

CHANGED LIVES

Trinity Sermon, No.18

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CHANGED LIVES

An Address given by

the Reverend

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Trinity Sermon No. 18

CHANGED LIVES

One of the most convincing proofs for the truth of Christianity is the personal experience of Christians. Everyone is interested in people, ancient or modern.

The true stories I want to bring to you do not need any embellishments. They come to you exactly as they were given to me by those whose lives were changed during the Billy Graham Crusade in Adelaide. Many people are active in this Church now as a result of the crusades. Some people ask the question - "Do those who make decisions at the meetings last?" In answer to this, after three years I am able to give the figures which indicate the fact that, where there is sympathetic support and sincere follow-up by the Church to whom they are referred, the majority go on to spiritual maturity.

Three hundred and twenty-five people were referred to this Church. Forty-one belonged to our daughter Church, St. Athanasius, Kidman Park. The majority of those are active in the life of the Church there. Twelve names were incorrectly recorded. Forty-six resided at temporary addresses, such as interstate and country people, nursing staff,

and hotel residents. The addresses of thirty-four are now unknown. Twenty-six are known to be living abroad or interstate. Forty-four were followed up because it was possible and necessary to do so. One hundred and two are still definitely accounted for as regular attenders at this Church or are known to be attending other Churches.

In other words 70% of those whom it is possible to account for are still lasting well.

These facts and figures may or may not interest you, but I am sure that those who have not as yet come to a place of personal commitment to Jesus Christ will be stimulated by the vital witness of some members of this Church who came forward at one of the Crusade meetings.

It is not my usual custom to give from the pulpit the experiences of others who may be known to some in the congregation, but in the case of each testimony I have first asked the permission of the person involved, which in each case was readily given. You may recognize the person of whom I am speaking. You may be sitting next to

that person. You may find yourself in similar circumstances to those in which any one of these people were placed.

First I want to bring you the testimony of St. Paul as given to young Timothy in his second letter, Chapter 1, verses 11 and 12. "I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also SUFFER these things; nevertheless I am NOT ASHAMED; for I KNOW whom I have BELIEVED, and am PERSUADED that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

In verse 12 there are three present tense verbs, two perfect tense verbs (which in the Greek language means an event in the past with an abiding effect in the present) and one noun with its roots in the perfect tense translated as a verb in the English. In other words the idea of the present runs through the verse. St. Paul's testimony is up-to-date. All that happened earlier in the past as his conversion when he made his decision for Christ is actively relevant in the present. But more than that: what was real to St. Paul then, is real to some in this Church now.

Paul said, "I SUFFER THESE THINGS."

Listen to the testimony of this Scientist:-

"God prepared me for an encounter with Himself by shattering my self-sufficiency. My husband and I were both trained as scientists and never attended Church or felt any need of God; we were quite comfortable.

"When our first child was born, life suddenly became very dark and I was completely helpless, for he was blind and had an incurable disease.

"For 18 months we carried on. Then a Christian invited me to the Crusade. Billy Graham spoke about the Cross and somehow I felt personally involved. At the end the Holy Spirit drew me out to seek Christ as the only answer to my need. I understood little at first, but He has shown me His way of salvation and fulfilled every promise.

"I know that God is ready to answer prayer, for only three months later my husband also gave his life to Christ."

St. Paul said, "I AM NOT ASHAMED."

Listen to the testimony of a retired Officer of the Royal Navy and his wife.

"We were both nominal Christians attending Church on most Sundays - that is, when it didn't inconvenience us too much. We considered it the right thing to do, but were careful not to become involved in any way if we could help it. We lived for ourselves and our family only.

"We never troubled to think deeply on spiritual things and our Bibles were dusty on the shelf.

"Neither had we ever really understood the true Gospel message. Our spiritual hearing must have been quite deaf to it.

"We went along to the first Billy Graham meeting mainly out of curiosity, and we were both quite sure that it would have no effect on us.

"We can only say that what happened to us must have been the Holy Spirit moving us, as we both felt compelled to go forward and receive Jesus Christ in- to our hearts.

"The change of heart and change of values which has resulted seems to us nothing short of a miracle.

