

## A Man with a Song and a Man with Some Scissors

*"And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?"* (II Samuel 3:38). It was five years ago today that John F. Kennedy, Jr. died in a plane crash with his wife and her sister. As the world categorizes greatness in their frame of reference, they often overlook those who did not boast or bear wide acclaim of fame. However, today I mourn with two families in the loss of two great men, Bob Redman and Jimmy Bittner. Bob was cheerful in spite of his multiple sclerosis and always had a song. Jimmy was a local barber who could make everybody feel like somebody.

In just a few minutes my wife is picking me up to head out for Bob's funeral. It seems like yesterday Bob was telling me about his younger brother, Fred. Not only were Fred and Bob brothers, they were the best of friends. Although Bob had been confined to a wheelchair, he was never isolated. To know Bob was to love him. And he loved people! His attitude and disposition were always positive. The closest I ever saw Bob to being anything but positive was when he had to make a decision about the amputation of one of his legs. Soon, however in "Bob Redman" fashion, he was bouncing back, giving God the glory for the ability to go on with or without limbs.

The most outstanding feature about Bob was his smile and his song. In the early days of Christchurch Baptist (Prestonwood) when it was time for Bob to give a special or offertory, he would bring his little keyboard that was "user friendly" to his frail arms. Rather than complain, he gave God thanks that he could play an old familiar hymn. I see him even now in my mind playing, smiling and blessing the whole church.

Because of Bob, I have in his brother Fred, not just another church member, but a dear friend. Today, our hearts go out to Johanna and the entire Redman family.

Just a few days ago, I found out that Bob and Fred would have lunch together on Thursdays. Fred jokingly said, "Wouldn't you know it, here's Bob in the hospital and this Thursday was his turn to buy (lunch)." Through the heart-break they were experiencing, there was a smile on both of their faces. The next time those brothers have a meal together will be at The Wedding Supper of the Lamb. And, oh, by the way, boys, the treat is on Jesus!

Come Monday, I will be speaking the Memorial service of a very special friend, Jimmy Bittner. When I arrived in town, over twenty-three years ago, I met the men (and Jo) who barbered at the old fashioned barber shop, Hargrave's Barber. Jimmy came to work for Larry thirty-two years ago. When Jimmy arrived at Hargrave's and saw the other barbers, he thought they were a bunch of "red-necks." I remember the first time I saw all of them, with Larry and Craig's handle-bar mustaches and being new to Texas, I thought it was the Earp brothers come back to life for a gun-fight at the OK Corral.

I witnessed to Jimmy for fifteen years. He was reared by a good Christian mother and his sister was a fine Christian as well. Jimmy had simply never made it personal until he was shot at close range by an angry man with a powerful pistol. I made a visit to Herman Hospital to see Jimmy shortly after his extremely close brush with death. He realized that God left him here for a purpose and what a joy it was to see Jimmy accept Jesus Christ as his own personal Savior. He decided to get in on God's purpose for his life for the remainder of his days on earth. Little did any of us know it was only going to be just seven years before God was going to call him home. In Bible numerology, seven is the number of perfection. Although Jimmy was only fifty-one, he crowded a heap of living into his short life. I am honored that I can call him Friend. Jimmy developed bone cancer and along with his diabetes, it was just more than his constitution could handle.

I enjoyed our last visits together. He had his Bible, a couple of good books and a will to fight the good fight. One person Jimmy fought the hardest for was his darling only child, Suzie. She was the

apple of her daddy's eyes. On our last visit together, Jimmy was in a lot of pain; both of his legs had been amputated and he was uncomfortable. I read him passages of Scripture having to do with Heaven, the glories of it, and the relief to those who suffer. He smiled through his tears. He was tough and he was brave, even though he was transparent enough to voice his fears.

Jimmy was one of the favorite barbers at Hargrave's. Whenever Jimmy was there, it seemed like somebody was always waiting to get into his chair. When Jimmy was in the shop you often heard the customers say when asked if they want a haircut, "I'm waiting for Jimmy!" Larry told me when Jimmy started working for him, Jimmy said, "I'll work for you until I find somewhere better to go." Larry smiled at me today and said, "Johnny, I guess Jimmy got somewhere better to go now." Yes, indeed! From time to time, I would see Jimmy come into church - last one there, first one to leave - but he loved God and loved God's true people. In the same way his customers used to say, "I'm waiting on Jimmy," he's up in heaven enjoying good health, loved ones that went before him and now "he's waiting on us." We'll all see you soon, old Friend. And we all love you still!

- Pastor Pope -

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