

The following is my testimony to God's saving grace. It is printed here as I delivered it in a live internet broadcast during the Sunday service from my home church on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020. A little background may help you to understand both the story and the motivation of the storyteller.

### **Testimony Background**

I am a very private, introverted individual. I have never been able to bring myself to share this story publically. I have previously only shared it with a very few close friends.

In late February of 2020 I had a dream. (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17) In this dream I was standing at the pulpit of my church addressing a large congregation. Even in my dream I thought it was odd that I could not see their faces. When I wrote this out, probably in 1970, I had made two passing mention of Timothy. In the dream, the entire opening preamble concerned Timothy. When I woke up I was able to write it out word for word from the dream. When I finally recorded it and it was incorporated into a service the facelessness of the congregation made sense. In the dream I saw the emptying of the churches before it became a government edict. Apparently God knew I was going to be speaking to a congregation that I could not see. The power and clarity of the dream was my impetus to finally share my story of salvation publically.

### **Testimony**

I would like to tell you a story this morning about doubt. This is the doubt that infuses the skeptic. The doubt that is at the root of atheism. The doubt that may be keeping **you** from a saving knowledge of the one true God.

First, let's look at the disciple Thomas.

Thomas is the least of the disciples!

Thomas disappears from scripture after the first book of Acts. So to do Andrew, Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, and Simon. But Thomas is the least of the disciples!

Thomas went on, as legend tells us, to found the Christian church in India. The others I have named simply disappeared into the mists of history. But Thomas is the least of the disciples!

Why is he the least of the disciples? For the same reason that he is also called Doubting Thomas.

In John 20:24-25 after the risen Lord had appeared to a gathering of all the disciples but Thomas they told him: "We have seen the Lord!" They had already believed that Christ had risen when Mary told them he had. They believed, not by seeing, but by faith! But Thomas told them: "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later, in John 20:26-28 they were gathered again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." And Thomas replied: "My Lord and my God".

Thomas could not believe by faith. He had to be provided with incontrovertible physical evidence.

Thomas is the least of the disciples!

I have for many years had a great deal of empathy for Thomas. You see, like Thomas, I simply could not believe in someone who had died two thousand years ago.

I would like to share with you an account of my road to Damascus experience which brought me to Christ, not by faith but by physical evidence making me, like Thomas, among the least of the believers.

In the summer of 1969 Millie, Trevor, Kevin and I moved to Red Deer where I went into business with Martin Scholz who had been our neighbour in northwest Calgary.

At this time neither Millie nor I were Christians. You could, I suppose, best describe us as agnostics. My own view of Christ and Christianity was decidedly jaundiced. As an avid student of history I was all too aware of the long list of wars and inhumanities which had been perpetrated in His name. These ranged from the crusades to the inquisition to the "Troubles" in Ireland. Truly, I wanted no part of anything which could engender so much inhumanity to man and so much suffering. Further, I did not believe that a man born and slain nearly two thousand years ago could have any relevance to our modern life, day and age.

Martin, on the other hand, was a good Lutheran who attended church each Sunday. Had you suggested that he was not a Christian you would have been subjected to an outburst of his Germanic temper. Martin was one of those high strung individuals one could best describe as antsy and driven.

In August of 1969 Bethany Baptist church in Red Deer held a revival crusade sponsoring the Sitara twins. A friend of Lydia's, Martin's wife, induced Lydia to attend one of the meetings. Thereafter she announced to Martin that she and the children were going to attend Bethany. Martin, the typical old country German, told her, in no uncertain terms, that they were Lutheran, that they and their family were not going to attend any other church, and that if she attended Bethany she need not come home again.

Lydia and the children went anyway.

After several Sundays of this Martin became intrigued with the changes which he could see in Lydia and allowed her to prevail upon him to attend Bethany with her and the children.

All of this, Millie and I were to learn later.

On the following Monday morning when Martin came in to work he announced to me that he had been "born again" and told me what that meant. You can well imagine, with my outlook, the derision with which I greeted this announcement.

I could not help but notice, however, over the next few weeks the fundamental change which had come over my friend and partner. I had never seen Martin go through a day with such calm as he now evinced. Nor could I overlook the serenity and peace of mind which he exhibited.

Martin and Lydia now turned all their considerable powers of persuasion upon Millie and me in an attempt to get us to go to Bethany with them. Millie readily agreed but I was having none of it. My mind was already made up.

