

This Must Be What Heaven Will Be Like!

This past Thursday I spoke in Hot Springs, Arkansas at the home of Champion Baptist College. We had a glorious Annual B.E.A.M.S. National Conference and we enjoyed a beautifully prepared luncheon, hosted by some of the college young ladies. There was one young lady that seemed to politely linger, waiting for a lull in conversation. Soon some sitting at our table directed my attention toward her. Her name was Laura Lee Alford and it was explained that she was hoping to go to the archipelago island nation of Vanuatu (formerly The New Hebrides) in the South Pacific. She was contemplating becoming a translator of Scriptures and ministering to a people who have not been introduced to Christianity. I also discovered that her older brother, Caleb was also going to the South Pacific on a mission for two years. In a moment after a break of hurried information, her eyes locked with mine and with trembling voice and an effort to fight back the tears she said, "You don't know me, but thirty years ago you were preaching in Maryland and my mother (then Patricia Healand) came down the aisle when you gave the invitation and got saved!" She explained that her mom, who not only got saved, but devoted herself in selfless dedication to Christ, later met and married Brian Alford and were blessed with the gift of Caleb and Laura Lee. No longer able to hold back the tears, Laura Lee then went on to say, "Brother Pope, I just wanted to thank you, because if my mom had not gotten saved that night, I would not be at this Bible College and my brother and I would not be in full time service for Christ, heading for the mission field! So, thank you!" My heart was deeply touched. What a blessing!

Earlier in the day, I was picked up from the Little Rock airport and we drove past Benton on our way to Hot Springs. My mind went back to the early 1970s and the great revivals we had witnessed in those days. When I saw Dr. Freret, he reminded me of the meeting I preached when we saw 154 saved in one week and on one night 58 were baptized. Later on Thursday night, I saw Dr. Kenny Graham, who pastors another church in Benton and who has often remarked that he still pastors converts from that one meeting in 1971. I recall, it was not unusual for other churches to participate in revival meetings, one with another, especially when God began to move. After Laura Lee gave her testimony at Thursday's luncheon, my mind went back to another young man of fifteen that I met while walking down a street in Benton, inviting everyone to church and witnessing when I had opportunity. This teen was in the front yard of his residence and was painting on a canvass, supported by an easel. I remember thinking; he was pretty good and told him so. After we conversed for a while, I asked him, "Do you know if you died today that you would go to heaven?" He answered that he did not know, but would like to know. My usual verse I give at a moment like this would be, "*These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*" (I John 5:13). This is a sure promise that whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ may know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Christ is Savior and Lord and that heaven is our home. The young man was eager to hear the Gospel and embrace the message. After he prayed the sinner's prayer, I gave him assurance through the Scriptures and then encouraged him to come to church, walk the aisle and present himself for believer's baptism. He did not come that night, nor the next night or for the rest of the week. To be perfectly honest with you, my first response was, that he did not mean business with God. Oh me of little faith! For you see, about 13 years later I was preaching for Dr. Gary Coleman at the Lavon Drive Baptist Church Youth Conference. I'll never forget a certain Thursday evening: we were closing out the meeting and the invitation went long and I was at the front, on my knees praying for the results and God's continued dealings, when I felt a tap on my shoulder. I stood up and there before me was a 6 foot, 4 inch, 28 year old young man standing before me with tears coming down his cheeks. He put his big arms around me, squeezed me, lifted me literally off the ground and said, "Do you know me?" I said, "No, but I would like to." He sat me down and told me the story, "I was fifteen years old, painting in my front yard in Benton, Arkansas, when you came by and won me to Jesus!" He

continued, "I didn't come that night, although I had full intention. You see later that afternoon, we had to leave for Dallas because my grandfather suddenly died." By the time he returned, the revival meeting was over. Then he and his family packed up and moved to Dallas. He said, "I remember what you told me about being baptized and I went to a Baptist church and got baptized and after graduation from high school, I went to Dallas Baptist College and then on to Southwestern Seminary. After graduating from seminary, I became a youth director of a church in Plano, Texas. Last week, I was giving my testimony. I said that a young man by the name of Johnny Pope came by my house while I was painting in the front yard. I had never seen him before, I have never seen him since, but he won me to Jesus. One of these days, I want to find him and tell him, thank you for leading me to Christ. After I gave my testimony, someone came up to me and told me you were preaching over here in Garland. Brother Johnny, thank you for winning me to Christ!" And he gave me a big hug and left the platform.

I believe this is what heaven will be like. We will then have the results! Please permit three thoughts on this subject.

1. Let us take advantage of every opportunity God gives us.

We don't know how everyone will respond when we attempt to give the Gospel. Oh sure, there are some that are obviously receptive, but I have often been surprised at someone I perceived to not be interested, but was after all very interested in hearing and receiving the Gospel. "*As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men...*" (Galatians 6:10).

2. Let us not give up the task of carrying out the Great Commission.

"*And He (Jesus) said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). It sometimes gets discouraging, but be reminded that the great missionary, Paul said, "*And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not*" (Galatians 6:9). We definitely shall reap, if just keep on keeping on. Isaiah was given a commission and he wanted to know, "*Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate*" (Isaiah 6:11). In other words, when there are no more people to witness to, God is saying, keep on giving out My Word!

3. Let us live in the light of eternity.

It is a challenge to know that we will not see all our rewards down here. Can we be satisfied to leave the results in God's hands? It is a humbling mission, but the reward, is "out of this world." After spending time with God's humble servant, Rick Martin, the missionary legend, I was reminded of the words of Rudyard Kipling who spoke to the young men at Oxford University. "Young men, one day you will meet a man who cares little or nothing for the things of this world. And when you do, on that day you will discover how terribly poor you are and how wonderfully rich he is." This was in warning to the youth who were at that time setting their course in life on a pursuit of material gain only. I came across this saying in my youth and I was determined to be a rich in eternal things. I may sound like a broken record, but I remind the youth and all whom I pastor the words of Jesus, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*" (Matthew 6:33).

As I prepare to fly home to Houston, I am consumed with these thoughts: I don't know who and how many were saved and rededicated to Christ last night after I extended the invitation. God is keeping the record. It is not my duty to be successful in man's eyes; it is my duty to be faithful in God's sight. And these two encounters, although years apart, remind me, this is what heaven will be like!

- Pastor Pope -

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