

My Other Dad: the Deacon!

This past week my wife and I had the privilege of visiting with my mother and father-in-law. I cherish our visits now more than ever. Barbara's dad is now in his eighties and along with his dear wife have had life-threatening health issues. As we age and receive signals such as debilitating illnesses that our life as we know it is preparing for change of address, we have a tendency to look back over life and distill that which is of true value. In extracting the essence of life, my father-in-law, whom I have always addressed as "Deacon" began to give his testimony of salvation.

The evening meal had come to a close and the Deacon began to tell how his sister had been working on him and his wife Betty to come out to their revival meeting at Hessville Baptist in Indiana. At this time their children were very young, my wife only about four years of age. They needed help. These members of the "greatest generation" were quite typical of their culture. He had done his time in the army and now he and Betty were working very hard at realizing the American dream. But no matter how much we have going for us, no one can make it without Jesus. Their American dream was well on the way to becoming a nightmare if things did not change. As a favor to his sister, Paul and Betty Wright went to the revival meeting. It was the last night. The preacher, Brother Scotty preached hard and gave the invitation. As soon as the invitation began, my mother-in-law, Betty sprang into the aisle and went to the front. My father-in-law, Paul wondered what am I going to do now? Wondering what kind of change this would make in their relationship and wondering what he would now do caused a conundrum in his mind.

After Betty had been shown the plan of salvation and prayed the sinner's prayer, Brother Scotty inquired about her husband. When Paul came to the front, Betty pointed him out and Brother Scotty affectionately put his arm around him and launched into a soul talk. Under great conviction, Paul Wright melted to his knees and prayed the sinner's prayer inviting Jesus Christ to be the Lord of his life. On the way home, he pulled over on the bridge of the Calumet River and emptied his six-pack into the waters below. This was a dramatic witness to the changed life that both he and Betty found that night. I am so thankful that my wife Barbara has no memories of unconverted parents. The only life she has known has been the Christian experience. Paul and Betty lived in such a way that their life was a testimony to their kids, that Christianity is real and you can trust Jesus with your eternity. I am very thankful that my wife, the mother of our four children, lived the Christian life in front of our kids. And that life really began for her the night her parents got saved!

As the Deacon gave his testimony this past week, the tears filled his eyes, his voiced faded and strengthened enough to say how grateful he was to know Christ and be saved. He smiled and said, "Brother Scotty told me that night, 'If the Devil comes up and tells you you're not saved, you just take him to Romans 10:13, that says, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved."* And you tell him to read it for yourself, Devil!' As he wiped the tears, straightened his bowed back up in his chair, he looked across to his wife, his "little girl" and me and flashed his sanguine smile, that will forever be locked in my memory. Without saying a word, as he smiled so thankfully it was as though he said, this is what life all boils down to...knowing and serving Christ with my family. Soon after this testimony, the Deacon began to nostalgically reminisce about his days of working on the bus ministry with his family. This was a great ministry that not only fulfilled the Great Commission, but allowed needy, un-churched kids to have a ride to church and receive Christ as their own personal Savior.

Today as I write these words I am so happy to not only have a Christian home but I am understanding better that my wife Barbara and I stand firm in our faith, but we do not stand alone. We stand on the shoulders of giants! Yes, The Deacon, Betty and my parents were part of the "greatest generation," but their greatness comes not because they were pre-occupied with the American dream,

but because they were pre-occupied with Christ! Having received my inspiration for this week's article from the Deacon, let me leave you with three goals:

1. Believe the Gospel.

Hearing the Deacon explain the Gospel of Christ and how it was communicated to him, I saw something in his eyes. I was beholding a man who "owned it." His mother was a godly lady, but he could not borrow Christianity from her. As I looked at his character-sketched face...I tell you if ever I have seen Jesus in a man...I see Him in Paul Wright. And knowing him, he would be very embarrassed at my words. So in behalf of his Christian humility, he would tell you in a heartbeat, if you see any goodness at all, the glory and praise alone must rest in the nail-pierced hands of the Lord Jesus Christ! "*Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven*" (Psalm 148:13)

2. Live the Gospel.

I have never known the Deacon to let his testimony slip. Although working rigorously as an operating engineer around some of the roughest men in the steel mills of the Midwest, he never caved in to their worldly ways, habits, talk or walk. He obeyed the command of Scripture that says, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord...*" (II Corinthians 6:17). If you think about it, often in the world I live in, basically surrounded by Christians, it is not difficult to maintain a Christ-like walk. The credit belongs to those Paul and Betty Wrights who live in, what is referred to as, the "real world" and maintain a holy walk. And they both did this as fine as any Christians I have ever known. I sometimes think about ways they contributed to the church and gave to needy people who never knew whom their benefactors were and the Wrights never asked for any recognition. They live the quiet Christian life from their heart.

3. Tell the Gospel.

I remember many years ago, the Deacon asked me to go with him and help him witness to a man he had worked with for over twenty years, but wanted to know for sure he would see him in Heaven. The Deacon had an insatiable desire for people to be saved! As I reflect upon the mental picture of my father-in-law telling me how he got saved with much enthusiasm, I thought of the words of the old song: "I love to tell the story, to those who know it best and seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest."

We have just had deacon elections at Christchurch. I say to our new board, with my deacon father-in-law in mind, let's be deacons like him; let's follow him as he followed his Lord. "*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy*" (Psalm 107:2).

- Pastor Pope -

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