

From Death to Life: The Salvation of a Sinner

By: Brett Michalk

I. Pre-Salvation:

It is my sincere desire as I sit to write out a testimony of the workings of the Holy Spirit in my life that those who are saved would be edified and encouraged, and those who have yet to taste of the sweetness of Christ, whether they would profess him or not, would be provoked, reproved, and hopefully constrained by the words from this weak vessel to examine themselves to make sure that they are in the faith. In his mercy, the Lord has allowed me to experience many walks of life in the 24 years I have lived, ranging from a heathen man, to a religious Pharisee, a broken sinner, and finally, by the grace of God, to a born again Christian.

I was raised by my parents in the Lutheran church. When I was an infant, I got baptized in this church, and from that point on considered myself to be a Christian. My family was like most conservative “Christian” families in America: we went to church regularly, were really close, and had very good morals. To the best of what they knew, my parents brought me up to be a well behaved Christian child. I was an A+ student, never got into any real trouble, and many were proud of me. Most of my family and friends had high expectations of me, and knew I could succeed much in this world. Looking back, I was not much enlightened to the truths of God, and religion took kind of a backseat in my life behind things such as school, work, and extracurricular activities. But I was still “saved.” I never had one doubt in my mind that this wasn’t the case, because I was raised Christian, went to church, was baptized, etc. Essentially trusting in many works, and that I was not an openly wicked person as “evidence” that I was going to heaven.

I started college at Texas A&M University in the Fall of 2006 studying to become a chemical engineer. It was at this point in my life (specifically my later years) that I began to indulge in the “pleasures of sin for a season.” I dove headlong into rebellion against my Creator as the years progressed. It was these years in college that I learned that I loved my sin. I would not have put it in those words at the time, but by my fruits of drunkenness, drugs, parties, cheating, and blasphemous words (just to name a few of my grievous sins against God), it was evidenced that I did love sin, for a tree is known by its fruit. It is interesting to note that the whole time that I was given over to this rebellion, I was attending church (though attendance decreased as time progressed) and never once doubted that Jesus was my Savior and that all my sins were forgiven in God’s eyes. Surely I was given over to a “strong delusion” like that which Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians, and was believing in this lie while I had pleasure in unrighteousness. I am utterly shocked at the mercy that God had on me in this time, because due to my deadly sin I should have died many times in my years at college.

Nevertheless, God continued to give me breath in my lungs throughout this season of rebellion. Between the fall and spring semester of my senior year of college, when my outright sin was at an all-time high, I went home to my family for our winter break. Sometime during this break, I was visited by a friend from high school that I was starting to communicate with more after multiple years of silence. In this meeting, she asked if it would be okay if she “practiced witnessing” on me. Because I still thought I was a Christian, I said yes, though in my heart I was confounded at such a strange request. She went through the Ten Commandments with me,

asking if they condemned me, and then proceeded to go through many New Testament passages describing the differences between good fruit and bad fruit, and the differences between the strait gate/narrow way and the wide gate/broad way. I remember justifying myself the entire time, saying that all of this condemns me, but there is forgiveness with Jesus, and that nobody is perfect. She left after that, and I went on my way as if nothing happened, and my heart remained as hard as a rock. I later found out that she wasn't just practicing, but knew based upon my open and unrepentant sin (of the last few years) that I was on my way to hell and needed the Gospel.

About three days later, I was talking with my dad in the kitchen, when all of a sudden out of nowhere, I was overcome with a feeling of guilt over all my sin. I immediately began to weep in conviction and started confessing much of my sin to my dad. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is come to reprove the world of sin, righteous, and judgment. Surely God was at work at this time as much of my more overt sin was coming before my eyes. My dad began to console me, saying that there is forgiveness with the Lord and that I have nothing to worry about. I am reminded of Jeremiah 23 and that the difference between a true and a false prophet is that the true will turn his people from their sin, and a false prophet will whisper peace when there is no peace. I don't fault my dad, because he grew up with the same "Gospel" that I did (which is no true gospel at all and has no power to save from sin), and was ignorant to the truth which sets a man free, but I was not in need of peace at that time, but sorrow and repentance. I was given an awakened conscience that night that for so long had been seared with a hot iron, allowing me to sin without remorse.

