



3 April 1977, I was converted to Christ. It happened at the Ster Kinekor cinema in Pinelands. My family had moved from Rhodesia to Cape Town. We were living in Pinelands, just a few kilometres from where I had been born. It was Sunday evening, 3rd April 1977, when I walked over to the local cinema, realising little, how dramatically that would change my life forever.

Ambushed by the Gospel

At that time, commercial activity on Sunday was prohibited in South Africa by law. No cinemas were open, in honour of the Lord's Day. The local Baptist Church had hired out the cinema for an Evangelistic rally. The guest preacher, Rev. Rex Matthie, preached a powerful message on what Christ had suffered for us: *"Jesus died for you. What have you ever done for Him?"*

Conviction

I sat stunned and ashamed. I had never done anything for God. My family was quite secular. We had never attended church services, not even on Christmas days. Sunday school had never been part of my life. We did not even pray before meals. Like my father, I described myself as an *"agnostic."*

Contrition

Now, all of the arguments I had picked up over the years against God and Christianity seemed awfully puny as I bowed before the Creator of the universe. I could not question the existence of God. His presence was overwhelming. I had nothing that I could say in my defense. I realised that I was lost. If I had died that night, I knew that I would go into an eternity separated from

God, in hell. I was a selfish, self-centred, ungrateful creature. I had never even so much as thanked God for the life He had given me, or for His many evidences of grace in me and my families, life.

Grace

My mother had told me that there had been complications before I was born. My mother, who was a nurse, had made use of thalidomide tablets, which were prevalent in 1959, to counter-act morning sickness and nausea. Children born to those who had used thalidomide were born horribly deformed, frequently without arms, or legs. My mother had been advised to have an abortion. Even though abortions were illegal in South Africa at that time, because of the revulsion and hysteria of many over the severe deformities suffered by those affected by thalidomide, abortions were not only being allowed in these cases, but encouraged. My mother told me how she just could not bring herself to consider it and called for a hospital chaplain to pray for her baby. Although we were not a praying family, this story had made quite an impact on me and I realised that there was a Higher Power who had smiled upon us and spared my life before I had even taken my first breath. Rex Mathie declared: *“If God has preserved your life thus far, it is for a reason!”*

Mercy

As I sat in that cinema hearing the Word of God, a whole lot of other incidents came to my memory. I remembered when I was just 5 years old, I had been run over by a car, just in front of our home. My mother ran out, lifted up the car and pulled me out from under it! I was rushed to the hospital, where the doctor was amazed. Although plainly one of the tyres had gone right across my chest (the tyre tracks were clearly visible on my clothes) there was no injury. I remember the doctor declaring: *“God must have been looking after him!”*

God

This was my first conscious recollection of the concept of God. The picture that I had in my mind was of one of the Colstream Guards standing outside Buckingham Palace in London. He had a long white beard but was dressed immaculately in a red soldier's uniform with a tall bearskin hat on his head and a rifle, with bayonet fixed, in his hands. The similarity of the two words guard and God, made me think of God as a soldier. He was plainly up in the clouds and had excellent vision because He could see me all the way down in Southern Africa. Somehow He had been able to intervene to save my life. That was my first concept of God. The preacher said: *“if God has preserved your life thus far, it is for a reason.”* I wondered what that reason could be.

Bombardments

All the life threatening experiences that my parents had related to me came flooding back into my memory as well. What if God had not protected my mother and father when they were enduring the mass aerial bombardments of the Second World War? Both my mother and father had experienced people being blown up to the left and right of them and, yet, they had not been harmed. For what purpose had God preserved their lives?

More Lives Than a Cat!