"We now have peace in our hearts with the assurance that, in coming to our Saviour in repentant faith, He has borne our sins in His body on the Cross and by His Resurrection and promises has taken away the fear of old age and death.

"We find that our whole attitude to other people has completely changed and, instead of trying to avoid them, we now have a great concern that they, too, should share the experience and new life.

"We now love the fellowship of other Christians and feel very happy in their company. Various worldly things which we used to enjoy no longer appeal to us. Our taste in the books we read has completely changed. Similarly our attitude towards money has changed.

"During the last three years we have learned the joy of reading the Scriptures and praying together.

"We praise God for His wonderful

goodness to us and for His guiding hand through many dangers and narrow escapes from death throughout our lives, and shudder as we realise how utterly unready we were in those times to meet our Lord and Saviour."

St. Paul said, "I KNOW."

Listen to the testimony of a Bricklayer and his wife.

"Yes, the Graham Crusade was on. We were helping because people that had not heard about Christ needed help. Because we were regular Church goers we thought we didn't need Christ; we knew all about Him. Little did we know that God was about to put his hand on us. During the first week of the Crusade we went forward and were born again. The Holy Spirit indeed came into our hearts. The joy that came into our lives was something we had never known before. Many things had to go overboard in our lives. We began to have our daily Bible reading and to attend Bible Classes. We were hungry to hear more of our Saviour and to do His work by speaking boldly for Him at work, in the home and, in fact, anywhere.

The wife goes on to say, "I became sick and one night had to have an emergency operation. For a while I became frightened, but after praying for help, an overwhelming calmness came over me and all fear vanished. The Comforter came and took over. We prayed about things and our prayers have been answered. Now we really know God answers prayer if said in faith.

They go on to urge, "If God speaks to you, we earnestly implore you to give yourself to Him and to know the joy we have and to share it with us. Our only regret is that we didn't find Christ sooner."

St. Paul said, "I HAVE BELIEVED."

Listen to the testimony of an outsider.

"Up till the age of sixteen I had never been inside a Church. My family were non-Christians and tried effectively to discourage 'anything religious.' My first contact was when against my will I went to hear T.B. Rees at a Youth for Christ Meeting. Later I was invited to a Guest Service at the local Church. It was here that, even

though still unconvinced, I received the tickets for the Billy Graham Crusade in Wembley Stadium about fifteen miles north of London.

"Here I gave my life to Christ and have been thankful ever since. I left England and travelled to every country of the world, and as I was working as a staff photographer for "Life International" I had free access to Russia, the Communist block countries. Later I went round the Far East and did a series on the Buddhist Temples.

"When I came to Australia I felt my life was being unfruitful for Christ. I felt I should share my faith. It was with this in mind that I joined into the life and devotions of Holy Trinity.

"When I tried to put Him first and not to do my will I had a time of utter desolation. I felt sure there must be other jobs for me to do for the Lord. Then I met and married a wonderful Christian girl and by studying and helping each other we can feel our faith grow.

"Yet we feel that this is not the end, and we pray that wherever the Lord

wants us, there may we go with His strength."

St. Paul said, "I AM PERSUADED."

Listen to the testimony of a young Medical Student, a member of this congregation, who was found in an exhausted condition after having been lost for four days in the bush near Wilpena Pound.

"The Billy Graham Crusade was for me a time of re-dedication. From that time I began reading God's word systematically. One verse in particular became precious to me. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word."

In hospital two days ago he wrote -
"From my recent experience I know

1. What it is to be the lost sheep searched for and found.
2. How readily and in what a real way God supplies strength in times of great need.
3. That hope can keep one going when

there seems to be nothing else.

4. The great joy that comes when one realizes that God has answered prayer."

St. Paul said, "I HAVE COMMITTED."

Listen to the testimony of an Assistant Matron at one of our large public hospitals.

"At the Billy Graham Crusade in Adelaide I claimed the status of Christian. Having been baptized and confirmed in the Church and having taught in the Sunday School Kindergarten for some time, I knew the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

"I attended the Counselling classes for the Graham Crusade and was duly made a reserve Counsellor. Attending most of the meetings I was called on several times to counsel people who had responded to the invitation to accept Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord.