I know now, looking back, that it was just an awakened conscience, but unfortunately at that time I thought I had been saved. I was able to quit much of my outward sin, and got extremely religious. Shortly after going back to school for the Spring semester, I met Sean, Jake, and Ryan just off campus through my friend who had witnessed to me weeks before. I found out that she was recently saved and now part of this church in Arlington. I listened for close to 6 hours as these men preached to a group of twenty or thirty college students. I was amazed. It seemed to me at the time that they had the whole Bible memorized. I had truly never heard anything like what I was hearing. Growing up, I never learned of being "born again", regeneration, depravity, and many other essential doctrines of the faith necessary for salvation. I was baptized as an infant and therefore "saved". I heard fluffy ten minute sermons that, instead of reproving men in their sin, would justify them. There was no HOLY Ghost in what I grew up with, and I knew immediately that these three men before me were something different. There was a power in their words that gripped my soul. Nothing else could have kept me there for 6 hours. I met up with them after this meeting was over and spoke for another hour or two with Jake specifically. I was able to share my testimony with him, and voice many concerns that I still had over my own soul. Instead of justifying the wicked or condemning the just, he told me to seek God with all my heart to find the answers I was looking for.

For the next year, pretty much all I did was read my Bible and go to school and work. I separated myself from my friends that I was still living with, because I could no longer join in their sin. I tried to reason with them much over their need to be saved, but to no avail. That being the case, for the time my conscience drove me to maintain a distance lest I be a partaker of their sins. Surely a companion of fools shall be destroyed. I actually received much persecution at this time due to my separation. I knew I had to though, as I had 2 Corinthians 6:17 ringing in my ears: *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord,*

and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” I knew I wanted to be received of God, even if it meant being forsaken by the world. My parents really liked the change they saw in me; even admitting to me that it spurred them on to read their Bible more. However, once I started preaching to them what the Lord was showing me on the strait gate and narrow way, they quickly began to despise it. I visited the church in Arlington multiple times that year, even getting baptized that summer. I was never formally examined before my baptism of whether I was bearing the fruits of legitimate salvation according to the scripture. The pastors and other more seasoned brothers in the church began to examine more carefully those that came desiring admittance to the church shortly after this time. This occurred as the Lord led the elders into more truth and stronger convictions on the need for purity within the church, and gave grace to implement that truth. As an aside, I praise God for these examinations now as many souls have been saved because they were found to be lost and deceived through these examinations. They consist of a thorough testing of a man's profession compared to salvation as defined by the written word of God with the help of the Holy Ghost. Consequentially many have been convinced of their lost estate, and given the opportunity to seek God to be truly saved rather than go on in their delusion.

About September of 2010, my last semester of college, the Lord took away all peace that I had up to that point. I began to doubt my salvation, but could never figure out why. I went through months of torment not knowing if I was lost or saved, and listened to countless sermons on biblical assurance. It got so bad that I was willing and desirous to find out that I was lost just to stop the turmoil. After months, I went camping alone in the woods for 3 days to seek God on these matters of my soul. The sermon “Seeking God Aright”, preached by Jake, was instrumental in this time. Through it and many other things the Lord showed me that I was unregenerate. There were many reasons with a few of the main ones being: I had never sought God with my whole heart willing to forsake all to follow him, but still loved my life and wanted to live it the way I desired, I had no power over the sins of my heart that no man can see, and I did not truly love the brethren, or want to be with them. I was, as Matthew 23 calls it, a whited sepulchre. I was refined and polished on the outside, but my heart still clave to the sins of covetousness, lust, greed, hatred, and pride. Any man can alter his outward appearance, but who can change his own heart? For the next 4 months I sought God to save my poor, wretched soul. I remember at times the Lord coming and meeting me and so magnifying my sin before my eyes that all I could do was get on my face and cry to God while trembling in fear to save me. It was a truly dreadful time, but I believe that a man must know his sickness before he will be willing to seek out the cure and pay whatever cost he must to acquire it. Christ demands complete surrender as expressed in Luke 14:26-33, and for these four months, He called me to lay down idol after idol...to choose life or death.

