

OUR MAGNIFICENT SAVIOR! Acts 10:38-43

(Peter speaking, NLT) 'And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. ³⁹ And we apostles are witnesses of all He did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross, ⁴⁰ but God raised Him to life on the third day. Then God allowed Him to appear, ⁴¹ not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be His witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. ⁴² And He ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead. ⁴³ He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in Him will have their sins forgiven through His name.'

INTRODUCTION

Brian Simo spent many years as a driver on the Trans-Am, road-racing circuit. You probably never heard of him. But there's one thing about him with which you *are* familiar. In 1985 he created the "No Fear" clothing line, cashing in on an idea that appeals to many Americans. We have a lot of respect for bravery; for those willing to take challenging risks by refusing to knuckle under to their fears. But when does "No Fear" really mean "Real Foolish"? In January 2015, three high school boys ignored the warning signs, "Danger! Thin Ice," while cavorting on a frozen lake in St. Charles, MO, just west of St. Louis. Like many teenagers, they thought the dangers were exaggerated; nothing too bad could really happen to them. Then the ice beneath them gave way, pitching two into the freezing waters. One boy, John Smith, should have died after being beneath the water for 15 minutes and without a pulse for 45 minutes. Medical personnel involved in his care call his total recovery, with no symptoms of his trauma, "miraculous." His story can be seen in the movie *Breakthrough* released in theaters nationwide in April; soon to be on DVD.

I wish I could confess I've never done anything "Real Foolish." Early in 1974, visiting the Phoenix Zoo with friends, I couldn't see any tigers in their exhibit area, which was surrounded by a steep enclosure to keep them captive. Nor could I see them at the base of the enclosure along the opposite wall. So I climbed over the outer railing to peer down the nearside wall. The tigers sat in the shade at the base of this wall; one gave me a start by growling at my head sticking over the wall! But at least these tigers were 30' below.

Unlike the three teenage boys who were foolishly confident no serious harm could come to them, despite signs warning them of "Danger," the possibility of death often seemed more real in my youth than the certainty of life. I'd like to share with you my personal testimony; how God our Heavenly Father protected me from physical death until **Jesus Christ** could save me from everlasting death and transform my life.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

At age one, one of my lungs was already so completely eaten up by tuberculosis it didn't even appear on X-rays. Drs. gave me just a 50-50 chance of living. The combination of Streptomycin and other medicines that ended the reign of terror of The Great White Plague, as TB was called due to the white spaces appearing in X-Rays where lung tissue had been consumed, was just barely coming into use. To give me a better chance to survive, Drs. urged my parents to move from West Virginia to Arizona's dry climate. The trip took more than a month because my Dad became increasingly ill. He no sooner arrived in Tucson than a Dr. diagnosed *him* with tuberculosis. Unwittingly, he'd transmitted TB to his infant son. He flew back to West Virginia, entered an adult TB sanitarium, and began fighting for his life. My mother stayed in Tucson long enough to establish Arizona residency. She then placed me in Comstock Children's Sanitarium, a local charity hospital. My Mom and two older siblings, a sister and a brother, moved back to West Virginia to be near my Dad. This was 1952, when I was about 18 months old. Gratefully, my Dad recovered from his TB, after staring death in the face many times, and returned to Tucson with our family in late 1954.

For the next four years, the Comstock Sanitarium was my home. My "room" was a crib in a large ward with about 20 beds in it. Each morning, a box of toys went around; we could select one as the only thing we had to play with all day. Richard H. Huff, the Uncle for whom I'm named, moved his family to Tucson to help watch over me. They are Christians and prayed I would live. A godly grandmother prayed I would live. She used to tell people in faith one day I would be 6' tall and weigh 175 lbs. I made it on both counts.

