

The Sovereign Saving Work of the Lord in Tiffany Martinez

by: Tiffany Martinez

Preface

“That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it” (Isa. 45:6-8). Surely salvation is of the Lord, and despite myself, He has graciously saved this wretched sinner. I know not why He did so, but I thank God that for His glory He chose to make me a vessel of mercy, for *“it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me”* (Gal. 1:15-16).

I. Pre-Salvation Background

From the time that I can remember, I always had favor in people’s eyes; I was an outgoing child with a personality of my own that seemed to be liked by many. For this reason, I tended to believe that God had favor toward me as well, yet *“God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him”* (Acts 10:34-35). I was strong-willed and outspoken, much more of a leader than a follower. Beginning at a young age, I was involved in many different sports until I found which ones that I liked best and sought to excel in these. The main one was gymnastics, which tended to much pride as I flourished in it. I also cared much about my looks and enjoyed being popular.

“For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”
(Gal. 1:10)

When I was growing up, my mother consistently stressed the importance of having a “relationship with God”. She, my sister, and I would go to different churches off and on, experiencing an array of denominations including Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Non-denominational, Charismatic, and perhaps others I fail to remember. My mother often spoke of praying to God for a peace about something. She explained how, in needing to make decisions, she would pray to God, and He would either give her a peace about it or not. Thus she would make her choices based upon the way that she felt but would not seek God’s truth in his Word to direct her, as it is written, *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path”* (Ps. 119:105). It was a fearful deception that we were under at that time, to the sadness of my heart. God, through the scripture, warns that *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Pro. 14:12), and in Proverbs 28:26 He declares, *“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered”*. This way that my mother

had shared with me seemed right, so I foolishly trusted my own heart to lead me, not knowing that it was truly only leading me on in death.

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”
(Jer. 17:9)*

I began getting more involved in church youth group starting around 7th grade and attended church camps every summer beginning at a young age. These are annual camps held during the summer by most modern churches. Sadly, I have found that they almost universally worship a fabrication of the true God, like the golden calf Aaron made and called “the LORD”. I have discovered this, primarily by the fruit that I have seen from these camps harmonizing with the fruit of the golden calf in Moses’ day. Such camps, as I have experienced throughout many years, are as the feast of the golden calf in Exodus 32, where the youth “*offer burnt offerings*” (“rededicate” their lives to the Lord), “*bring peace offerings*” (singing along with modern worship music); and “*the people sit down to eat and to drink, and rise up to play*” (Exo. 32:6). Like Aaron’s feast of eating and drinking and rising up to play, these camps make being a Christian seem to be fun and games, contrary to scriptural Christianity. One example is the loud Christian music that is played with dimmed and colored lights for sensational charisma in an attempt to cause the children or teens to make some new commitment to this false Jesus. This is far from how the Lord truly works through preaching in His Word: in Acts chapter 2, when Peter preached to the people, they were pricked in their hearts, and in Acts chapter 7, when Stephen preached, it says they were cut to the heart. According to the biblical Jesus, the Holy Ghost came to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, not to lull them into spiritual drunkenness by fancy lights and music that make you feel good at the expense of the reality of biblical truth.

Preachers of different sorts proclaim, with much zeal and eloquence, their unbiblical “christ” who does not demand men to forsake all and bear the cross, neither can this “christ” give sinners lasting victory over sin. They bring many to have an emotional, false zeal that makes them believe that they are loving Jesus, when in fact, their glory is in their shame, even as Philippians chapter three speaks of. Consequentially, the youth go on as enemies to the cross of Christ, indulging in loving their lives and enjoying their free time in pursuing the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the of the eyes, and the pride of life, through playing their favorite sports and fun games, exchanging phone numbers (girls to boys and boys to girls that have romantic interest one in another), doing skits, and many other such empty thrills. Some even attempt to fulfill the lusts of their self-righteous pride and justify the above behaviors by doing humanitarian works of the flesh without turning from their sins. Thus, I fear they will one day stand before a Holy God, while pleading, “have we not in thy name done many wonderful works?”, and the Lord will profess unto them, “*I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Matt. 7:23). This idolatrous, so-called “Christian camp worship” of their “god”, that is their own belly (their own desires), is nothing like the Christianity the apostle Paul lived, who wrote to follow him as he followed Christ; He was as the filth of the world and offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:13).

*“He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”
(John 12:25)*

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.”