I moved in amongst the church in order to seek the Lord once I graduated from college, after the Lord faithfully shut every door leading me anywhere else for work. I knew for months that Dallas was where the Lord was leading, but I kicked against it much. Nevertheless, I knew that I wasn't going to be saved if I was unwilling to obey God. So I moved, and in the three weeks that it took for me to be found of the Lord, the brethren were faithful to preach to me, pray for me, and guide this spiritually blind man to the strait gate, until they, and more importantly I, knew that I had been crucified and risen with Christ. The Lord stripped much from me in this time, broke me in pieces, and pierced my heart with the sword of the Spirit every day, but I know now that it was all necessary for me to call upon the Lord in truth having no confidence in the filthy rags of my self-righteousness. I bless the Lord that the same faithful brother to

preach to me at the very beginning (Jake) was able by the grace of God to preach the atoning sacrifice of my Savior by grace through faith alone! To this broken man, as I cast all of myself at Jesus' feet, faith came by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

II. Post-Salvation Fruit:

Some of the immediate effects of my regeneration were a love for the written word of God, coupled with the quickening power of his Spirit to that word, confirming my soul to be his. I had a love for the brethren that far surpasses the love for any other in this world. The Lord began (and still is faithful), not only to cleanse outward sin, but to root out the sin of my heart. I am still shocked at the power of God to take a sin-loving man, give him a new heart, and conform him to the image of his Son. He gave me a precious sensitivity of, and hatred for, the sin I once loved, and a hungering and thirsting for the true righteousness I once ignored. I have noticed a highly increased sensitivity to sin especially when walking close to the Lord. This is exactly what Paul says should be the fruit of godly sorrow that worketh repentance to salvation: carefulness, clearing of yourselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and revenge. All against the vile sin still in our members! Another notable difference I saw was my relationship to the world. In my heart, before I was saved, I just wanted to be an engineer and make a lot of money to live a comfortable life. The Lord made me hate the vanities of this world! I'm willing, but it would be a cross to me now to be an engineer. The Lord has indeed called me to work, but, bless God, he has given me the blessing of doing that work along side my brethren.

A few months after I was saved the Lord really started to burden me to find a job that I might fulfill my calling and have to give to him that would ask. I started looking and could find nothing for weeks. I just kept praying for the job that the Lord would have me to do, when he led me to a job posting for an air conditioning filter technician. I had instant faith that this could be the Lord's will after I read the job description: that I would be on the road a lot and work on my own out of my truck. I was thrilled that I would be able to seek God while working. I called the owner and was invited for an interview the next morning. I knew the Lord would have to open this door because I failed about 4 of the 10 qualifications for the job. My interview went well the next morning and I awaited an answer. The same day of my interview another brother, Tanner, got back from New York and I told him about the job. He was even less qualified than I was, but still called the owner. His interview also went well the next day. During his interview he was asked if he knew me because his address was the same as mine on our application. This opened a door to share a little about us being Christians and that we would work hard for him and not do him wrong. The next day, we both got a call and a job offer. Out of 20-30 applicants, two under qualified Christians got the job! The general manager actually told us weeks later that the only reason we got the job was because we were Christians. Praise the Lord for directing our steps, and opening a door that no man can shut! I know it was a work of God. We ended up working for that company about 60 hours a week for six months.

Now that the church has made the move to Wells, TX, we have started Trudeau Tree Service, where I am an arborist - climbing, cutting down, and hauling away trees. The Lord has greatly used these labors to expose and purge sin and cause fruit to abound. It took the power of God

to turn me, who previously was unwilling to give up my intellect and engineering pride, and humble me to the dust so that my only desire is to be a doorkeeper in the house of my God.

This is not to say that I am without struggles. The Bible speaks of a mortification of sin that must be done on a daily basis as I die to myself and walk in newness of life. Part of my “self”, or my old man, is a tendency to extreme lightness, especially with my words. When the Lord yoked me together with my closest brother in Christ shortly after my conversion, we both learned quickly that both of our tendencies in the flesh was lightness. When one of us was walking in our flesh it quickly spread to the other. Once the Lord showed us our struggle, we began to cry to God to purge us of this sin and to grant the sobriety that a man of God is called to. Truly it took the power of God to free us from this sin, but our faithful Lord came through and bestowed the grace necessary to walk in the Spirit so that we would not fulfill the lusts of our flesh. Though it was one of my greatest weaknesses, this is now one of the most practically discernable workings of sanctification in my life by His Spirit. Looking back over the last year and a half, I notice that the closer I walk with God, the more burdened, sober, temperate, and heavy I am as the Lord gives me revelation of the reality of the fearful state of this world.

In this day of gross darkness and hypocrisy, I believe a distinguishing mark of the righteous would be similar to the days of Ezekiel: *“And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof”* (Ezekiel 9:4). I pray God would continue to give me this testimony and only let it increase as iniquity abounds all around.