

INTRODUCTION

My name is Dick Keogh. This is the story of my journey - my journey from a place of spiritual uncertainty to a place of knowing for certain that I will go to Heaven when I die.

The first time I read the following verses from John's Epistle in the New Testament, I was amazed. John wrote:

'Since we believe human testimony, surely we can believe the greater testimony that comes from God. And God has testified about his Son. All who believe in the Son of God know in their hearts that this testimony is true. Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life'.¹

I was particularly struck by what John wrote in verse thirteen. He said, 'I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life'. John was saying, "You may know!" This really challenged me to examine my own heart to see if I had this assurance of eternal life that I read of in the Scriptures.

CHILDHOOD DAYS

For many generations our family had been devout Roman Catholics. One of my ancestors had allowed her home to be used as a Chapel where mass was said regularly. My parents were very involved in their Church. My mother was a great woman of prayer and regularly said Novenas and Rosaries. She devoted much of her time to the worship of the Blessed Virgin Mary and many of the Saints. My father belonged to the Holy Family Confraternity, a men's organisation which met once each week to worship Jesus, Mary and Joseph, known collectively as 'The Holy Family'.

Our parents had a great influence on us when we were children. I remember all of us kneeling down together in the evening time and saying the Rosary to the Blessed Virgin Mary. I also accompanied my father to many of the Holy Family Confraternity meetings over the years.

My school days began at the local Convent where the Nuns educated me. After receiving my First Communion I attended the Christian Brothers' School. One of the boys in my school was a Protestant. Although we came from different backgrounds and traditions we were great friends. Both of us had one thing in common - we **HOPED** we would go to Heaven when we died.

HOPING

I **HOPED** I would get to Heaven because of the fact that as an infant I had been baptised into the Roman Catholic Church. Each time I went to Confession the priest told me he had absolved me from my sins. The priest also told me I received the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ every time I swallowed the Holy Communion wafer. When I was twelve years old I received my Confirmation. The Archbishop anointed me with oil. I attended Mass and received the Sacraments regularly. As far as I was concerned I was a devout Roman Catholic and **HOPED** this would get me to Heaven.

My friend **HOPED** he would also get to Heaven because of the fact that he had been baptised and enrolled as a member of the Protestant Church. He had learned the Catechism and attended Sunday School. He had been confirmed and was regularly attending the services in his Church. He considered himself to be a good Protestant and sincerely **HOPED** this would get him to Heaven.

I **HOPED** the Roman Catholic Church would work on my behalf and do all that was necessary to help get me to Heaven. My friend also **HOPED** the Protestant Church, to which he belonged, would make every effort to secure a place in Heaven for him. Both of us **HOPED** our respective Churches would be actively engaged in securing Salvation for us.

After I left school I got a job with an undertaker. At funerals I saw many heartbroken people crying at gravesides. The priests at the Roman Catholic funerals and the ministers at the Protestant funerals would try to comfort the broken hearted family members of the deceased, all of whom were **HOPING** the soul of their loved one had gone to be with the Lord.

Each year, in the month of November, the priests would send out a list to each home in their parish. People were encouraged to write the names of their deceased family members on this list, which would then be returned to the priests. Masses were said on All Souls' Day for the repose of the souls of everyone mentioned on the lists. The priests who said the Masses and the people who paid for them sincerely **HOPED** these Masses would help save the souls of those mentioned. I remember seeing my mother writing down the names of our deceased family members on the list and returning it to the priests, **HOPING** that by doing this she could help to secure a place in Heaven for her loved ones.

I wondered what might happen at the time of my death. I could picture myself on my deathbed. I knew I would certainly be **HOPING** to go to Heaven. I would definitely be **HOPING** I would not go to Hell. What a fearful situation to be in when you are dying! How terrible it would be to be uncertain about where you are going! I really longed to know for certain that I would go to Heaven when I died. Many years later I was still **HOPING**. At this stage I was married and had a family. If my children had asked me if I knew for certain I would go to Heaven when I died, I would have had to say, "I **HOPE** so, but I don't actually know." I wished I did know!

