

I'd Rather Have Jesus

Jack Holcomb

You know it well. It's one of my favorite verses of scripture. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

I suppose if any man were to give a complete testimony of his life, he would have to begin with his mother and dad. My mother is a saint. I came dangerously close to worshipping my mother. I have never known a person in all of my experience that I felt knew God any more than my mother, and I've known many people. My father was a contractor. He worked with men and had seen a hard life. Losing his parents when he was eight years of age, he made his own living, raised himself, and grew hard as the years went by. The two influences in the home were making their impression upon the children.

There were five boys and two girls. My mother absolutely *made* us go to Sunday school. Mother used to line us up – Norman, Charles, Colleen, Jack, Carroll, Ginger, and little Frank – and we'd all go to church. If we'd get thirsty, mother would take us out to the water fountain to get a drink, and then we'd come back and stay there until the last "amen" was said. I'm glad for that training.

Some of my happiest memories are the time when that sweet, precious mother would gather us around her in that little home and then all seven of us children and mother would pray. She would read the Word and explain to us all what the Lord Jesus had done for us.

When I was just a tiny fellow, I felt I wanted to be a preacher. One day I got little Carroll and Virginia, set them down before me, and preached to them with all my heart. Something happened. I began to cry and weep and I felt as though I was the greatest sinner that ever lived. I got down on my knees. I don't remember what transpired in my heart, but it was a great

experience that I have never forgotten. I had experiences like that because my mother laid her hands upon my head daily and asked God to guide this boy.

My first introduction to Pentecost was when we were members of a Baptist church in Waco. The pastor got up one day and made the announcement that no Baptists were to attend the local Pentecostal healing revival that was going on down there. We didn't know there was a meeting going on, but as soon as he made that announcement we went right down there to see what it was all about.

When the depression hit Texas, it was really very hard for our family to get enough to eat. We went as long as three months eating day-old bread and what we called "thickened gravy." Flour and water – hot! We'd pour it over our bread, and that's what we ate. I was too young to realize what it all meant, but those days of hardship became an awful burden, especially to my mother and dad. It became more difficult for my dad to find work. He always tried his best, but work just was not to be found. We lost our furniture. We were reduced to living in a great big old rambling house, sleeping on the floor.

I really loved school, even at my earliest age of attendance. But I remember a certain time that Carroll and I had to stay out of school for three weeks. There was a definite reason: we just didn't have the clothes to wear.

Mother tried to fix me some clothes from a pair of my dad's old trousers, but she had no machine, and could see with only one eye, and it was hard. So we had to stay out of school. We played around the house, and naturally the little fellows from nearby would pass on their way to school.

"Jack? No, he's not sick." And they'd take the news to the teacher. She got the idea I was playing hookey.

Three weeks went by. One day my grandmother came down and asked my mother why we weren't in school. "Well, they haven't the clothes to wear," she said. "I've worked and done everything I could to make the clothes look presentable and wearable, but they're gone now."

And my grandmother - God bless her precious heart – called Carroll and me to her and said, “Now boys, you must get back to school. I see an ad in the paper where we can get you some overalls for sixty-nine cents.”

In Waco, Texas, there is one of these fellows who is perennially going out of business. He’s probably got a “going out of business” sale on tomorrow. But anyway, he had a pair of overalls for sixty-nine cents. Grandmother gave us the money. I called him up and persuaded him to open the store for us at 7:30, although his regular opening time was 9:30.

The next morning Carroll and I got up early and ran all through town, and got there just a little before Mr. C did. I’ll always love and appreciate him for what he did. In we went, but, tragedy upon tragedy, the sixty-nine cent overalls were too small for us. He solved the problem by giving us a pair of eighty-nine cent ones for the sixty-nine cents. We ran all the way home. Mother told us to come back so she could get us cleaned up and ready for school.

I was ready to run out the door when mother said, “Wait just a minute, boys, you’ve got to have an excuse.”

“Oh, yes. Well, tell Miss B I’ve been nearly dead – awfully sick.

“Son, you know I can’t tell her that. I’m going to tell her the truth.”

