

The Seed of the Harvest

At 6:00 the Sunday evening service started. The announcements seemed abbreviated and the songs were sung quickly. Anticipation was intense as an overflow crowd came to hear Paul Felding's testimony. Curiosity was aroused a few days earlier with his statement, "My life has not always been the way it is now. My life was a wasteland, until the Lord broke my heart." The pastor gave a brief word about the turnaround with the family farms and gave credit first to God and then he thanked Mr. Felding for his part in the effort. Then the pastor gave thanks for Paul's great help in Sunday School and throughout the church overall. And without overdoing it, the pastor finally introduced his friend and compatriot in the Lord, Paul Felding.

The overly-packed house fell into a hush when Mr. Felding began to talk. In a calm unassuming manner the band teacher told how he had been reared in this community and he said, "If I could have picked a place in the whole United States, knowing what I know now, I would still pick this place." He continued, "This is the place where my wife was also reared, the place where my children have been reared, and if Christ doesn't return in the next few years, Lord willing it will be the place where I am buried." Then like a Niagara being loosed, his speech became fluid as his thoughts were racing ahead of his talking.

"I always loved music. I played all kinds and if I put my mind to it, I could play just about any instrument you would place in my hands. My wonderful parents encouraged me to give my talents to God, to play and sing in church. But I had other plans. I put together a little swing band that played at local dances, small time political rallies and parties. It worked out nicely. I married my high school sweetheart; we soon had one, then two children. When I enrolled in college to major in music, the tuition was not difficult paying, although I had the extra burden of marriage, because of the incredible revenue that was accrued by my band playing engagements.

Before finishing my bachelor's degree, I was granted a full-ride scholarship for postgraduate studies at Julliard School of Music. Even though the workload was going to be lessened, I could not resist working with my band to make more and more money. Money was becoming my God as my music study and even more sadly, my family became increasingly removed from my life. One day my dad asked me to bring my wife and kids to a revival meeting. I did not go because I wanted to...I went because my dad put me on a guilt trip.

"The preacher took four verses as his text. He worked and weaved these verses throughout his message. He was so redundant with them (for which now I am thankful) I thought I might have them memorized by the time he was through with his sermon. The verses were found in John 6:26-29 and they read: *'Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.'*

"These powerful inspired verses stayed with me for nine months. Every time I made a selfish decision based upon my own greedy outlook in life, these verses came back to me. There is a place in the Scripture that Jesus tells another Paul, *'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks'* (Acts 9:5). Even when God would bring His Word back to my mind, I would shove it back and try to ignore the fact that I was not truly a Christian and that I had gods in my life that were ruling and reigning. The longer I went, the easier it seemed to ignore or push back the 'pricks' - until one evening...

"I had imbibed enough that I was unsteady. I was also using medication, legal and illegal to keep

me going in my quest for more engagements, more money, and more opportunities to make it big. I had no business driving. As I look back, I must tell you, I had no business drinking. I was so tired and drunk, I just wanted to be home, but I knew home was still a couple of hours down the road. I came around a treacherous curve; an eighteen-wheeler and I were headed directly for each other. I had enough frame of mind to know I was no match for him, so I swerved as far as I could to the left. The left front wheel came off the road. I overcompensated and just as the massive truck passed, I cut the wheel back to the right only to realize my sudden jerking movement and centrifugal force threw the back end of the car off the road. The car went plummeting down a deep, steep ravine. I pushed the brakes so hard; I thought my leg was going to go through the floorboard. After the car came to a stopping place which was deep in the trees, one of which my car was wrapped around, I discovered my legs had indeed gone through the floorboard. I was pinned; I couldn't get out.

"I was coming in and out of consciousness. I had no idea of the extent of my injury. With the alcohol content in my body and the loss of blood, I was in a haze. I knew, however, I was in trouble... deep trouble. I guess because of the way I have always seen car wrecks, with flashing lights and sirens, I was in a awe of the deafening sound of silence from woods into which I had crashed. The frogs and crickets continued their noises, I even saw lightning bugs illuminating. There wasn't a person on earth who knew where I was or the condition I was in. Then I was convinced I was now going to die. I tried to be brave, but then I thought about my wife who had become a stranger to me and two beautiful kids that I hardly knew. I was sickened at my hypocrisy of writing songs about my family, especially a very special song about my son and me. I remember telling people in performance about this song I had written about my son and seeing ladies wipe their tears, probably thinking what a great dad I was. As I lay in that dark wood, I realized just what a farce my life had been. I found myself asking God to let me live to tell my wife what she means to me. I began begging God for a chance just to get to know my kids. I was trying to make a deal by saying, "Look God, I don't have to live until they graduate, just let me live until they enter middle school. There are some things I want to tell them; oh God, there are some things I want to do. Then a phrase from those verses that old preacher gave nine months earlier came to me once again, '*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life....*' The Word of God had been like a seed planted in my heart and had now taken root. There was a peace gathering in my heart. The atmosphere of death, yes, my own death, had now calmed as I prayed this prayer, 'Oh God, I heard the Gospel when I was young. I know Jesus died upon the cross and when He died, He died for me. I believe He was buried and that He rose again the third day. I now ask you to forgive me for my sins. And when I spoke that phrase, my heart broke, for now I knew in spite of all my sins, God was loving me for Jesus' sake. He was being patient with me, for Jesus' sake. Then, with an assurance that God was now prepared to do what He promised, right in this crushed car, I cried out, 'Lord save me.'"

Paul Felding took a long pause collecting his composure. With an up-lifted look of ecstasy, he continued his story, "Well, it was settled; I was saved!" I knew that I was not going to be discovered until it was too late, so I reached back, took a yellow pad and asked God for one more undeserving favor. I prayed, 'Lord, my wife and kids need to know where Dad went today. They also need to hear an apology, so please Lord, let what little light my overhead dome provides give me enough light to write these last words to my wonderful family.'" Felding did not hide his emotion as he pulled out an envelope containing what he thought would be his last letter.

Pat Shaughnessy was deeply moved and was relating to everything Felding was saying. Kathy was amazed as Pat took the back of the church pew to pull himself up to the very edge of his seat. He didn't want to miss a word.

(To be continued).

- Pastor Pope -

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