

CHAPTER 3

The Choice

Jesus, the perfect example of the perfect seed, said; "Truly truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12v24) "For whosoever would save his life, will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake, he will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself.' (Lk. 9v24, 25) "And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges Me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God." (Lk. 12v8)

As the seed dies, the roots are born. You can have no plant life without roots. If the roots are poor, the plant will be poor. The fruit will also be poor or non-existent. We look at the outward appearance but God looks at the heart (the roots). "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. 7v16) Jesus said; "By this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.' (John 15v8) Roots grow toward the water source. They become stunted where there are rocks or infertile ground. A tree with roots in only one direction is less stable in the wind. It is very sad that many Christians growing in ill-watered or infertile soil also become stunted and unstable because of the lack of real spiritual nurturing in the place where they worship. While it is not easy to die to ourselves, I have found in my experience that dying to myself has been worthwhile for the blessings that follow. It is important that we count the cost and make the choice to allow Jesus Christ to be 'Lord' of our lives. There is a sense in which we need to 'die daily' to our own desires and be open to co-operate in the Lord's blessing, but there are also landmarks or major deliberate steps which make the daily choice easier.

The first of many steps for me was on the Sunday nearest the 12th July, 1956 when, at the age of thirteen, I stood up during an 'appeal' at a Quaker Evangelical camp meeting at Moyallen, Northern Ireland and

visibly, if not vocally acknowledged that I wanted Jesus to be my Lord. The Lord saw my heart and my desire to be forgiven. He saw my longing for a personal relationship with Him. He forgave me not because of anything I had done, but by His grace (unmerited favour) as it is put so well in Ephesians 2v8; "For by grace I (you) have been saved through faith and this not of my (your) own doing, it is the gift of God. Not because of works lest I (any man) should boast.

It was not that I had not had a rich spiritual heritage; my parents were committed Christians and had well-worn Bibles. They had a time of worship and Bible reading each morning with my older brother Edmund and I was welcome to be there when I wanted to. My father's father had been very friendly with John George Govern,¹ the founder of the Faith Mission (an Evangelical village mission) and his mother's father was one of the people who welcomed D.L. Moody to York on that evangelist's first visit to England. My mother's father had travelled in the Quaker Ministry as a young man and he was in the habit of closing his shop mid-morning each Thursday and going to Quaker mid-week meeting for worship. He also read a chapter of the Bible each day to his family beginning at Genesis and proceeding to Revelation. One story I was told about him was that once when two of his shop assistants were quarrelling about something, my grandfather sat down between them and repeated from memory the 119th Psalm. (the longest chapter in the Bible). By the time he finished, the shop assistants had forgotten what they were quarrelling about!

In spite of my rich heritage, I realised I did not have a first-hand relationship with God like my parents had. I soon found out at boarding school that I was pulled down by the people I was with (Rom.7v14-24) and it was not long before I was brought before the headmaster for telling a dirty story. I knew in my heart that I was not what God wanted me to be, so when the opportunity came, I stood up for Jesus at the camp meeting previously mentioned.

¹ When the Fire Fell the outcome in the life of John George Govern. The Faith Mission Govern House; 38 Coates Gardens, Edinburgh Scotland. *Their early desire was to preach nothing less than the Christianity of Christ*

I did not say anything to my parents about my decision for Christ but later on my mother told me she had observed that I did not have temper tantrums the same way anymore. My school results jumped by about eight percent on average and instead of being in the middle of the class I was in the top twenty five percent. My health improved also and while I was still experiencing some sickness, I was no longer losing the week-per-term that I lost in Junior school with very painful ear trouble. (Pressure used to build up in inner ear and ear drums perforated on several occasions) About this time I started the practice of reading a chapter of Scripture a day and while some people wonder where my knowledge of Scripture comes from, this is basically it. I also ran a small Bible Study group at boarding school nicknamed 'Bubblers Bible Class'. I don't know if it did the others any good, but it certainly helped me have a better understanding of the Scriptures.

For the next two years, I had very little fellowship with other Christians who could enlarge my vision of the Christian walk and in many ways drifted from the Lord. However, the Lord was teaching and paring me for the days ahead and maybe protecting me from becoming too denominationally doctrinal. Later I met up with and enjoyed fellowship with a Baptist family in Waterford.

It was about the time of my conversion that I first spoke in a Quaker meeting for worship in Waterford in spite of feeling very nervous and shaking in my shoes. In fact, I made several attempts before finally standing up and speaking.

The next major step came when I was at college in England and met up with the Faith Mission Pilgrims, and in particular Mary Morrison² who was converted during an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on the island of Lewis north of Scotland. Some people stepping ashore were convicted of sin and turned to God. Others were drawn to places of worship and gave their lives to the Lord. Time lost its meaning as often the services went on all night. The presence of God was so real.

² Harken O'Daughter, testimony of Mary Morrison. Prairie Bible Institute. Three Hills Alberta Canada

What Mary and Duncan³ told me of that time still remains with me as a vision of what God can do in transforming lives by the conviction of the Holy Spirit. As Duncan often said, "Horizons should always be a menace to our peace." They told me of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and with their encouragement, I prayed for the Holy Spirit (Lk. 11v13) to come into my life at this time. What I received was a 'spring-clean'. The Holy Spirit showed me things⁴ which I needed to put right. (John 16v8) For example, I had to send money to pay a train fare I had not paid due to haste at the station. I had to pay for a child's toy I had broken. I found it very difficult to do these things and often agonized over them for days before my desire for the peace of God which passes all understanding exceeded my pride. It is interesting to note that in 1964, Duncan Campbell⁶ the Minister, much used of the Lord on Lewis received from the Lord that there would be riots and revival in Ireland would come through small prayer groups scattered around the country.

I find that it is essential to be a positive Christian and be so busy doing what is right that we have no time to do what is wrong. Wrong thoughts are for me, like a flashing warning light. I know that when I am close to the Lord, wrong thoughts do not cause problems but when I drift away, they become a problem. We need to be careful about what we feed our minds or for that which gets our attention — gets us!

The next few years I was involved in coffee-bar Evangelism and other mission activity in Dublin. Then followed work for reconciliation in Ireland. In spite of these activities, these were really wilderness years as far as my Christian life was concerned. I was defeated, depressed and anxious. I felt guided to marry a certain young lady and that she was not of the same mind, I found this shattering to my belief in being guided by God. My anxiety was heightened as in April 1967 Lebanese friends shared with me Arab feelings as we looked over the dividing wall that separated the parts of Jerusalem which were in Jordan from those in Israel. Also as I stood in the Garden of Gethsemane, I felt the

³ Duncan Campbell the preacher who was used much during that Revival. Two old ladies had been praying for many years and felt to call for Duncan and Revival came

⁴ Matthew 5:23

war clouds hanging over the city. When the napalm bombs started dropping two months later, I thought how easily I could have been in the midst of it all and from all this worry, I developed a stomach ulcer.

The way back to the Lord opened for me as I started doing the known will of God. I visited an elderly aunt in hospital regularly for example (Matt. 25v36) and worked for peace. (Matt. 5v9) "Blessed are the peacemakers." Jesus said. In spite of all these involvements, there was still something missing. As I travelled to America in December, 1971 I realised afresh that I had no power to change anyone and that while love is the way to peace, I could not lift anyone out of the hate into love nor could I deal with the fear in my own heart. The story of what happened next is in the preceding chapters, but the best is yet to come.