“But Mamma, I don’t want her to know we’re so poor that we didn’t have any clothes.” I may not have had a shirt on my back, but I had pride!

Mother saw I was in a fix. She called Carroll and me together, put her arms around us both, and through tears said, “Boys, I want you to promise Mother that no matter what it takes, or how bad it hurts, from this day on, you’ll tell the truth. It’s so important, boys, that you be genuine.”

I thought my heart would break. I didn’t want to take that note, but she finally wrote it, and I walked out and was late to school anyway.

When I walked in the door every eye turned my way. Miss B said, “Hello, Jack. Come here. Where have you been the last three weeks?” I gave her my excuse. “No, I don’t want to read your excuse. You turn

around and tell all the children where you have been, and why you haven't been at school."

"But, please, Miss B, please read the note; it's on the note."

"No you tell the children." She thought she was teaching me a lesson not to play hookey. I pleaded with her, but she said to tell the children, so I faced them all.

I fully intended to say that I had pneumonia. Then I thought of the note, and that my mother had said to tell the truth. But I just couldn't tell those kids that I didn't have any clothes. I looked at Miss B one more time and said, "Well, if you won't read the note, will you come out in the hall and let me tell you?"

"Alright, alright, I guess you've suffered enough." So we walked out in the hall and I told her rather dejectedly that I didn't have any clothes to wear to school. I thought her heart would break. She dropped on her knees and threw her arms around me and began to cry and pray, "Dear Lord, what have I done to this boy?" She cried, and I cried – what a time we had!

When we went back into the room she had her arm around my shoulder and she said, "Students, we were absolutely mistaken about Jack. I want you to know that he had a perfectly legitimate excuse, and everything is fine." You've heard of the teacher's pet? I was it from then on.

That afternoon she asked me to stay after school. She took me down in her car to the largest department store in town. She bought me two pairs of shoes, lots of socks, two lovely pairs of trousers, shirts, corduroy jacket, a little helmet – everything! I ran home with it all, and as I ran in the front door, all I could do was shout, "Mamma, Mamma, Mamma, what if I hadn't told the truth? What if I hadn't told her the truth, Mamma?"

As I grew into young manhood, I was forced out of school. My father felt I should work; so a job was found riding a bicycle for Western Union. When I began working, I thought I was grown up and ought to start smoking. So I did. The week I smoked my first cigarette, I took my first glass of liquor. They somehow go together. At the same time I started to

run around and carouse. It all went together – cigarettes, drink, bad companions – and I thought it was smart. But it isn't smart. In the end, it will turn and ruin and damn your soul.

An artist who was an atheist had seen some of my paintings in a high school exhibits and asked me to work with him. He was a great scenic artist, and while we would be painting together, painting stage equipment for some of the largest theaters in America, he would fill my mind with his diabolical doctrine. "Jack, is it possible there is a God? Look at it from a reasonable point of view. Where does God come from?" All those things were injected into my young mind.

This artist had a son named David. He had bought the boy a beautiful new automobile. We would run around together and we thought it was fun to carouse around and have a good time.

One night I went to an old fashioned church where I was convicted of my sin. I heard the voice of Jesus calling me and I got up and walked down the aisle and fell across that altar and gave my heart to Jesus. When I went back to the studio the next day, I told the artist what had happened. I told him I would have to quit working for him, because it was either that or turn my back on God. He ridiculed me. He told me to stick to him and he'd make something of me. "You're going to lose out, Jack", he said.

About a year ago I visited that man in his studio. The whole side of his face was drawn, for he had had a stroke. He said to me, "I wish you'd pray for David." When I inquired, he told me that David had become a hopeless drunkard; it had affected his mind, and he was now in a padded cell. I thought of the day I quit working for that artist. My decision was renewed that it pays to serve Jesus. Almost putting my thoughts into words, my artist friend said, "Jack, you don't know what I'd give if my boy had defied me and followed you that day when you quit."