"During this time it became very clear to me, through the Grace of God, that I myself must step out for my Sav-

our and make a public re-dedication of my faith. This I did and now with joyful, thankful heart I can say "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

These six people of this congregation, as well as many others, can say with St. Paul, "For which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

Have you a testimony? Have you been persuaded to live? Have you personally experienced the power of the Gospel in your life? Perhaps you are asking, "What is the Gospel?"

St. Paul said: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1.16) and again in Romans 6.23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

First let us see

MAN'S CONDITION

The Bible tells us plainly that "the

wages of sin is death", "The soul that sinneth it shall die", "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God", "There is none righteous, no not one."

The universal extent of human sin is a fact of our own everyday experience. We see it as we read history or the newspapers. We see it as we travel abroad or mix with our fellow-men. We see it in our home. We see it in our own lives.

Nearly all our legislation, says John Stott, has grown up because human beings cannot be trusted to settle their disputes with honesty and without self-interest. A promise is not enough; we need a contract. Doors are not enough; we have to lock and bolt them. The payment of fares is not enough; we have to be issued with tickets which are punched, inspected and collected. Law and order are not enough; we need the police to enforce them. We cannot trust each other. In fact we cannot trust ourselves. To make it more personal, take the matter of our own standards, quite apart from the standards of God, or the standards other people expect of us. Take our own standards. Can we honestly say we al-

ways live up to our own standards. Do we not find ourselves trying to excuse ourselves by constantly lowering our standards so that the gap between them and our actual behaviour is not too great, or too uncomfortable or too convicting? St. John was right when he said, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

The Bible clearly states as an unalterable law, "The wages of sin is death." There's no escape from the attempt to break the moral law in the same way as there is no escape from the attempt to break physical laws. Some try to avoid the logic of this by the use of certain arguments.

1. The argument of IMMUNITY. "It won't happen to me."

We all have an inherent sense of personal immunity. Without it none of us could carry on our daily living or even remain sane. You know that a person driving a car at 75 miles per hour is liable to be killed, yet he does it without turning a hair. Or as it was pointed out by an Adelaide specialist when asked about the connection

between smoking and lung cancer said: "You know that if eight men smoke more than twenty cigarettes a day, one of the eight will die of lung cancer; but your sense of personal immunity enables you to feel that, if you are one of the eight, the man who dies of lung cancer will be one of the other seven, not you. Each of the other seven also has a sense of personal immunity and feels exactly the same way. Somebody must be wrong. It might just as well be you as anybody." The specialist went on to say, "If all of you were in a room with me and knew for certain that I would shortly go mad and shoot one in every eight and you didn't know which ones, how many of you would stay in the room?"

There is no immunity as far as the consequences of sin are concerned. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The proportion is not one in eight, but eight out of eight because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

2. The argument of FUTILITY. "What's the use anyway."

This is the attitude of the person

who has tried and tried again and failed and failed again. He honestly wants to do better. He wants to get rid of the things in his life which shame him, but he cannot. Eventually he thinks that it is futile and he gives it away.

3. The argument of ABILITY. "I can manage my own affairs." Such a person reasons like this; "I can look after myself." "I don't need any help." "I can conquer this sin business myself, I can get out of the mess that I am in, I'm good enough as I am." But he is not, and deep down he knows it.

4. The argument of INCRECULITY. It goes like this. "It's too good to be true." When you come to a person and say, "Do you know that simply by receiving Jesus Christ, by committing your life to him, by asking him to come into your life, by doing something as simple as that, you may have forgiveness of your sins because Jesus Christ has already done everything for you," the reply often is, "Surely it isn't as simple as that. Isn't it something I have to work for?" It seems incredible. But it worked in the lives of those whose testimonies have been given.

5. The argument of NEUTRALITY. "I couldn't care less." Such a person tries to shake off the whole matter and tries to remain neutral about it. There are more people with that attitude today than any other kind of attitude. It may be you are faced with the facts of the Gospel and the necessity of personal commitment, and are saying right now, "I want to be neutral about this. I'm not going to commit myself. I'm not going to take this religious business too far. Let me remain like most other people. I want to be neutral about this." But this argument does not deal with the basic human problem of the sin of man.

