

A Day to Remember, and a Decision I Will Never Regret

We all remember special days in our lives. Our birthday... our anniversary... our first day on a job... our children's birthdays... For me, the date *August 6* will always hold a special place in my heart and mind. August 6, 1981, to be exact...

I was 17 years old and about a month away from starting my senior year in high school. I had everything going for me at the time -- superb health, good grades, great family, wonderful friends, and a steady summer job (so I had a little spending money). In these and so many other ways, I had a great life. I was part of a typical middle-class American family: Dad, Mom, 3 kids, 3 dogs -- I even had a car. Everything was going my way it seemed... but not everything. Something was missing.

Deep down inside -- I was not happy. No one probably knew it -- I hid my sadness well. I knew there was more to life than I was living. I was fighting against doing what I knew was right -- a decision I needed to make. Something was holding me back, and I had to deal with it or be miserable forever!

I was always a deep thinker. Some people go through life skimming across the surface -- never getting very deep... never really wrestling with the big questions of life -- things like "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" and "Who cares?" At this time, I was a teenager in the prime of life -- why should I be concerned about such questions? (Really, I think deep down -- at any age -- we all thirst to know the answers to these questions.) But even at 17, these questions were important to me.

I was a good kid, in general. My family always went to church regularly. I had been involved in the church youth group from the time I was very young... Sunday and Wednesday Bible classes... Vacation Bible Schools... retreats... trips to big youth events... weekly devotionals... gospel meetings... If ever there was a kid that was "good" -- it was me! I even took my grandfather to town just about every Saturday so he could buy groceries and get out of the house for a while. Adults who knew me (and girls I was too shy to speak to) said I was "sweet." But I knew the truth -- as good as I appeared, I was not good enough.

Deep inside, I knew enough about God and Bible teachings to know that I had fallen far short of perfection. I was carrying around a heavy burden that I was powerless to drop on my own... and this burden was getting heavier... and heavier. The burden I was carrying was my sin. I had sinned against God! (By the way... the Bible tells us we have all sinned against God and fallen short! Romans 3:23).

And I knew enough truth to know that if I piled up all of my church-going, my memory verses, my Sunday school lessons, my VBS certificates, my perfect attendance pins, my participation in church youth events, and all the other good things that I might have accomplished in my entire sweet life -- all of these good deeds combined could not erase a single one of my sins. Not one.

I knew that I needed help -- God's help! Only He could remove this heavy burden... this crushing weight... these iron shackles. I had resisted Him long enough. Looking back, I don't really know why I resisted Him at all, but I did. I ran from Him. I hid. But finally my rebellious will had been worn down. I couldn't fight it any more; it was time to make a change in my life -- to turn toward God... I needed to go before the One who could take care of my problem. He did, and He did so much more than that!

It was a Thursday afternoon, August 6, 1981. I went into my mother's office at work and plopped down in her guest chair. On this day, my face was particularly long and sad... I was feeling low. My mother noticed my sadness, and she lovingly probed until I told her -- "I need to do something I've been putting off. I need to obey the good news of Jesus Christ! I want to become a Christian! I want to be baptized into Christ!"

Arrangements were quickly made, and just a few hours later at about 7:30 that evening, a small assembly met at the meeting place of the Park City Church of Christ just south of Fayetteville, Tennessee, where my family attended church. I met with our preacher, Carlos Kirkpatrick, for a few minutes to discuss my situation. He asked me, "David, why do you want to be baptized?" I was a little surprised by his question, but I said simply, "Because I have sinned... and I want my sins taken away." It was my understanding that when we respond to Christ in faith, at the point of baptism, our sins are taken away (Galatians 3:26-27; Acts 2:36-39, 22:16), and I wanted to follow the same example of obedience that I read about in the Bible.

A few minutes later, as our little assembly gathered in the auditorium, Carlos asked me to stand, and he asked me a simple but profound question: "David, do you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" I had waited for years for this moment! I answered, "Yes, I do!" We made our way to the baptistry, and he baptized me -- burying me under the water and raising me up -- just like Jesus was buried in the tomb and raised up on the third day! Baptism is a simple and beautiful re-enactment of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection! Just as Jesus was raised from the dead -- we are raised up with Christ to live a new life (Romans 6:3-5)!

And so it was on this special day that I turned my sin burden over to the One -- the Only One -- who could truly do anything about it. That is what Jesus' cross is all about. In His death, He paid the price for my sins -- and your sins -- a debt we could never repay in a thousand lifetimes! And in His resurrection, He overcame forever the power of death and the grave! And because He paid this debt, in surrendering my life to Him, I turn my sin burden over to Him! And now, freed from this horrible burden of death, I can truly live! Jesus truly did die "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:1-6).

We are promised as we continue to follow Him in this life, "walking in the light" with Jesus, His blood continues to cleanse us (1 John 1:6-10)! What a wonderful promise! What a wonderful way of life! I am far from perfect, and although I try to follow Him in my own bumbling way, I know I can never do enough to even begin to repay what Jesus has done for me. And so, with a thankful heart, I serve Him... and I walk with Him.

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Some call it "victory through surrender!" Some call it being "born again." Some call it "salvation," or "redemption," or "forgiveness of sins." All of these terms are correct. But I call it... a day to remember, and a decision I will never regret!

(Originally written: August 6, 2016)