(Gal. 6:14)

Many at these camps will receive an emotional stirring and make some sort of a mental assent or carnal commitment to the Lord that fades away within just a couple of weeks. Thus they leave and there is no true change in their heart; they are just as bound in sin and rebellion to the true God as when they came to the camp, because when they were there they never really sought Him in truth. Furthermore, they are now strengthened in their false conversion, and true salvation is that much more impossible the next time God tries to shake them from their self-righteous fig leaves.

“And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

(Gen. 3:7)

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.”

(Pro. 21:2)

In light of my above concerns for modern church camps, I would like to share a personal instance that occurred after my 8th grade year that nearly destroyed my soul. The summer after my 8th grade year, I attended a church camp where I experienced some kind of a “spiritual high” that led me to outward changes, such as exchanging an impure relationship (I do not mean impure as in fornication, but nevertheless impure) for a boyfriend of a higher class of morality, and feeling like I was “too good” to go teen clubbing anymore. However, though I had this experience, it merely cleansed the outside of the cup and dish, while my heart still had no hunger and thirst after heavenly things. Not only so, I even began to have a greater amount of damnable pride and self-righteousness than before. In the bible, God’s favor is not upon those who are proud and confident, but upon the broken, poor, beggarly, and the needy – that is, them that fear Him and hope in his mercy (Psalm 33:18). Although I felt as if I was a better person with greater morality through this event, I was even farther from being pleasing to God.

I began regularly attending a church and its youth group every time I could get my foot in the doors. I had just enough moral religion to keep my head pointed up and yet damn my soul to hell. I was what Proverbs 30:12-13 speaks of: *“There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up.”* After my 10th grade year, I found out that I was moving due to my stepdad’s job relocation. I was devastated when I found this out (most of all worried that I wouldn’t experience or have the “feeling of the Lord” the same way I did at the current church I was involved with). I also had an idol of gymnastics during this time, but that year, right before it was time to begin competitions for the season, the Lord mercifully allowed me to tear my ACL while tumbling, causing me to be out the whole season. I still had hope, though, that I could gain back my skills and excel my junior and senior year until I found out that I was moving to Decatur, TX, which did not offer gymnastics. The Lord was striving with me at this time to strip me of this idol. Yet I still claved to unrighteousness rather than seeking after God. *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10-12). I ended up moving with my mom and stepdad to this small town where I made friends quickly and hopped right into the “popular” scene with sports

and high self-confidence. I ran track, played basketball, and since they did not have gymnastics, I got into cheerleading at Decatur High School, and competition cheer outside of school. Previously, gymnastics was something for me to glory in and boast in being good at, but cheerleading was the closest thing that was available, so I jumped into this and used it as an ulterior outlet to increase my self-esteem and personal reputation. Looking back, it's unthinkable that I could have called myself a Christian and been involved in such a sensual sport with a purpose of making men have adulterous eyes.

I had no discretion at this time; I was caught up in all the vanity of beauty and having favor with people. Proverbs 11:22 says, *“As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion”*. In Proverbs 31:30, God further declares, *“Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised”*. I also thought within myself that being the best at sports was a praiseworthy thing, but the Lord *“taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy”* (Psa. 147:10-11).

Once out of high school, I moved back to Abilene, TX, to attend college at Hardin Simmons University. There, I quickly ran into grievous sin. I got into a relationship with a guy that soon turned impure, even though at first, with some false religious zeal, I determined it would be a completely pure relationship. Although I had some superficial inclination to be very religious in order to glorify God (as I thought), I had no power or true desire in my heart to fulfill it; I only went after rebellion and the impurities bound up in my wicked heart. I knew I was going against God's will but chose to fulfill the lusts of my flesh rather than listen to my conscience. Even as the Lord says in Isaiah 65:2, *“I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts”*. I was nigh marrying this particular boyfriend - we spoke of soon engagement and marriage after about a year of our relationship. Then our relationship began faltering due to all of our sin; bitter fights and disputing from selfish lusts arose more and more consistently. As I had attempted to have a successful “romantic” relationship based upon being beautiful and having a good personality, the Lord now began to show me the emptiness of this. *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity”* (Ecc. 1:2). I was nothing more than a proud, self-willed, selfish girl who wanted her way or else she would nag her boyfriend and then sob and cry to her girlfriends about how she had been mistreated by him. I was miserable and yet still tried to get satisfaction from this relationship. My boyfriend then decided we needed to “take a break” with our relationship and see how things went. I was destroyed, as I had placed my whole self upon him and had made our relationship an idol. I grew depressed for about two weeks and then picked myself up in pride to move on to get satisfaction from other relationships. Once he saw that I had seemingly gained back independence, he wanted to get back together, so we did...but the cycle of fighting and disputing started right back up. I was again miserable.

