

Sunday 21st January 2018

(Edit note: the bracketed parts are things that were said impromptu from the notes on the day)

Sharing my testimony, the brief has been to speak on general theme of how the Bible and Jesus became important in my life.

The lord be with you....

I was raised with church as part of my life as a child, like the majority of church people in NZ I suppose

When I was young I remember learning and knowing that God was three persons, that Jesus was God's son, because we sang hymns in a traditional presbyterian church, Holy Holy Holy Lord God Almighty, and "all people that on earth do dwell sing to the Lord with cheerful voice", and "Eternal, invisible, God only wise". Great truth

Then into my teens I started attending youth group, and every year we would attend combined youth group camps at various locations around Otago

At all these camps it was always made clear that we should know God, talk to God often and everyday, this was a new idea to me, which wasn't preached explicitly or practiced so much in my church or family.

My family, we knew God truly as "Eternal invisible God only wise" I suppose, I guess it was more of an agnostic acceptance of God. God's out there, he's in control, but we sort of just get on with it and hope for the best.

We said grace at dinner time and the Lord's prayer in church, but the rest of the time is for work and school and community music, and I guess if any of us prayed about something ever, then we prayed privately but not together, and that's ok.

I remember the first time I felt the Holy Spirit's presence in a strong way was at my confirmation, it was a baptism and confirmation evening service in our church and there were a good number of eight or more people either being baptised and confirmed, confirmation was for those who had been baptised as babies but now wanted to confess Christ as Lord for themselves. I didn't get immersed in the pool but anointed on the forehead with oil.

I remember experiencing then the warmth and anointing of the Holy Spirit as an elder read parts of Timothy over me when I was getting ministered to

Let no one despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

13Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.

14Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given you through the prophecy spoken over you at the laying on of the hands of the elders. **15**Be diligent in these matters and absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. **16**Pay close attention to your life and to your teaching. Persevere in these things, for by so doing you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

After confirmation and having fresh revelation of the Holy Spirit in my life, I noticed a difference when it came to singing the old hymns, words that used to be rote and distant, and didn't mean all that much, were now all new, they were very succinct and had a depth of thought and meaning and revelation that I'd never seen before, this was a sudden change, I found it amazing. I was experiencing what was being said, and the importance of it.

It was after this I realised that it wasn't enough to just sing the words absent-mindedly whenever we had worship, but to make sure those words were sung to the Lord *at that moment*, it was then that I realised that when we worshiped we sing to God because he is close by, and in the room with us here today, deserving of our worship,

also with this came –much to the irritation of some church band mates the scrutiny of the content of the words of every song we were doing after that!

As it is important not to offer rubbish to God Almighty,

Did the songs say the right things? or indeed anything of God? Are the songs to God, are we singing to the Lord, or did they just meander? are the words actually just more about us and our nice ideas, projected onto God. In the same manner as Cain,

(If you remember the story of Cain and Abel, the common teaching is Abel sacrificed a blood sacrifice which is what was required by God. Think back to Adam and Eve when they were banished from the Garden, God gave them animal skins to wear, this means death came into the perfect world, something had to die. Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins")

Cain says "here you go God here's my basket of stuff that's not acceptable to you, but you'll accept it anyway". There's a whole sermon on this, talk to me about it later, but we have to be careful we don't make the same error.

In the bible, talking about the prophet Samuel it says 'He let none of his words fall to the ground' and we are to be the same when we worship in spirit and in truth. Don't let any of the things we are saying just fall off, make sure that you mean it, and that they project on to the Lord.

*So it was at this time the hymns became powerful, I felt I had changed to one who knew *something* at least of what the bible says in Collosions and other places, of being *Alive in Christ*, I got that, because my worship experience was more real and active than before

Read Tozer "whatever happened to worship" pg 77 normal or nominal?

Later as a student I was introduced to the music of Keith Green on a tape with a friend, I was really impressed by his piano playing and the songwriting, thought this guy's on par with Billy Joel or Elton John, it was the same era late 70s early 80s (a great time for music), and then the depth of thought and conviction and teaching in his lyrics, it was better than any Christian music I'd heard before, and still to this day.

Keith Green, I'll just talk about him for a little bit as his testimony was a big encouragement to me as a young man in really believing in Jesus and the Bible.

He was raised as a Hollywood child, appeared on some commercials, tv shows and he was writing songs as a boy, produced a record when he was 12, but like it is in that world, he was just another one that got disposed of.

Later he became a hippie in his late teens, looking to all kinds of alternative spiritual paths and drugs etc,

kind of what's the norm today I would suggest-

I truly think hippie culture is now the mainstream, It was originally a lifestyle for "no collar" ruffians, but it's all through white collar and blue collar society now too.

You've got alternative religions, and mind blanking meditation, pop psychology, spirit mediums, magic, astrology, casual sex and drugs. This is the condition we're in now as a society, maybe you're doing some of this stuff yourself, but as a Christian it has to stop or the word says, you'll get handed over to it, and that's not a fun place to be believe me.

