ushers will show you to the place of prayer. Make sure you're not going to leave until you know every single doubt is removed and everything is settled between you and God.

Just keep responding. Others making their way to the place of prayer even now. Don't hesitate a moment.

Before the congregation begins to move out in mass, here is your opportunity to get every single doubt removed. The husband and wife ought to come together as a Christian or as one who's not sure about it. God bless you.

Couples are going together. That's wonderful. How many others? Go now.

Don't miss it. Don't be so near and yet miss it. So close to being saved and yet not be saved.

So close to walking in spiritual victory and yet not find that reality. We're in need of many prayer partners to go as well to the place of prayer. How many others? Before we close, you want to go to that place of prayer and get things settled? God is speaking to you now about this whole relationship to eternity.

Go now and join those. Young people, boys and girls who've never known for sure that you're truly God's child. Go now.

Many others have raised your hand for prayer. I would to God that you would not allow anything to stop you from responding to what it is God is saying. Let's just quietly sing one verse of the song.

Just as I am without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bid'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come, I come. Here's the verse. Keep on going to the place of prayer.

If you raised your hand for prayer, even if you did not and you know what God's saying, go now as we prayerfully sing it. Just as I am without one plea but that thy blood was shed for me and that thou bid'st me come...

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