II. My False Conversion

“Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard.”
(Pro. 13:15)

It was at this time, in January 2008, that I found myself driving one night in complete misery, weeping over my current estate. My life was spent on looking beautiful to the eye, having a satisfying relationship with a boy that made me feel good, being smart and getting an education

that was esteemed in the world's eyes, and enjoying fun time with friends...all of which had no eternal significance, and I was beginning to see the worthlessness of it all. *"For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mar. 8:36). However, my sorrow was not the godly sorrow of David's in Psalm 51, who said, *"against thee, thee only have I sinned"*, thus leading to repentance, but contrariwise, I had a worldly sorrow of self-pity, which only leads to death. I knew that I was miserable due to the consequences of my choices, stemming from chasing after my own desires and lusts rather than following after God. I was not sorrowful because of the actual sins that I had committed against the Lord, but rather because my sins were not satisfying me as I desired them to. I was not grieved because God was grieved, nor in fear that I had offended a Holy King whose scepter rules the universe.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."
(Psa. 51:17)

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."
(2 Cor. 7:10)

I thought the Lord was speaking to me in this moment, telling me to turn and live for Him rather than myself. As I drove in my car, I surrendered to do so, knowing that if I didn't, then I would only continue dissatisfied the rest of my life - yet this was still the problem. I was only looking after my own satisfaction as opposed to having a holy indignation for God to be glorified in the vessel He created. The scripture was then brought to my mind: *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"* (Gal. 6:7-8). I didn't want to sow to my flesh any longer, since I felt I was reaping the corruption thereof and would continue to as long as I sowed to it. So I set my face to turn my life over to the Lord and to follow His ways as I thought them to be. I got counsel from a highly religious girl at the time who advised me to break up with my boyfriend, reasoning with me that I didn't need to be with anyone if my relationship with God was not right. I accepted this as truth and so prayed for grace to end it and then did.

Following this, I got involved with a street evangelism ministry team and began reading my bible and learning more, conforming my life to the things that I read; I put off all outward worldliness that I knew of and put on a good form of godliness, but I still was not saved. This is the outcome of the pharisaical evangelism that occurs today, just as it was with the religious in Jesus' day; He warned them: *"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves"* (Mat. 23:15). Jeremiah 23:21-22 proclaims, *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings"*. I was not freed from my sins - they were only now increased; my heart was even more in bondage than ever before to pride and vainglory which bred envy, covetousness, and sensuality - being a lover of myself rather than a lover of God.

Moreover, 1 Thessalonians 1:5 declares, *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"*. When I joined this evangelism team, the gospel was presented in word but not in power. It is manifest therefore that it was only a work

of the flesh, or else there would have been quickening power behind it unto my salvation as well as others. This is the evident token which shows that most evangelism today is a mere work of men (not God in men), as souls remain unquickened, dead in their sins, unlike in John Wesley's day when souls fell to the ground, fainting from the weight of conviction upon them. *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"* (John 6:63). I was also void of the assurance of faith in my false conversion. I knew I had nothing more than a mental assent that Jesus Christ had truly come as God in the flesh to save a dying world, and even this was a very feeble conviction. I had always struggled with whether or not I truly believed this within me. I would try so hard to imagine and understand it in my mind, and when I couldn't, I would give up and tell myself that I believed.

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

(1 Cor. 2:4-5)

At this time, I began praying that God would reveal Jesus to me, but not with much fervency or diligence. It is written that, *"without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Hebrews 11:6). In March 2008, I was in my room praying and trying with fleshly might to believe in Jesus. I was kneeling down and with an impatient heart determined in my mind once and for all that I was going to believe in Jesus and that would be the end of it. It was nothing more than the climax of what I had done my entire life - making a mental assent of belief in Christ and calling it salvation. James 2:19 says, *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble"*. So I declared myself saved, since I had decided to believe and had an urgency to be baptized, being that was the next thing the bible spoke of doing once somebody believes. I therefore was baptized that March, shortly after choosing to believe in Jesus Christ. I really thought I could determine to do such a thing. I would later come to realize that I could not will my own salvation. John 1:13 speaks of saved men as those *"which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"*. Romans 9:16 and 18 says, *"So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"*.

