

‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD, And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.’ -Isaiah 43:10

John preached a sermon on Isaiah 43 in which he said – ‘The past is not a measure of your future ... if these are your thoughts you short-change yourself. We must taste where we are at present.’

I have lived a very religious life ... one in which I claimed to be a lover of God, yet I lived most my life with no knowledge of Him and His greatness. I now understand that my life was one filled with false doctrine, no care for scripture and a very, very small view of God. I know the importance of Christian fellowship and I now know with all certainty that it is a travesty when one depends on others to teach them the truth of God ... when the truth is clearly revealed to them and the Word is in their hands.

From a very early age I had an awareness that God was real, alive and that He somehow ‘controlled’ everything; though that did not make sense. Thoughts of Father, Jesus and a scary Holy Ghost moved across my mind very often with gentle stirrings of emotions mingled with many questions. In these questions were numerous concerns for my soul (what it was, how it got there/where). These questions often affected me with emotions, convictions and childlike affections for God.

During one of these very questioning times I attended a revival at our church with my family. I was very young and knew very little of God ... all of what I did know was not the truth. I went forward one night thinking this was ‘right.’ I was asked a couple questions, lead to pray and went through the motions we call ‘Baptism’ two weeks later. I was very selfishly affected by this for quite some time.

I began attempts to pray, became more interested in religion and church activities. I seemed to be happy now ... since my soul was going to heaven. Nothing in me changed other than my prideful heart becoming more full of me. I lived my life for myself ... and I believed that I had been saved ... the work was done. With time the emotions and those childish affections lessened and finally the stirrings disappeared altogether.

Through my life I was convinced of the ‘saving’ in spite of very real apprehensions and doubts which at many times were accompanied by fear. When these fears arose I would not allow myself to dwell on them. I would increase church activity, try to ‘mind’ those 10 commandments, and try to talk to God. I just knew this would make me feel better ... that those inward hurts, doubts and conflicts would just go away if I could just fill my life with these activities associated with God.

Several times these fears reached extreme highs. My mind and life were full and busy ... with selfish things ... things of the world ... and I was about them constantly. If there was a gap or empty space I would fill it. These fearful interruptions of my busy life seemed so very unfair ... after all, I was ‘saved’. Why should I be so bothered? To me, Satan was just attempting to draw me off course. I had no thought that the Holy Spirit was moving me ... and I did not seek God’s face ... nor did I truly know what this meant.

In one instance I became associated with people who had a defined view of God ... something I did not have. In this I began to read more; not so much the Bible, but books about the Bible and some of those self-help books John mentions. I did change somewhat outwardly ... acted a little different ... but that was all.

Later, Joseph participated in a class at Excelsior that Misty Snyder taught. Misty required the children to memorize portions of Romans 1. I am now thankful that God led her to do so; for this was the first time I recall any scripture actually affecting me and I can now see the working of the Holy Spirit in my life at that time. It seemed or felt to me that God was showing me the truth of who and what I really was. As I helped Joseph with his memory work those verses began to consume my thoughts ... and I found it so very hard to concentrate and very difficult to sleep while these words played over and over in my mind ... and my heart became troubled:

‘They are without excuse’ ... ‘Professing to be wise, they became fools’ ... ‘although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God’ ... ‘nor were thankful’ ... ‘became futile in their thoughts’ ... ‘their foolish hearts were darkened’ ...

God was making me aware of my sinful nature and my all-consuming self-centeredness ... for I did know of God, but I was suppressing that truth in my unrighteousness. One day after we completed memory work, I read on ... with great anxiety ... and when I read verse 28 I was so filled with doubt, fear and emotion that I cried uncontrollably ... feeling that this was indeed ‘me’. God tells us in Romans 1:28 – ‘And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.’ I knew this was me.

He did not leave me here with these thoughts ... I struggled with these questions and emotions ... torn between Satan’s lie that I had been ‘saved and baptized’ at an early age ... and that truth God was now showing me through this passage.

I sought advice ... but not through scripture ... I sought advice from a well-meaning person who assured me that ‘once saved, always saved’ was the truth. That God had indeed surely saved me, and Satan was just stirring me up for his own evil intent. And so, with enough passage of time and enough turning of my back to the truth I was back to my old self ... almost. But ... those stirrings never completely left me ... or as I have come to know ... the Holy Spirit was indeed in pursuit of a very unrighteous ‘me’.

During this time our family began attending Christ Church and God began showing me more and more of himself ... teaching me through scriptures I had heard before, but never understood. It seemed to me a sort of new awareness of Him; yet there was still so much pride in the awareness. This time in my life was filled with much doubt, fear and anticipation ... for what or why I was not sure. It seemed that at every corner there was ‘something’ to face, ‘something’ I could not solve alone, and nothing seemed to ‘work’ as I had planned. My life had no peace ... I became angry ... and even more self-centered ... and I felt very threatened by these thoughts that I may not be all I expected myself to be. All the while the Holy Spirit continued that quest to show me my true self.