Keith Green and his friends decided that they would make Jesus their guru since they noticed in all the religions they were looking in to that Jesus was mentioned somewhere and he said that he was the 'only way', and they liked his teachings so they thought they should probably follow the guy who said he was the only way. (They weren't Christians as such at this time)

Him and his wife were invited to a house church meeting, they had worship and bible teaching then prayer, the invitation was given to receive Jesus, they were taught how they could start again and receive the Lord, with a clean slate -raise hand so they could be prayed for- dramatic change.

I don't know about you but I've always been encouraged by testimony of people who didn't know the Life in Christ until later, and then became truly born again, and just how much change and power it has on people, cos we can forget as church kids, and be quite ignorant of the power and blessing we have in Christ, just like the Israelites in the desert, it reminds me when I see these transformations to be thankful for the peace and joy of the Spirit that we have, not to take what we have in Christ casually, or glibly or lightly ever, there's just no place for that!

What the Lord has done for us is so great and so profound, he's rescued us from eternal separation, he's restored us, he's healed us before, he's delivered us from

demons (I mean that, I'm not just talking about metaphorical things that ignorant psychology explains away, some of us here have witnessed these things, I won't go into detail here) It's just not appropriate to be casual about any of this, this is the power of God at work.

There's tremendous power here if we accept it. The word warns us and says "they have a form of Godliness but deny the power thereof", I talked about Cain already, we're not to form any sort of Godliness of our own making, but to be Alive in Christ, and have Godly character because of him and only him, he's our righteousness, it's really important to get this right.

When I see that sort of change in people, including myself the past year, It helps me to remember the lost again, to be aware again of the real powers of darkness at work that would undo the blessings we have. To remember and know that Jesus is above all that.

Read Keith green pg 227

How can they live without Jesus
How can live without God's love
How can they feel so at home down here
When there's so much more up above

Throwin' away things that matter
They hold on to things that don't
The world has gone crazy
But soon maybe
A lot more are gonna know

For maybe they don't understand it
Or maybe they just haven't heard
Or maybe we're not doin' all we can
Living up to His Holy Word

'Cause phonies have come
And wrongs been done
Even killing in Jesus' name
And if you've been burned
Here's what I've learned
The Lord's not the one to blame

For He's not just a religion
With steeples and bells

Or a salesman who will sell you
The things you just want to hear

For His love was such
That he suffered so much
To cause some of us
Just to follow, follow

So many laughing at Jesus
While the funniest thing that He's done
Is love this whole stubborn rebellious world
While their hate for Him just goes on

And love just like that
Will bring him back
For the few He can call His friends
The ones He's found true
Who've made it through
Enduring until the end
The ones He's found true
Who've made it through
Enduring until the end

as I was preparing this I kept hearing how we're called to Live in Christ, not to live for the world, or fame or pleasure but to live in Christ. (Some of us may become famous, who knows? But we're not to live for it)

We're called to remember each day to confess Christ in our living,

Confess Christ in our workplace, keep the talk clean (I have to be careful not to slip into swearing along with others when they are talking at work, it can be very easy to slip into that for me – the book of James has a lot to say about this)

Confess Christ with our work ethic, not to be skiving off, leave things half done we're ambassadors for Jesus now, we've got to be careful.
It's a reminder of how gracious the Lord is when we think about this isn't it?

Along that same thought we're not to take his name in vain – this isn't just talking about people using Jesus name as a swear word, but I have seen church people do that though.... –this is about our attitudes and behaviour towards others during the week, being as Christlike as possible as our witness, holding the name of Jesus in high regard, the name above all names, don't take that in

vain. Interesting though isn't it how only Jesus name gets used as a swear word, you notice you don't hear the other Gods mentioned like that.

Final point

Because God is Holy, we're called to confess our wrongdoing to him, it might seem like an unnecessary and small thing to confess sin regularly to God, but I've learnt that God doesn't think so.

You know we recite a lot of stuff in church, but I don't know if we believe it – "is God the same yesterday today and forever" as the bible says?

-Yes.

Has he changed his mind about sin?

No.

(it doesn't matter what the sin is; sin is sin)

When we do confess our sin to Him it both acknowledges the sin before God, and puts us into agreement with how **God** sees sin, otherwise we'll pretend and do everything to convince ourselves, with the help of the world, the flesh and the devil that it doesn't really matter.

Main thing I've learnt the last 2 years at least, and they've been tough as many of you know, is without confession of sin and repentance of it- that is making the effort to keep away from sin- you won't find true release.

If you're just keeping all that stuff to yourself, and away from God, get prayer, get free before it's too late.

I'll finish with a song I wrote 17 years ago along to these words by Charles Wesley

O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free;
a heart that's sprinkled with the blood
so freely shed for me:

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne;
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone:

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within:

A heart in every thought renewed,
and full of love divine;
perfect and right and pure and good —
a mirror, Lord, of thine.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new best name of Love.