As I continued on in the street evangelism and other religious activities, I also continued on in my sin, never delivered in my heart from my wicked desires and lusts thereof. As aforementioned, I did have a seemingly godly appearance, even to myself, but my heart was still given to things of this world rather than loving God with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I loved my life rather than hating it, and the Lord Jesus Christ himself spake on this wise: *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"* (Luke 14:26).

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

(Mat. 22:37-38)

I married Salvador Martinez, who had also been involved in the same street evangelism team and was religious yet unregenerate in heart, in November of 2008. We continued on our religious path together, joining a moderately conservative local church and evangelizing.

Compared to others I was a seemingly “good” person, but 2 Corinthians 10:12 states, “*we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise*”.

I began a one-year fast track nursing program in August of 2010; I wasn’t sure of what else to do and did not feel a leading from the Lord in any particular direction. The doors opened up for me to go through the schooling, so I took the steps necessary. I figured that must be where God wanted me and that He would direct me if otherwise. Truly, as it is written: “*A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps*” (Proverbs 16:9). The Lord directed my steps into the very event that would soon show me the powerlessness of my professed Christianity to truly care for souls and stand against sin in this wicked generation. Praise Him.

III. Seeing My Lost Estate

It was February of 2011, and I attended a seminar for nursing school credits. It was a seminar of “anonymous” meetings (for those who are unfamiliar, these are meetings for addicts to come to in attempt to gain knowledge and help to free themselves from their addictions). The first meeting I sat in was a “Cocaine Anonymus” meeting. The speaker of the meeting began speaking, and I was soon extremely grieved to be there due to his blasphemous words, foul language, and making jokes about sin. “*Fools make a mock at sin: but among the righteous there is favour*” (Pro. 14:9). I couldn’t sit there with my religious convictions and listen to this speaker, so I began to pray to God about what to do. I asked, “what would Christ do?” and instantly believed the Lord was telling me that Christ would stand up and share the gospel with these dying sinners stuck in their bondage to sin. I grew fearful when I thought of doing such, as it were I did not want to interrupt the speaker and speak aloud to this large crowd filled with cocaine addicts, other nursing students, and my nursing professors. I had no boldness and grew greatly distressed within myself, wondering why I couldn’t do what I believed God wanted me to do. I ended up just leaving the meeting instead. As I walked out of the doors I burst into tears as the Lord quickened to me Rev. 21:8 - “*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death*”. The Lord showed me that I cared more about the honor of men than the honor of God. John 5:44 says, “*How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?*” With this conviction and condemnation upon my heart I felt less “eternally secure”, and the Lord began drawing me to His truth. Isaiah 65:1 declares, “*I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name*”.

By this time, I had heard things about the brethren at the Church of Arlington (now the Church of Wells) from my cousin Randall, who had met them in Arlington. He was attending Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth and had met these people on the streets of Arlington on a night that some of them were open-air preaching to crowds after a baseball game. I now began to look more into their church and beliefs, going onto their website, reading their postings, watching testimonies, and viewing YouTube clips of their open-air preaching. In doing this, I quickly saw and realized that they had a different spirit and power abiding in them than I had in me and that theirs was most definitely of the Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Through seeing this, I desired to meet with them. I wanted to be around them to see more of

what it was to have the Spirit of God and to be around Christians who I had confidence, according to the scriptures and their lives agreeing, were Christians indeed. With this desire and my troubled heart toward my own salvation, I started to ask my husband if we could arrange a trip to Arlington and meet up with some of these Christians. He wasn't too fond of the idea at first, but by a sovereign act of God, He used the following event to cause a change of heart on my husband's end and an opportunity to meet some from this church.

During my college spring break of March 2011, my husband and I desired to get away, being that we were both now troubled over the question of whether we were saved or not. In Salvador's unwillingness to visit the church of Arlington, we decided to go camping for a few days to seek the Lord concerning the troubles of our souls. We packed up our truck and headed out to a nearby campsite. The campsite was packed and noisy, and there wasn't much "getting away", to our great dissatisfaction. Like with Jonah, the Lord was cursing our efforts of running from His will, that He might save our souls. It was utterly miserable, and we were clueless as to how to spend our time; as it is written, *"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked"* (Isaiah 57:21). We didn't desire to stay but had already paid for three nights, so we were going to stay at least one night (grudgingly). Salvador had it on his heart to try to call Randall, as we were getting ready to go to sleep, and as he picked his phone up to do so, Randall was calling him. Randall said that he was going to surprise us by coming into town but wanted to let us know he was on his way so that we would be home. We took this as a welcome relief to our misery and immediately packed up and went home.