There were also many incidents that my parents had mentioned of how *“lucky”* I had been: when I had fallen deathly ill with a contagious disease on board HMS Pendennis Castle sailing between England and South Africa, the ship had wanted to put me off at the Canary Islands. Again, my secular parents had asked for prayer from a minister on board the ship and I had been healed. My mother also mentioned when, as an adventurous little boy, I had tried to cross a waterfall and was washed over! My mother had said that it was incredible that I had not been killed, or crippled in that and in so many other incidents. Several times my mother said to me: *“You have more lives than a cat!”*

Why?

Why had God preserved my life when I had not even acknowledged Him? I had not even prayed to God before that night. I had never even thanked Him for all of these incidents, which my parents had reminded me of through the years. In that cinema, on 3 April 1977, I felt myself standing before the Throne of Almighty God, guilty of disobeying His Law, justly deserving to be condemned to an eternity in hell. I was overwhelmed with a sense of my unworthiness and wickedness.

Commitment

There was no way that I could possibly deserve God’s love, but I felt this absolutely overwhelming compulsion to stand up and go forward and make a public commitment of my life to Christ. The very least I could do was to thank God for all that He had done in Christ for me.

Conversion

They were singing *“Just as I am without one plea but that Thy Blood was shed for me”* as I walked down the aisle and bowed in prayer at the front of that cinema in Pinelands. One of the church deacons, Bill Parker, counselled me, explained the implications of what I was doing and led me in prayer. It was the most exhilarating experience. There could be no doubt whatsoever. God was reaching down and putting life within me. I had been deaf, dumb, blind and dead in my trespasses and sins. For the very first time my (spiritual) eyes were being opened. For the first time I could consciously sense the presence of God. In fact, I was absolutely overwhelmed with a sense of the presence of God, His love and His mercy. I trembled before His holiness and power, even as I revelled in the joy of knowing that my sins were forgiven. I was a new creature in Christ!

Joy

I wanted to jump and leap and shout and proclaim what God had done. This was a completely new experience for me. With a German mother and an English father, we Anglo-Saxon’s do not particularly go much into expressing emotion about anything. My upbringing had very much been in the restrained, *“cool, calm and collected”* British tradition. But, as I walked and skipped on my way home from the cinema that night, all kinds of emotions were bubbling within me. I could not restrain it.

Called

I was absolutely overwhelmed with the conviction that God had called me to a lifetime of service as a missionary! But what did I know about missions? The only missionary that I had ever heard about was David Livingstone and that was from the history books. Of course, I had sometimes heard reports about missionaries being killed by Communist terrorists in the war in Rhodesia. I had wondered why anyone would do anything so stupid as to go into a war zone and present themselves as targets for blood-thirsty Marxist guerrillas. But now, on the night of my conversion, I was absolutely convinced that God was commanding me to go and to proclaim His Gospel and to be dedicated for the rest of my life to serving and extending His Kingdom.

Coming Home

What was I to say at home? I could not wait to tell my parents what God had done for me. However, as I opened the door, I saw that someone had beaten me to it. A friend of the family, who had also been at the rally, had rushed over to inform my incredulous parents that their son had gone forward at one of these *“Billy Graham things!”* Jeers and scorns greeted me.

Confrontation

“So, you have become a born again Baptist like Jimmy Carter!” That really stung. As a patriotic Rhodesian, I despised everything that Jimmy Carter was doing in betraying our and so many other, countries into the hands of Marxist revolutionaries. To us Jimmy Carter was the epitome of a hypocrite and a traitor. Shamefully I lashed back with razor sharp tongue defending my conversion and disassociating from everything that Jimmy Carter stood for. Like my parents, I was an argumentative type and rose to the challenge with characteristic verbal aggression.

Repentance

Later that night, as I bowed in prayer at the side of my bed for the first time in my life, I was ashamed that the very first witness I had given to my parents had been to dishonour them and argue. How would I ever be able to be a Christian? I despaired at the sinful desire to justify myself rising so quickly out of the heart of one who had, at that very hour, given his life to Christ. What kind of poor excuse for a Christian could I ever hope to be?