Man's condition is such that he is lost and he needs to be found. He is a slave and he needs to be freed. He is condemned and he needs to be pardoned. To be really honest about this, as we look into our own hearts, we know that it is true. The Scriptures are clear: "The wages of sin is death." But that's not the end.

GOD'S PROVISION

"The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." One

never tires of preaching this glorious Gospel, for one never knows when there is some seeking soul who is ready to receive it. Does it not often puzzle you that an evangelist like Billy Graham can preach the same Gospel day after day, night after night, year after year, in one place after another, and never get tired of doing so? Would you not think it would become monotonous after a while? The character of the Gospel is such that one never tires of preaching it, and the Christian never tires of hearing it, because he knows that there is always someone who needs it and whose life could be transformed through it.

God's provision has been made. The Gospel is simply this. We start with a consciousness of our sin. We acknowledge the hopeless state we are in. All our arguments and excuses fall aside as before God we see ourselves as we really are. We say with that publican in the Temple that Jesus told us about: "God be merciful unto me, a sinner."

Then we realise that God has done for us that which we could not do for ourselves. God's Son came with the

express purpose of saving us from our sin. The Son of Man "came to seek and to save that which is lost." He died to save. This was the cost of our redemption. This was the price He was willing to pay so that our salvation might come to us as a free gift. He did everything necessary so that all we need to do is come to Him in faith. Christ died for the ungodly, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. More than that, Christ lives to save and He is here now. He is waiting for our response. He has done everything. He wants us simply to come to Him and in His risen power He stands amongst us now. I wonder are we ready to receive Him.

Richard Hooker said, in the 16th century, "Let it be accounted folly, or frenzy, or fury, or whatsoever. It is our wisdom and our comfort, we care for no knowledge in the world but this, that man hath sinned and God hath suffered, that God hath made himself the sin of man and that men are made the righteousness of God." What a wonderful statement! Is that your testimony? Has the Spirit of God been speaking to you over the years, over recent weeks, or even at this moment?

As you have listened to the testimony of others have you been saying, "I wish that were I." I want to say to you, there are many people in this Church who have a personal testimony to give as well as those I mentioned earlier. Each one of the clergy, the wardens of this Church, the organist, the choir members, the sidesmen, the leaders of our organisation all have a personal testimony to give. Have you? Are you able to say, "I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day?"

Perhaps you are asking, "How may I receive Christ as my Saviour?" You are not required to be reformed by your own effort, but to be transformed by the power of Christ which is available. You are not expected to know everything, but simply to obey Christ. It is not necessary to wait until you are good enough or until you think you are bad enough, but you are to come now as you are. Come now in repentance, acknowledging your sin and saying before God, "I know I am a sinner; I may not know much else, but I know that."

Then see on the hill of Calvary the

crucified Christ lifted up, who said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." See in Him the one who bears in His body our sin; the one who is waiting for us to come to Him. I wonder are you ready to come to Him in obedience?

I know of a lad of fifteen who had run away from home. I know his parents were very anxious. The lad comes from a fine Christian home, not one of those homes where religion is rammed down the throat of children. For some unknown reason he left without warning. You can imagine how the father felt. He wondered, every time the 'phone rang, would he hear the voice of his son? He wondered, every time the back door banged, would it mean the homecoming of his son? He wondered, every time that the front door bell rang, was it someone to give him news? All the time he longed for the return of the one whom he loved. God's love for us is like that. We have strayed away from Him. We are estranged from God but He is waiting, waiting, waiting for us to come home and He has made the way easy because we do not come in our own strength. Immediately we start to make our way back in repentance and

faith Jesus Christ meets us on the way with the words, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Do you want to come home to the Heavenly Father in reconciliation? Are you ready to come to Christ in repentance, faith and obedience? Do it now. Then testify with St. Paul and all others who have claimed Christ as Saviour, "I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day."

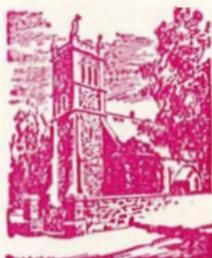
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MY PRAYER

"God give me strength to respond to Your call of love and come to Jesus Christ just as I am to find your answer for my sin, for His sake."

Amen.

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