That night, as we talked with Randall about our own doubts of salvation and of his dealings with the Church of Arlington, I asked Salvador if I could call one of the girls in the church to meet up with her and some of the other women. The Lord moved his heart to allow me to do so. I called one of them that very night and set up to meet the next day for lunch in Arlington. We drove to Arlington the following day, and I sat down with a few of these Christian sisters at Panera Bread. I shared what I thought was my testimony to be at the time and my concerns for the estate of my soul. They didn't tell me whether they believed I was saved or not; they just began to go through scripture with me to have me examine my heart and the fruits of it. It was hard for me to see my heart of dead men's bones inside with the outside of my whitewashed sepulchre being made so clean. I still was not sure of my salvation and desired to search through more scripture. That night, Salvador and I met with a few of the brethren from the church who sat down with us and went through a multitude of scriptures and sang many hymns to us. Neither the scriptures nor the lyrics of such godly hymns seemed to be confirming my salvation. I grew more anxious for my soul and less convinced that I had ever been truly converted. I began seeking the Lord to show me if I was saved or not, confirming it through the scriptures.

I began going to Arlington to visit more with the brethren there, going through more scriptures and sharing anything the Lord was showing me. The final confirmation the Lord gave me, by His mercy, to show me that I was not saved then came about. I was sitting in our old house in Abilene by myself one night, trying to work on some schoolwork. I began being attacked with a demonic terror; just as I had been often tormented by devils throughout my life. I called my cousin Randall to try and talk to him on the phone to keep my mind distracted and comforted. I then heard footsteps going through the living room/kitchen area where I was, but knowing that I was there alone, I knew it was evil spirits lurking around. Seeing that I had never actually audibly heard anything of the sort before in my life, I grew greatly terrified. I

got up from the couch, got in our truck, and fled from the house. As I was fleeing, though, I still felt the devil's presence and couldn't get away from it or be consoled. I drove to a nearby parking lot with lights and opened my bible to read. As I opened it up to a random page, I looked down and began reading. My eyes hit the page and I read, "*The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion*" (Pro. 28:1). I knew God was speaking to me. I was wicked, not a righteous person (which means to be a saved person). This was the last thing the Lord used to convince me of my lost estate. I could no longer justify myself once my heart was examined by the Word of God, and by the mercies of the Lord, He did not give me over to delusions or deception but rather allowed my heart to be made manifest before my eyes.

Once I saw my lost estate, I only desired to be saved, whatever that meant. I began seeking the Lord for salvation, as He drew me by His grace, and was spurred on with scriptures such as Isaiah 55:6-7: "*Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon*", Hosea 10:12: "*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you*", and Jeremiah 29:13: "*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart*". As I continued with my schooling, I struggled with being able to think about doing schoolwork while believing and realizing more and more that my soul was in dire straits. I could hardly justify doing schoolwork rather than seeking God - for what will a man give in exchange for his soul (Matt. 16:26)? But as I was in subjection to my husband's will for me to continue my schooling, I continued and prayed that God would change his heart. As I sat crying in vexation one night, hardly able to continue on with schoolwork, Salvador came by my side and gave me leave from having to continue in nursing school. The Lord had changed his heart and was faithful to relieve me to seek Him as He drew me. Praise the Lord.

I went to Arlington off and on over the next month to stay with some of the sisters and seek the Lord there, away from distractions and others who would only want to try to give me a false peace that would damn my soul to hell. "*For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace*" (Jer. 8:11). I was encouraged by Proverbs 18:1 which says, "*Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddeth with all wisdom*". The Lord drew my husband to Himself as well; he realized he had never been saved and desired to seek the Lord until he found Him. So Salvador and I moved to Grand Prairie (where many of the brethren from the Church of Arlington also lived) in May, 2011 and continued seeking the Lord amongst the brethren, praying, reading the scriptures, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, watching preaching videos, listening to sermons on audio, and receiving preaching. My husband was saved soon after we moved, but I, however, spent the next four months on a terrible cycle of being stirred up and seeking with some diligence and then being discouraged and slothful. Falling into slothfulness so often was a terrible snare to my soul, as "*the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat*" (Pro. 13:4). The Lord was working all the while, though, breaking me of self-righteousness, pride, and many other sins and idols in my heart. He was so merciful to condescend and spoke to me through His Word and many dreams. I came to realize that salvation truly was not, nor could not in any wise, be of myself, that both grace to seek the Lord and faith to believe the Lord are a gift of God; it only comes from the mercy of the Lord giving it to whom He will have mercy upon. Titus 3:5 says, "*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according*

to his mercy he saved us”. Jude 1:21 - “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”.