Christian Union

The next day at Pinelands High School, Mark Liprini, one of the boys from Pinelands Baptist Church who had been at the rally, came over and introduced himself to me. He told me of the Christian Union that met during break time. It was tremendous to join in singing songs of praises to the Lord with others who loved Jesus. I had no idea that there were so many Christians at school.

Introduction to Sunday Worship

The next Sunday was Easter Sunday. The Liprini family from the church came and collected me for morning worship. I am so glad they did. I was dreading having to go to church for the first time. I do not think people brought up in church-going families realise how intimidating it is for a secular person to enter a church building! No more would we think of going into an exclusive

club, where we were not members, than to walk, on our own, into a church building. It was so very helpful and thoughtful of the Liprini family to have driven over to my home and taken me to Pinelands Baptist for the first time.

Experiencing the Reality of Hymns in Worship

That first Sunday morning service was absolutely tremendous. I was astounded that I knew the hymns. We had sung these very same hymns in school assemblies in Rhodesia. Yet, now, for the first time, I was understanding what I was singing! I marvelled that for so many years I had sung hymns that had been insensible to me. Yet now they were coming alive and I was no longer singing a hymn, but worshipping God in thanksgiving for the reality of what He was doing in my own experience!

Communist Idolatry in Moscow

The guest speaker, Rev. Rex Mathie, proclaimed the Resurrection of Christ. He described in great detail how on Easter Sunday, in Moscow, in the Soviet Union, long lines of Communists file past the corpse of Vladimir Lenin, to see their god. He is dead. In fact, a full time taxidermist was employed by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to maintain the illusion of life-likeness for the decaying corpse of Lenin. Very little of his original body remains. Mostly the worshipping Communists are only seeing plaster of paris repairs for the ears, nose, etc. which had already fallen off. There was absolutely no doubt that Lenin is dead.

Christ is Risen

However, on the other side of Red Square, in Moscow, St. Basil's Orthodox Church has a ritual each Easter Sunday. The congregation walks around the church exclaiming: *"Where is He? He is not here. Where is He? He is not here."*

Then the minister exclaims:

"HE IS RISEN!"

And then the entire congregation resounds in response:

"HE IS RISEN INDEED!"

What a contrast between the dead ideology of communism and the Resurrection power of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

We Serve a Risen Saviour

When we sung that hymn: *"We serve a Risen Saviour..."* it felt as if my heart would burst with joy and excitement for this tremendous truth of the Gospel.

No Turning Back

Another hymn that I sung at that time continued to resound within my heart and mind: *"I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back! Praise the Lord! No turning back!"*



Saved to Serve

My pastor, Rev. Doc Watson, later testified that from the beginning I harassed him for more teaching and for more opportunities to serve the Lord. Within 2 months, I was working on a Scripture Union team for a holiday mission in Somerset West. During that outreach I gave my first message, A Missionary Challenge, at the local Presbyterian Church in the evening service.

Literature Ministry, Youth Work and Evangelism

Within the year, I was a Sunday school teacher and a youth leader and administering the book table at Pinelands Baptist. I devoured Christian literature, attended every meeting and training course possible, whether on evangelism, counselling, holiness, or missions. Door-to-door evangelism, placing the Gospel of John in every home in Pinelands, tract distribution in the streets and at railway stations, ministering in old ages homes and other Christian service filled my days. One prayer I prayed over and over was the words of that chorus: *“Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me, Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.”*

An Adventure of Discipleship

That was the beginning of this incredible adventure of discipleship which has taken me across 4 continents, over 140 missions behind enemy lines, smuggling Bibles to persecuted Christians, serving the suffering in communist and Muslim lands. Whether under fire, or in prison, sick, or healthy, I have experienced the reality of Gods mercy, guidance, provision and protection. The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you.

“And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the Word through the accompanying signs. Amen.” Mark 16:20

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See also: [35 Years Ago – Frontline's First Mission to Mozambique](#)