It was mid-1956 before the hospital released me to rejoin my family. It was like starting life all over again. I'd never seen a dog or magazine. I knew almost nothing about anything, including what it meant to have a Dad, Mom, sister, or brother. They were almost total strangers. To this day, I'm hampered by the lack of family bonding and being almost a hospital "orphan" in my crucial formative years. This left me extremely insecure. I frightened easily and jumped when startled. Life often seemed overwhelming and fraught with dangers. Death seemed to live in my neighborhood; just a few blocks away. Having been sick for so long, I had very little resistance to other illnesses. I came down with double pneumonia twice in first grade and missed 96 school days due to various illnesses, but still passed. I had a thirst to learn and family and friends patient enough to answer the million questions I asked. I grew stronger as I grew older, but my knees were almost always scabby because when I tried to run like other boys, my flat feet and weak bones did not support me very well. I had severe allergies, drove my brother nuts with my morning snorting, and came down with bronchitis each year through my sophomore year, causing me to miss 2-3 weeks of school.

In my junior year, Death came knocking again. In February of 1968, I drove home from a basketball game at Sunnyside High School, after my Amphitheater High School team lost our second straight game by one point. It was nighttime in a dark, unfamiliar part of town. I turned to look at my friend, who'd given a dumb reason why we lost, and went through the stop sign on Bilby Rd. at Park Ave. A Camaro T-boned the 1953 Volkswagen Beetle I was driving. My face smashed on the steering wheel, knocking me out; my friend and I were both thrown from the car to the roadside. While unconscious, my spirit rose like a feather fluttering in the breeze, going back and forth; up, up, up. I passed through a cloud barrier. A massive, dark desk stood before me. Another desk was on my right. A glowing being seated behind the desk before me spoke two words to the glowing being seated at the desk on my right, "Not yet." My spirit immediately became heavier. I started fluttering down, down, down. Then I saw my body. As soon as I entered it, I awoke. I was lying on my back, bleeding, and partly in the right lane of a dark road. It's a wonder my neck wasn't broken or that I wasn't run over after being thrown from the Volkswagen Beetle into the roadway.

On that February night, at age 16, I thought I was "ready to meet my Maker." After not being raised in a church-going home, I began to take God seriously at age 13. This was 1964; the year The Beatles first came to America. My older brother committed his life to **Jesus Christ** through the influence of a Christian on his basketball team. After seeing many of my generation getting caught up in drugs, alcohol, and "free love," I committed myself to be a role model for the next generation. I began to pray often, read the Bible some, and attend the church my brother attended (if it didn't interfere with basketball priorities). The pastor sent word I should be baptized. After he answered some of my main questions about God, he baptized me at age 16. I'd realized by then that if this life is all there is, living in a dog-eat-dog world trying to pile up enough wealth to live comfortably—yet we can be cut down by an accident, disease, or a wacko at any time—then why bother? So I began to take my relationship with God even more seriously. But it was like putting new paint over rusty metal. I looked better from the outside, but nothing had changed on the inside.

Let's fast forward to my senior year. Despite a bumpy start, my life was generally good—athletic, academic awards, and a scholarship provided to the University of Arizona. Like you, sometimes I'd do selfish or mean things to others. Later on, I'd wonder, "How could I do that?" I truly wanted to be a good person and generally lived by high moral standards. But I could not explain or escape that something deep within showed its ugly head at times, as anger or lust. I'd try to excuse my actions saying someone pushed me too far and deserved how I reacted. Or I'd say, "That wasn't really me" doing the ugly things I'd thought

I'd never do. I now began to fear, "Yes, this really is me; a dark part of me I had not realized was there."

I'd been elected Chaplain of a boy's service club in high school. I told a girl on our first date in my senior year that God was 90% of my life. But now, as I was about to graduate and needed to make long-term decisions about what to do with myself, I lost confidence that I had a solid moral foundation upon which to build a good life. I realized I could have a meaningful career and then be driven over the edge by black passions and be ruined. In the summer of 1969, at age 18, I tried to enlist in the Army to serve my country in Viet Nam. This would give me time to sort through my confusion. I promised myself I would read through the Bible while in the Army. I thought if I became more religious, I might be able to keep my evil urges under control. But I was so churning inside that I developed two ulcers. The Army didn't want me, so what was I to do? I could not run from my problems and worry was killing me. I went one night to the neighborhood elementary school, E. C. Nash, climbed to the roof, and cried out in tears to God for help. He impressed upon my mind these words: "You'll find the answers you need if you'll draw closer to Me."