IV. O Boundless Salvation!

“And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

(Isa. 42:16)

“For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

(Gal. 1:12)

At the end of August, 2011, the Lord saw fit to have mercy upon me unto the regeneration of my soul. A few days prior to the night that the Lord came and saved me, He revealed to me something that I had never seen before in the scriptures: *the concept of someone being saved on the behalf of another’s faith*. Although I had read through the scriptures before, I had never seen this means of salvation, and it seemed significant as the Lord opened this principle to my mind.

Then on Saturday, August 20, 2011, as the church gathered together for a prayer meeting, I stayed back to seek the Lord alone. I had been praying for the Lord to send preachers as I hoped to receive faith through the hearing of the Word, for *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). Nevertheless, as it were, my heart at this time was still as a stone, needing to be broken up. While I was at home, five brethren arrived at the house. As I saw them at the front door about to come into the house, I didn’t want them to see me, so I went into my room, locked my door, and went into my closet to begin reading and hiding myself away - *“For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved”* (John 3:20). My husband knew that the brothers would be coming, and he was burdened for my soul, so he requested that they preach to me, sing a hymn, or do or say anything to encourage me to continue to seek the Lord, if they had grace to do so. As they were planning to leave and walking out the door, the Lord constrained one of them, burdening him to speak to me. He didn’t know what the Lord wanted him to speak, but knew he needed to talk with me.

I then heard knocking at my bedroom door and grudgingly came out from my closet. I made my way to the living room to talk to the brethren. The brother who was constrained to speak to me asked me how I was doing and if the Lord had been showing me anything of late. I briefly shared with him the last thing the Lord had shown me, then sat and waited for him to say something. Next, the Lord began giving him utterance to preach to me, but nothing was ministering faith nor hardly even heard on my end.

“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

(Mat. 13:15)

Later into the preaching, a sister came into the house and sat down with a word from the Lord

to share with me. As she shared this word I broke; the Lord used it to soften my hard heart. The brethren told me later that they could tell my whole countenance had changed at that point, and that they had faith that the Lord was there and working in me. Faith began stirring in my heart as well. The hymn was sang, “If ever I love Thee, my Jesus ‘tis now”. As the brethren sang this hymn, I thought within myself, “if ever I did love Jesus, it’s NOW!” The Lord’s loving-kindness was inevitably melting my heart. At one point, one of the brothers ended up lying down on the floor (I thought he was praying but found out later that he had fallen asleep through sheer fatigue). Then, during the preaching, he shot up, opened his bible, and began preaching the Word to me; the Lord had awakened him from a dead sleep and given him words of life for my soul!

As I sat and listened to the preaching and singing of hymns, broken and weeping, a brother then began to pray. He prayed and said something close to the following, “Oh Lord, please see our faith and save her”. As he prayed this, I had much confidence that it was from the Lord and that He would save me on the behalf of their faith, as this was the very concept that the Lord had revealed to me only but a few days prior to this night. When he got done praying that prayer, he then began preaching to me on Mark 2:1-12, about the man with the palsy being borne of four before the Lord, and the Lord seeing the four men’s faith and saying to the man of the palsy, “*Son, thy sins be forgiven thee*”. As he was preaching this, I noticed that there were four brethren with me in the room bearing me before Christ in preaching, prayers, and the singing of hymns. It further confirmed the genuine work I perceived the Lord was doing in my soul. I was confident that the word being spoken was the Lord speaking to me and telling me “*thy sins be forgiven thee*”. The next scripture I remember being read was Acts 2:37-38, “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart (as was I), and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*” I had heard this verse preached before but now it was mixed with faith! Even as it is written, “*For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it*” (Heb. 4:2). The Lord granted me faith to believe this was what he was now charging me to do, as he charged the man with the palsy, after telling him that his sins were forgiven – saying, “*Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house*”.

