

WHEN I BECAME A CHRISTIAN

(message given to youth group)

by Kelly Coghlan

Question: What was the first word that John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter said as they began their preaching ministries? Hint: It was the same word; therefore, it must be one of the most important words in Christianity. Implementation of that word is the first step to a changed life. I will tell you later.

My singular message to you today is that you can know Jesus Christ personally and He can come into you, and you can know that you are going to heaven.

2 Corinthians 13:5 talks about a test that we are to give ourselves: "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves...Jesus Christ is in you--unless...you fail the test?" The test: is Jesus Christ in you?

My Background: I grew up as a dedicated member of First United Methodist Church, Longview. I was baptized as a baby there, and then baptized there again at confirmation in my early teens; but I did not know Jesus then. I was President of the UMYF and received the God & Country Award of Boy Scouting in First Methodist Church; but I did not know Jesus then. I went to Lakeview Methodist Summer Camp every year I was eligible; but I did not know Jesus then.

I went to a Billy Graham crusade, walked down to the front, prayed the prayer, but I did not meet Jesus there either. Why? What was missing?

Youth Trip: When I was 16, the summer before my Junior year in High School, I was invited to play the drums on a ten-state tour with another church's youth group. Every night we performed a Christian musical for a different church.

The last night of the tour, we were in Vicksburg, Mississippi. But, we did something different that night. We went out to the parking lot of the largest Honky Tonk in Mississippi and set up our P.A. system. I was asked to play a drum solo to stir up some interest. Drunks began emptying the bar to come outside to see what was going on. After I finished my drum solo, the choir began singing and then youth went out to give their testimony to the people who had exited the bar.

I went around and listened to what the kids were saying. A guy named David began talking to two drunks. He talked about his own personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He asked the two drunks, "If you died tonight, would you go to heaven?" I asked myself the same question. I did not know.

In that instant, I felt alone as if a spot light were shining down on me with God at the other end of it. I saw for the first time the sin in my life. The lust; the lying; the self centeredness. I saw it through God's eyes. I had a sense of just how holy and perfect God is and I saw the great gulf between who I am and who He is. I saw for the first time that if I were to get what I deserved, it would not be to go to heaven.

And what was the first word uttered by Jesus, John and Peter? REPENT. 2

Corinthians 7:9--"I now rejoice...that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance...for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance...leading to salvation...." Sorrow=Repentance=Salvation.

Acts 20:20--"I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, solemnly testifying of (1) repentance toward God and (2) faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Two steps.

Why can't you just have Faith without first having repentance?

LIFEGUARD: Well, think of it this way. Think of a person out in the middle of the ocean. They have no life preserver. There is a lifeguard on shore. Until the person realizes that they are drowning, they will never scream for help. They will never see the need for the lifeguard to save them, and they will drown and never know what hit them. Christianity is much the same way. You never reach the issue of whether you have faith that the lifeguard can save you until you first see the need to be saved.

Recall the old hymn: Love Lifted Me: "I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore." You will never see a purpose for the life and death of Jesus Christ until you realize that you are going to drown without Him saving you.

That night in Mississippi, I prayed and asked God to forgive me and asked Jesus to come

into me. The next day, I told 100 kids what happened. Romans 10:9--"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."

Have you ever come face-to-face with yourself? Have you ever felt ashamed for how you really are? Have you ever truly repented before God and told Him, "I need you; I need to change; I want you to save me from who I am." You can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You can know that you are going to heaven. You can do that today.