At this time in our lives Millie's two younger brothers, Jim and Ted were living with us.

One Sunday Millie came home from church all aglow and announced to Ted, Jim and me that she had "accepted Christ as her savior and been born again". Her announcement was literally met with gales of laughter.

From then on I was under constant pressure to attend Bethany. Martin and Lydia were constantly urging me to come. Millie asked me to attend with her each Sunday as she prepared to go off to church. Other members of the congregation would stop in at our office, take me out to coffee and urge me to attend while trying to tell me all about Christ.

Finally, I told one of these well meaning people what my view of the history of Christianity was. Why would anyone follow such an example? Further, I told him that I would only believe in someone who died two thousand years ago being relevant if I could see him alive here and now.

Despite my jaundiced view point I could not overlook the very real changes in both Millie and Martin. Of particular interest to me was the very real peace of mind that they had both achieved. I will not say that I was troubled in mind or spirit but I was driven. This peace of mind became, to me, something which was much desired.

Finally I gave in to the importuning of Millie and my friends and agreed to attend Bethany. In all honesty, my sole reason for attending was to see if I could find that same peace of mind and spirit.

I have never been more bored in my life. I saw nothing to change my thinking regarding the relevancy of it all. For the next two or three Sundays I spent more time looking at my watch to see how much longer I had to stay in place than I spent listening to the service.

My quest for this peace of mind and spirit was now becoming a driving force. I told Millie that whatever she had found at Bethany I could not find. I told her that I was going to have Jim take me to the Catholic church. Perhaps I could find "it" there. The Sunday that I planned to go Jim was not available. I went nowhere.

That evening, Millie asked me to go to the evening service with her and then on to Martin's and Lydia's after the service. Bethany church was in the habit of holding a combination social and prayer meeting at one of the congregant's homes after the Sunday evening service.

Knowing that Jim was away and that Ted had gone to Delia, 90 miles away for a weekend curling bonspiel and thus, would not be available to baby sit, I went to our kitchen window to look across the common to the other town house where our one and only baby sitter lived. The lights in her home were out. I was safe, or so I thought.

I told Millie that I would go if we could get a baby sitter. She called. No one answered.

I was off the hook!

Five minutes before Millie had to leave Ted pulled up in front of our town house. When he came in he told us that he had to be back in Delia for an 8:00 AM draw and no, since he had a place to stay in Delia, he had no idea why he had come home.

I was stuck!

Ted later told us that after he had finished his afternoon draw he simply felt an overwhelming compulsion to drive back to Red Deer. On the way back he passed an R.C.M.P. cruiser while going considerably over the speed limit. The cruiser ignored him. Thirty or forty miles out of Red Deer his gas gauge read empty. In the car he was driving, empty meant no more gas! He made it home without stopping and in the morning was able to make the closest filling station.

We were to go to Martin's and Lydia's before going to church and then have them ride there with us.

To understand what happened during the rest of the evening it is important to be able to visualize the Scholz's living room. The room is rectangular in shape with the home entrance behind a stub wall at the north end of the east wall. A piano stands against this short north wall with several chairs arrayed against the east wall. In the south east corner stands a most comfortable easy chair with a swag lamp hanging above it. A chair and a long couch occupy the west wall of the room.

When we arrived at their home it was still too early to leave for church and of course we were invited in. I sat down on the couch beside Lydia. Before we left for church Lydia asked me if I would mind if they prayed. It was their house. How could I object? Everyone but me bowed their heads while first Martin and then Millie said a short prayer. My discomfort was greatly increased when Lydia began to pray for me. As I sat there and listened to Lydia the easy chair and its swag lamp in the far corner slowly dissolved from my sight and Jesus was standing in front of me looking directly into my eyes.

Had I not been so frozen with astonishment I could have reached out and touched Him. A few moments later I was conscious of Lydia saying "Amen" and the vision fading. Once again I could see the easy chair and the swag lamp. At no time, either then or later did I ever have a single moments doubt as to whom I had seen.

By the time we had sat through another boring church service and returned to the Scholz home I had fully convinced myself that my mind had momentarily slipped a cog or two. I was far more prepared to accept that my mind was slipping than I was prepared to accept that what I had seen had any basis in reality.