There came a point in this time in which I became very uneasy and was somewhat forced to speak with John Snyder ... though I now know this was part of God’s blessed plan for me ... I met with John not for the purpose of seeking advice, but more to ‘explain where I was in this madness’. I dreaded this meeting for various reasons, but mainly because I

was prideful and I felt intimidated by John's knowledge of and love for God and his determination to be obedient to Him.

John was so very kind and concerned, something I did not expect. He showed a true love for God in his sweetness and kind affections for our family ... and his piety was real. He showed the greatest delight in the Word, and he pointed me to it. The Holy Spirit was working in me ... and John was pointing me to scripture. John and Misty met with me countless times ... each gently guiding. 'Read, Susanne' ... John would say. 'Read Luke ... it is full of accounts of Christ's love' ... 'Read the Psalms' ... 'Read, Read, Read' ... he said. I was desperate for answers. I picked up my Bible, which I seldom read unselfishly ... I 'dusted it off' so to speak ... and I read. And the more I read, the more God showed me the beauty of Himself ...

One passage that I read early on that encouraged me so was James 4:7-10 – 'Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.'

During this time I received two letters that greatly influenced my thoughts: one from John Snyder, the other from Ms. Kathy Streval. The letter from John encouraged me to cling to Christ ... that my life was indeed not my own to live as I pleased, but was a life for Christ filled with responsibility ... that the world was watching me. This was frightening. Ms. Kathy's letter helped me to see that I was not alone in this experience. That she had traversed these paths and had found in the end a beauty far surpassing all others ... The love of Christ and the hope we have in Him.

The Holy Spirit continued to work in me, as God's message in John's sermons pierced my heart each week and renewed any struggles that I thought I had overcome. God was indeed emptying me of myself ... and He was showing me more of my sin that I cared to see. This emptying was so very painful and even more humbling. People around me were pulling and pushing me in all directions, the confusion was more that I felt I could bear. John said this was 'good' ... and I just did not understand fully how this was 'good' ... But it was ...

Mr. Roberts visited our church during this time ... and he said some things that weighed heavy on my heart ... 'How carefully do you listen to the Word of the Lord? When it is proclaimed do you listen? We must ask that those that are still 'on the bottle' begin to listen and be shaken to the core and take care not to approach Christianity as an infant. Some seem to remain in Christian infancy because they truly have not come to repentance. True motivation for repentance is not for self, but for Christ. Pray for work in them.' On another night he said, 'Has God convicted you of a sin ... don't refuse Him. This is trampling God underfoot. Remember that grace cannot be abused.' These words did sting my heart for God had truly convicted me of my sin, and I began to beg God to shake me to that core that I might not approach Christianity in this manner ... and that Christ's beauty would indeed be seen ... that I might have true repentance in Christ. Mr. Roberts explained 'repentance' to me ... and from that night for me there was no turning ...

More and more John, Lanny, Chuck and Matt Miller encouraged me to 'press on', for Christ was still not my greatest treasure.

... His hand was heavy upon me. God granted me faith in Him and brought a peace in the understanding that I could no longer plead with myself. My fear was indeed cast aside. I began truly seeking God's face to confess these truths of myself that He was showing me – for I was indeed a wretched, miserable sinner and my heart was deceitful ... and even when I did good evil was still present – and it was Christ's work alone that eased this weight of sin. His gentle kindnesses and mercies towards me increased moment by moment ... and I truly knew and had fellowship with God ... He humbled me with the truth and beauty of salvation by free grace of Him. A grace He extended to me ... for He has broken my chains and delivered me from this 'body of death' and He has given me light – For He saved me.

The effects of Him – of his righteousness ... His glory, splendor and majesty are incomprehensible to me. For now my heart is restless without God's word which is pleasant, lively and sweet ... my apprehensions have subsided, and the truths of Christ are ever present. In Jesus, I find a beauty so vast – like none I have ever known. His changeless, everlasting majesty filled with patience, kindness and love – marvels me. His devotion in full submission to the Father in all humility – awes me. That he would look upon me with certainty of promise gives my heart its resting place. I rejoice with trembling as I live the truths of Phillipians 3:7-16, which begins ... 'But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.'

God has indeed given me a new heart ... for I hardly recognize myself. I am like a new creature. He is my interest ... the old ones are gone. Seems He causes to me to forget all but Him, as I learn more of His truths. I cannot express the true fullness He has placed in my heart. It is a fullness 'gladly taken up' so-to-speak with Him and spiritual matters ... a fullness of His joy in me ... His abiding in me and me abiding in Him. His words fill so much of my thoughts, so constant sometimes that it seems a distraction to be in this world. To know and have covenant love with Him – living in my once poor, wretched heart – this overwhelms me.

My smallness, feebleness and my constant need of Him are ever present as he calls me constantly not to be content with where or who I am, but to cling ever closer to Him daily. His goodness causes my heart to long for Him. He has placed within me a blessed assurance that I am his ... Christ is now my greatest treasure, and He is my confidence.

God has shown me the truths of himself – that he IS the God of Isaiah 43:10 and that he indeed calls me of his own; and I am so humbled that my past is not a measure of my future for he has given me a taste of where I am at present and I rest in my future in Him.

I am seeking His will to follow Hosea 6:3 -

'Let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth.'