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”

(1 The. 2:13)

The Lord had now given this spiritual light unto salvation for my soul and therefore gave little else for the brethren to preach to me. They stopped preaching, not knowing if the Lord had given me faith by the hearing of the Word, but not having any further words from the Lord. One of them then asked me if the Lord had given me any light at all that night from the preaching, and I shared with him these things and the seemingly undeniable faith that the Lord was bestowing upon me. They were then confident as well that the Lord had done a work in my soul. It was silent after I shared these things that the Lord had shown me. Just as the four with the man who had the palsy did not pick up their friend when the Lord commanded him to arise, the brethren were not going to tell me that it was then time for me to be baptized, but rather wait upon me to obey the voice of the Lord. As I sat in this silent atmosphere with the

brethren, not making any moves to obey the light that had been given, I began growing fearful, being warned in my heart by the scripture, *“Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you”* (John 12:35). I was also thinking about the Saviour passing me by, even as the fearful hymn says, “pass me not o gentle Saviour, hear my humble cry, while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by”, and when the scriptures speak of Christ passing people by and doing no mighty works because of their unbelief. The longer I sat and did not obey, the more numb and cold I felt my heart becoming, of the which I grew very very fearful...fearful of going on under the wrath of God. I'm thankful that the Lord imparted such a fear upon me, for *“by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil”* (Proverbs 16:6). Finally I spoke and said that I didn't think it good to sit there any longer. One of the brethren then inquired of what I wanted to do, to which I replied, “I want to repent and be baptized!” They praised the Lord for His work and woke up Brother Ryan (one of the elders) immediately to let him know. Brother Ryan then called another elder, and after inquiry, they both believed it was the Lord's will to wait till morning to hear out what had happened to me.

Salvador then arrived home, and after sharing everything with him, he informed me that the reason he was just now getting home was because after the prayer meeting a brother was burdened to pray for me, and Salvador was burdened and led to join him. They told the other congregants that they were going to continue to pray for me, and if any others were burdened then they could join. There ended up being a total of four of them bearing me up in prayer. After I shared with my husband the work the Lord had done, he told me that everything they had been praying for, the Lord had been working in me throughout this night of preaching. Praise the Lord who answers the prayers of His saints and honors their faith! *“...the desire of the righteous shall be granted”* (Proverbs 10:24). He also shared how they had sang the hymn “Great Things He Hath Done” after praying for me, and Brother Brett (one of the brothers of the church), with faith that the Lord had saved me, without having heard anything yet of how the preaching to me was going, openly declared in reference to my soul, “great things He **hath** done!” Right after this, they had received a phone call from one of the brothers that was with me, informing them that they believed that I was saved. Bless the Lord - the Lord is faithful to confirm His work in such a way that it would be known that it is indeed His work, and not the work of another, that He might receive the glory due only to His name!

The next morning, two of the pastors spoke to me, testing the things that happened according to the Word of God and through the Holy Ghost, as to take heed to the principle of 1 Timothy 5:22, which charges, *“Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure”*. They, upon hearing this glorious testimony of saving grace, had faith that the Lord had done a saving work. I was then baptized in obedience to the Lord and His Word by faith through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which He bestowed upon me. Praise be to His great name!

“This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”
(Psa. 118:23-24)

V. God Uses Earthen Vessels

“And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.”

(Jdg. 7:2)

As I had sought the Lord for salvation, I had prayed that He would save me in a way that I could not take any credit for it, knowing that I would if I could. I was able to glory in myself when I was falsely converted, because, as I thought, I simply chose to believe and follow God's ways. When the Lord thought it fit to truly save me, however, He had to strip me of all pride and self-righteousness first, for surely, He will not share His glory with another. Ephesians 2:8-9 states, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast”*. And again, Romans 3:27 says, *“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith”* (Romans 3:27). Previously, I had boasted in myself, but now my boasting is in how God saved me and how He is mighty to save by giving the gift of faith; the Lord has caused my glorying to be in Him and not another, *“that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:31).

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”

(Jer. 9:23-24)

The Lord uses earthen vessels, that men may be humbled and the Lord be glorified, as 2 Corinthians 4:7 states: *“that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us”*. Romans 10 speaks of salvation through confession of mouth and believing in your heart, but it then makes the defense, *“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”* (Romans 10:14). 1 Corinthians 1:21 expresses the necessity of God using men as well - *“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe”*. Further, it is demonstrated throughout the whole bible how God works through and uses His chosen people to save. He used Noah to build an ark to the saving of his household, Moses to bring the Israelites out of bondage and lead them through the wilderness into the Promised Land, and the prophets to warn the people, that if they would take heed to the prophets' words they would be saved. In the New Testament, the gospels give the ultimate use of God's using humble vessels of clay through making his own Son to be an earthen vessel for the salvation of the world, if they would believe in Him. Also in the New Testament, Acts chapter eight, the Lord used Philip to guide the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. In Acts chapter nine, He used Ananias to lay his hands upon Saul that he may receive sight and the Holy Ghost, and then Saul (Paul) was used by God to visit and to write to the churches that they may be kept in the faith and thus saved. As was explained for my own conversion, God used the faith of four men, as in Mark chapter 2, to bear me before Christ that my sins may be forgiven by Christ. The Lord worked through the other saints by prayer for the saving of my soul as well, as they labored much in prayer for me, to that end, night and day. Philippians 1:19 says, *“For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”*. Praise the Lord for His saints that are burdened for souls and lay down their lives that some might be saved!