When I quit my job, my father was angry. He thought I should make money. I was sure making a lot – 11 cents an hour. My mother was so glad at the news that she cried. She told me then how precious God had been to her during the months that I was coming into the world, and how God had witnessed to her heart that He was going to use me in the ministry. "Remember, son," she said, "if you trust God, He'll never let you down." And he never has.

We felt now that I should finish my education. We prayed about it, but there seemed to be no way out. Suddenly there was placed before me an opportunity to work my way through school. It was a miracle! I was in a quartet, and if I would represent the school, they would give me room, board, and tuition.

Mother stood in the door and gave me a little twelve-inch cardboard box, and in it was everything that I possessed. Then she gave me \$1.40, which was all she had, wished me God's blessing, and tearfully kissed me good-bye. So off I went to school.

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Several years later God saw fit to allow to come into my life a heart-breaking tragedy, the loss of my dear wife. Yet, through those days of severe heartache, God became more real to me than I had ever known before. It was following the loss of my wife that the devil made his strongest bid for my life.

A man who trained who trained singers for the various Hollywood studios invited me to his studio. He heard me sing a couple of scales and then, taking me aside, he told me that I had a fine voice but that I needed training. He offered to train me free of charge under a contract by which he was to determine who should manage me, and he was to receive 25 per cent of all money I would ever make. "And," he said, "I can do it. I have the connections to get you to the top." He thought he was making quite an impression on me.

I didn't talk for a while. But finally I told him I appreciated his offer, that it was a real compliment – coming from him – but I had to refuse. "I once was lost," I told him, "my life was confused and I didn't know reality. But I met Jesus and was saved, and I tell you, you don't have enough money to entice me to give up my ministry. You don't know what I'd lose if I would enter your way of life." He was quite offended.

A few days later I was out at the Warner Brothers studio where they were making movies. A friend of mine, a foreman of the plant, wanted me to see the tremendous magnitude of the industry so had taken me out there. I would to God that the church would work on the scale and

magnitude that they do. If they need a fifty-foot mountain, they haul in a lot of dirt and make one right before your eyes. In the place where I was, they were making two movies at once – one in each end. There was a herd of wild horses running around in there. I had never seen anything like it in all my life.

After they finished cutting that particular part, they stopped for an intermission. This foreman friend of mine introduced me to the orchestra leader, telling him I was a singer. The leader, very congenial, invited me to sing with the orchestra. “Do you know ‘A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody’?” he asked.

“Do you know ‘Amazing Grace’?” I asked.

“I don’t believe I do.”

“Do you know ‘There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood’?”

“I believe I’ve heard of that. Is it written in the key of ‘C’?”

“Yes, but play it a little higher.”

The leader sat down to the piano and the others took their places and they began to play. I love beautiful music, and when they began to play, “There is a Fountain,” I got inspired – just as much as I’ve ever been inspired behind a pulpit – and I began to sing,

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
drawn from Immanuel’s veins,
and sinners plunged beneath that flood
lose all their guilty stains.”

All the people in that building stopped and looked in my direction.

After the song, the orchestra leader invited me to have lunch with him. At lunch he said he would like to train my voice. He offered me \$350 a week for a start. That was a lot of money. I let him talk for a while, then I said to him, “Fellow, there’s a song I’d love to sing for you. It goes like this:” and I began to sing,

“I rather have Jesus than men’s applause,
I’d rather be faithful to His dear cause;
I’d rather have Jesus than worldwide fame;
I’d rather be true to His holy name,

Than to be the king of a vast domain
And be held in sins dread sway;
I’d rather have Jesus than anything
This world affords today.”

He say there and looked at me for a moment, so I gave him my testimony of what Christ has done for me. Then I got up to leave. I shook his hand and said, “Pal, I appreciate more than you know your thinking that you could help me in some way, but I’d never give up what I have in my heart for anything that you might have to offer me.” And I went on my way.

Some people would say, “What a foolish mistake.” But if I could tell you how God has blessed me – a fellow without an ounce of training. God has given me opportunities up and down the country to sing the gospel and, as a result, to see hundred upon hundreds of souls won to Christ. Young people, it pays to serve Jesus!