The Scholz's large living room very quickly filled up with members from the church. When Pastor Sinclair arrived he walked straight to the big easy chair, hesitated and then turned and sat down on one of the hard wooden chairs against the east wall. I later learned that the most comfortable chair in whatever house the Sunday evening gathering was held was always reserved for the pastor in deference to his bad back. Pastor Sinclair later told me that although he intended to sit in the easy chair something forbade his doing so.

Next to arrive was Len Olson, one of the deacons of the church. Seeing that the pastor had not taken the easy chair Len sat down in it. He just as quickly stood up and moved to one of the wooden chairs. Len was later to tell us that he felt as though he had been forcefully thrust back out of the chair. Despite the room being full, no one sat in the easy chair during the entire evening. One person

was even relegated to the piano bench.

A lively, and to me, totally uninteresting discussion about biblical topics went on for what seemed an interminable length of time. Finally, near midnight, Lydia served refreshments and then the group decided to close, as they always did, with a round of prayer.

Sitting in that living room listening to all those people pray was a very uncomfortable experience. It became even more uncomfortable when Lydia, the last in the chain, began to pray for my salvation. As she began to pray, the easy chair and the swag lamp in the corner again faded from my vision. Again, Jesus was standing directly in front of me looking straight into my eyes. Again, had I had the nerve, I could have reached out and touched Him. Again, he vanished as Lydia said "Amen".

The gathering broke up and we all went our separate ways to our homes. I lay in bed for an hour or more wrestling with what I had experienced. Millie was also awake and quietly, to herself, urging me to surrender to Christ. I could no longer accept that my mind was slipping. The experience had been far too real. Finally I slipped from our bed and to my knees on the floor. I had never talked to the Lord and really had no idea as to how to go about doing so now. I simply said something like "Okay Lord, I accept that you are real and I accept you. Please forgive me all that I have done wrong."

I experienced a sensation as though a hundred pound sack had just been lifted off my shoulders. The relief was so great that I literally laughed aloud.

Millie, of course, demanded to know what on earth I was doing. When I told her what had happened during the evening she immediately thanked the Lord and then, despite the hour, phoned Martin.

When she had told Martin what had happened he said: "Praise God, I have been lying here awake all this time knowing that something great was happening but not knowing what it could be." Martin immediately phoned pastor Sinclair to relay the news. Pastor Sinclair had also been laying awake for the same reason that had kept Martin from sleep.

I have always been able to rationalize the events and occurrences in my life. Millie claims that, if need be, I could rationalize black into white. Over the next few months, and from time to time until the present, when things became difficult, my mind has tried to find some rational, non religious, explanation for what happened that evening in Red Deer. Thankfully, the Lord knows me better than I know myself. He had set just too many things in motion at the same time for me to be able to justify them all as coincidence. Ted's totally illogical return to Red Deer and the occurrence of the police cruiser and the empty gas tank were just the beginning. There was Jim's unusual absence. There was the baby sitter who was "always available". There was the reaction of Jim Sinclair and Len Olson to the easy chair. There was the "waiting up" of Martin, Pastor Jim and Millie for the "news". Most powerfully, although no coincidence, were the months of prayers for my salvation by the majority of the church congregation and the similar prayers of a great number of people at Prairie Bible Institute where Martin and Lydia's daughter was enrolled.

Did any of this make me feel special? On the contrary, I found it a real lesson in humility when I considered the huge number of people who had been beseeching Christ for my salvation. Also humbling was the realization of just how much Christ loved even me; not just 2000 years ago but **now**.

My walk with Christ and my life have been anything but smooth. While I have on occasion tried to pull away He has always managed to gently bring me back. He has always been there. I trust that He always will be.

In John 10:27:29 Christ promises me that, now that I have given myself to Him, no one and nothing will be able to separate me from Him. He doubles down on this promise by reiterating the same promise from his Father. **Listen** to what He says!

“My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never die. **No one will steal them out of my hand.** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than anyone. No one can steal them out of my Father’s hand.”

Figuratively speaking, Christ as shepherd, has gathered his flock inside His paddock where he protects them.

When someone is in dire straights you often hear people say: “God help you!” Well, let me tell you, if your have placed yourself outside the paddock **even God won’t help you.**

Where are **you - right** now?

Are you **safe** inside Christ’s paddock or **out** with the wolves?

Do you wish to come in?

*Jesus is waiting for you!*

Ralph