VI. Some Blessed Fruits of Saving Grace

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”
(Php. 1:9-11)

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.”
(Mat. 12:33)

The Word of God explains how, in the same way you know a tree by its fruit, you can judge whether the heart be regenerated unto life or not by the fruit that it produces. If someone has the Holy Spirit, then they will be holy as He is holy. One aspect of holiness, which is conformity to the likeness of Christ, is the fear of God. Surely, no one has ever feared God like Jesus Christ did (Heb. 5:7). Before I was born again, there was no fear of God before my eyes, even as Romans 3:18 declares the estate of all men to be before they are saved. Now, I do not want this fear I am speaking of, which is a legitimate fruit of the Spirit of God, to be mistaken for what many suppose is a worldly respect. No, I am not speaking of respect, but I am speaking of biblical reverence and fear (they are completely different than respect). I could have convinced myself before I was saved that I had a reverence in the way of a respect toward God...but not that I feared Him. Heb. 12:28-29 shows that biblical fear is more severe than worldly respect, as it says, *“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.”* Even as the consequence of the death of Ananias and Sapphira when they slighted the ways of God, teach us, a *“great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things”* (Acts 5:11). This surely was not talking about a mere respect but more like deep dread. Upon my false conversion, I did not have a fear and trembling. Contrariwise, when I was soundly converted, I was trembling at the Word of God, as Isaiah 66:2 states the disposition a man must have for the Lord to look upon him: *“but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”*. Psalm 119:120 says, *“My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments”*. Philippians 2:12 charges us to *“work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling”*. 2 Corinthians 5:11 proclaims, *“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men”*, and Matthew 10:28 declares, *“fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell”*. Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 states, *“...surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God”*. And surely it was not well with my soul before my true conversion, for I did not have the fear of the Lord within me. Upon the Lord giving me saving faith, though, there was fear and there was trembling to cleave to Him and follow His ways.

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”
(Jer. 32:40)

Such a fear brings sobriety that I did not have until after being saved either. Prior to true salvation, I was able to take sins of my heart lightly and live as a drunken person, spiritually

speaking, in this world. I would be funny and joke around and laugh; I would be the “life of the party”, so to speak, the attention getter. It was even hard for me many times not to smile or laugh when my husband would be reproofing me for sin. I was not able to take sin, or God’s ways, seriously. 1 Timothy 2:9 explains how the way women who profess godliness are to be women that “*adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety*”. 1 Timothy 3:11 calls for the wife to be grave and sober. 1 Peter 5:8 warns to “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*”.

*“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”
(Tit. 2:11-12)*

Also, being religious but not truly in the faith, I would have an afflicted conscience and would feel better or believe my relationship with the Lord was going well if I was consistently doing good works, such as witnessing or praying or reading my bible for long amounts of time. Now I have a clear conscience before God because of the blood of Christ and his righteousness alone. I used to try so hard in my mind to believe in Christ, but I could not muster it up to truly believe with all that in me is. The night the Lord came and rained righteousness down upon me, I could not deny that He had come and given me faith and the grace to walk therein. It was so evident that He was real, and working, and moving; Christ and His salvation is now an experienced reality rather than an idea or thought I once attempted to imagine and believe. Praise the LORD for His faithfulness!

When I was merely religious, I desired glory for myself. By this, I mean that I wanted to be spiritual and for people to acknowledge it. I would covet the honor of men upon hearing people speak of how certain individuals were so spiritual and would not make mention of me being so. I had a competitive heart to be the most spiritual. Now by the Spirit of God, I have a love for my brethren and am able to joy in Christ abounding in another person; for a brother or sister to be abounding in the works of Christ does not stir bitter envy against that person, but a love all the more for Christ working in them. 1 John 3:14 - “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*”. I thank the Lord that He has changed such a wicked heart to have freedom to do righteousness rather than sin. “*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*” (Rom. 6:17-18). Surely freedom to do righteousness is the blessing of the Lord: “*...God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*” (Acts 3:26). Amen.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid, it Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down-
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*