On the last Sunday of August, 1969, I started going to church every time the doors were open. James Robison, a young evangelist, came to Tucson's Hi Corbett Field in October (and spoke at area high schools, including Amphi, on the dangers of drinking & driving and sexual pitfalls). I trained as a counselor to help others find God, still unaware I was not truly a Christian. One night, James Robison said, "Do not tell me that you do not drink, or smoke," and then he mentioned a number of other things that displeased the Lord. His next statement brought me up short. He declared, "Tell me what you have done with Jesus." I knew I'd never really done anything with **Jesus**, except to follow His example as best I could. That same night, a boy of 17, whom I'd counseled two nights earlier about how to become a Christian, raised his hand that he knew for certain that **Jesus** was His Savior and he would go to Heaven, if, God forbid, he happened to die on his way home that night. A light came on inside me. I realized this boy now knew he was a Christian because of an experience he'd had two nights ago. I'd never had an experience. I thought I was a Christian because of all the good things I *did* do and because of all the bad things I did *not* do.

I came forward the next night to find what was missing in my relationship with God. As James Robison led us in a prayer confessing our sins, I saw for the first time how God saw me. It wasn't pretty; like something festering in a septic tank. Sin tainted even my best actions. I did them out of pride so others would think well of me or praise me. I asked God to forgive me for all the ways I'd displeased Him, on the basis of what **Jesus** had done when He died in my place as a condemned sinner on a Cross. More importantly, I pleaded with God to "make me like Jesus." I did not want to live any longer in ways that disgusted Him. Pastor and author, Andrew Murray (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 192-93), writes, "He that would meet and find God must seek Him in His will; union with God's will is union with Himself. . . . It is to be feared that there are many Christians who seek salvation, and have no conception in what salvation consists—a *being saved from their own will*, and being restored to do the will of God alone."

I did not become a true Christian until I quit trying to please God by *improving* myself. I became a Christian when I asked God to *remove* myself. Within two weeks after experiencing **Jesus** in October of 1969, I could tell I was a new person inside. I wasn't religious anymore; legalistically focused on rules. I now had a personal relationship with my Heavenly Father, the Lord God of Heaven. I began the slow process of learning to give God's will and values priority over my will. And I found in **Jesus** what I'd looked for all my life. He became my best friend. We began to face everything in life together and He gave me real purpose and meaning. I discovered His Spirit in my heart could overpower my strongest, wrongest desires. I focused more on how I needed to change my unChristlike actions, so I wouldn't grieve my Lord and Savior, than on how I wanted others to change. Those who knew me best, like my older brother, found this made me much easier to live with! ☺ But I also broke out in a cold sweat one night when it dawned on me what would have happened if I'd died 18 months earlier in the near-fatal car crash. I was on "thin ice" and near doom, like the boys on the frozen lake in St. Charles, MO, without knowing it.

Do you have a personal relationship today with **Jesus**? If religion, trying to be good, could gain us God's forgiveness or favor, the Son of God made His long trip to earth for nothing. Worse yet, He died in our place on the Cross, as the sacrificial "Lamb of God" and after being subjected to excruciating torture, in vain! His early disciple, Peter, testifies, "[Y]ou know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.³⁹ And we apostles are witnesses of all He did throughout Judea and in Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross,⁴⁰ but God raised Him to life on the third day. Then God allowed Him to appear,⁴¹ not to the general public, but to us whom God had chosen in advance to be His witnesses. We were those who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.⁴² And He ordered us to preach everywhere and to testify that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be the judge of all—the living and the dead.⁴³ He is the one all the prophets testified about, saying that everyone who believes in Him will have their sins forgiven through His name.'