

Personal Message Testimony

It began in England.

Bedford is a smallish county town some 50 miles north of London and between Oxford and Cambridge. A young new minister, fresh from seminary had been appointed to the London Road Methodist Church. My wife Margaret and I got on well with him but he was full of liberal theology. A few months before we emigrated to New Zealand we were at a discussion in his home on a Sunday night, after church service. I had stated that I believed the Bible was correct to which he countered that there were two genealogies of Jesus in the Bible, Matthew and Luke's. They were different. How can that be?

Of course I didn't have a clue but stated that although I didn't know I still believed that both were correct. This brought scorn from many others there; but I believe it was that statement that pleased God.

A few years later, settled on the other side of the world in New Zealand we attended St. Andrews Presbyterian Church led by another Bible Believing minister, Reverend Tom Woods. At that time I was an elder in the church. My daytime job was selling paint and wallpaper wholesale to retail shops in Taranaki. One of those was the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre.

On one of my calls the owner, Bill Bailey, was reading his Bible. Feeling rather like Philip I asked him if he understood what he was reading. Unlike the Ethiopian eunuch he replied that yes he did. He said he was reading Exodus and examining the similarities of that story with a Christian's life. I couldn't believe it. What Bill Bailey was saying was that well known stories in the Bible could be interpreted as a type or pattern of life today. The Israelites had to accept the blood of a lamb to be free from slavery just as Christians accept the Blood of the Lamb of God Jesus Christ to free them from the slavery of sin. When water baptism was seen as a type of the Red Sea story and the Pentecost experience as a pattern of Mount Sinai I got excited. The Bible was suddenly a different book.

My calls at the Eltham Paint Centre became more frequent and longer. I would sometimes call twice a day to learn things like Biblical Ruth was a type of the gentile bride of today and Naomi represented modern Israel returning to her land. Esther too was a picture of the Bride, chosen because the original Queen refused the King's call.

I couldn't get enough of these teachings and soon discovered that they were from an American, William Branham. Generally English people are suspicious of things American, especially preachers but this one was different. He did not ask for money, he did not puff himself up as some great man. Instead he simply preached the Bible he so firmly believed in. Bill had some reel to reel tapes of sermons so I listened to them at home. My wife, Margaret couldn't stand them. They were just a noise, she couldn't distinguish a voice. Those tapes hadn't been filtered so all the background noise was there from coughs and movements to loud Amen's and "Preach it brother". At that time I was head of St Andrew's Sunday School and taught the teenagers the sorts of things I had been learning. Rev Tom Woods now had an assistant minister, an older man with the pentecostal experience, who was adding a spiritual dimension to many in the church. On one occasion I had left Sunday's lesson of the three main Jewish feasts and their Christian counterparts on the blackboard. Monday night was a Session meeting and the Assistant Minister and I were setting out the chairs. He looked at the blackboard and then said "I think it might be an idea to wipe that off, the elders will never understand that!"

Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions with the firm's car we could no longer attend St. Andrews but instead attended a combined church in our village of Oakura. A Bible Study group was soon meeting at our house but I was struggling over water baptism. I had been christened as a baby and confirmed in the Methodist church and I could see no need to be re-baptised in Jesus name.

I explained this to Bill who was pushing me to take that step. He said, "You'll not go any further until you get re-baptised." I felt that this was rubbish, of course, because I was able to teach with simple revelations and understanding of Biblical stories coming regularly and easily. After a year of nothing I finally gave in. Bill was right, I was wrong. Baptism by immersion in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is essential. Without it there is no growth, no real future.

After this I was again getting revelations and able to teach the now 50 strong Friday night Bible study at our home.

Margaret felt that I was moving on and she was stuck. Finally she decided that if she didn't want to get left behind she needed to get baptised in Jesus name too. I took her down to the local Oakura river and baptised her there. She said that she felt a wall inside her crumbling down and when I next put one of this noisy reel to reel recordings of Brother Branham's sermons she heard every word.

I accepted Bill's job offer at the Eltham Paint and Revival Book Centre and we moved from our small seaside village to a small industrial town in South Taranaki, Eltham.

During that first winter Bill and I started meeting at my new home for Bible Study. Soon some of the Oakura people decided to make the hour long journey and join in. Again the teachings were based on Brother Branham's sermons. By the 1980's there were cassette tapes and books of his messages readily available, especially from Gisborne's Gospel Tape Ministry and Voice of God in the USA. Meanwhile, as the story of the Eltham Paint Centre shows, more and more people were drawn to this message.

A second retail outlet was created at Manaia, a small town 20 minutes away and when it was my turn to work there I would listen to Brother Branham (now clear) tapes when there was no customers and all the other work had been done. This went on for a two or three years as I absorbed God's message.

I found that Branham's preaching illuminated the Bible. It made sense of the book of Revelation which no other teaching had ever done. The Seven Church Ages and the Seals confirmed that here was God speaking through a prophet.

As I see it, the Message was calling a people to come out of denominations and walk with Jesus Christ. Instead of elders, ministers or even arch bishops and popes telling people what to do the Holy Spirit was guiding His people individually. As Branham said God deals with the Jews as a nation but with the gentiles as individuals. I was particularly drawn to his last full sermon, Leadership. The essence of it is that we are all sheep and we are led. When we are very young mother leads us. Then our school teacher leads us. Then as we become teenagers our fathers leading is very important. Once we are adults our Pastor leads us but there is one stage beyond that and that is in our maturity it must be the Holy Ghost that leads us. That doesn't mean we are finished with Pastors and church but rather we now fulfil our place as part of the body of Christ and all of us should be lead by the spirit of Jesus.

Another thing I really like is the freedom we have to do as we feel led. Our African missions required no one's permission no one else's money, and no one else's time.

For me the adventure the message has brought me life. There has, and still will be much shaping, moulding, correcting and encouraging to go through but I now know it is for my own good. And only that way can I help make God's Word a living reality for others.

Richard Oliver