KNOWING

In November 1975 I met a friend of mine who told me he definitely knew he would go to Heaven when he died. I had known this man for many years. For quite a while he had been **HOPING** that one day he would get to Heaven. But now he told me that he was **NO LONGER HOPING**. He said he actually **KNEW** that he was going to Heaven. I asked him to explain how he could have this assurance. He said he got it from reading and believing the Scriptures. He told me that in the Bible, God had revealed His plan of Salvation. He then encouraged me to read the Scriptures for myself.

In John's first Epistle I read the following words: 'I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life'.² I was surprised that John could say, "You may **KNOW**." This was just what I needed! I really needed to **KNOW**! There is such a great difference between **HOPING** for something and knowing the reality. John was highlighting the fact that it is actually possible to **KNOW** that you have eternal life by believing what God said concerning His Son: 'And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son'.³

According to the Scriptures eternal life is therefore in a **PERSON** (Jesus Christ) and His work on the sinner's behalf. For the first time in my life I was confronted with the fact that eternal life is in a Person and not in a Religion. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me".⁴ For many years I had believed that Religion was the way to eternal life. But now I could see that the Scriptures were not speaking about Religion but about a Relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I was reading in God's Word about the importance of believing in, trusting in, and depending upon this Person.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

God's Love

Jesus also said, "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."⁵ The Saviour said that 'God loved the world.' But did that include **ME**? Did God actually love me as an individual? I knew I was a sinner and that my sin had to be paid for. According to the New Testament, 'Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard'.⁶ I knew I was certainly included there! God's Word was crystal clear. It very specifically stated that we are all sinners. But I was greatly

encouraged when I read that 'God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners'.⁷ How my heart began to warm as I read those precious words. It was fine to read of God's love for the **WORLD**. But what about **ME**, as an individual?

My question was answered when I read the words of the apostle Paul. He referred the Jesus as 'the Son of God, who loved ME and gave himself for ME'.⁸ This was just what I needed to know! The Apostle Paul knew that God loved the world. But he also knew that God loved him as an individual. He knew that Christ had suffered and died for him on the cross at Calvary. He knew that Jesus became the sinner's substitute and paid in full the penalty for the guilt of the sins of all who would repent and put their faith in Him. This was just what I needed to know too! I realised I was a sinner and that my sin had to be dealt with. I longed to know if God loved **ME** so much that He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for **MY** sin.

As I read over these verses again I could see that God **DID** love me. He demonstrated the extent of His love for me at the cross. This became very clear as I once again read of 'the Son of God, who loved ME and gave himself for ME'. I could see now that God loved me as an individual. The Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me, paid in full, as my substitute, all that was required so that my sin could be forgiven. But why would God do this for a sinner like me? The answer was very clear in the Scriptures. It was because He **LOVED** me!

God's Mercy

The apostle Paul makes it very clear that 'When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit'.⁹ I was really amazed when I read here of God's plan of Salvation. The Scriptures very clearly outline the fact that we are saved, not because of what **WE** have done, but because of what **GOD** has done on our behalf. It is because of His **MERCY** that He saved us. He has had mercy on the sinner. In these verses it mentions the fact that God showed us His kindness and love. But where and when was this kindness and love shown? According to the Scriptures, God's love was manifested and demonstrated publicly at Calvary, as the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died upon the cross as a substitute for sinners. God's Word made it clear that it did not matter what good works I did or what efforts I made to save myself. It did not matter which Church I belonged to. None of these things could ever save my soul. The message of the Bible was clear. Salvation was bestowed because of God's mercy.

What a great challenge this was to me! For many years I had been **HOPING** I could earn or merit Salvation by being religious, depending upon the Church and doing my best. But I had reckoned I would never know until after I died if the Church had done enough for me or if I had done enough myself to secure my Salvation. Now, for the first time in my life, I was confronted with what God said in His Word. It was clear that the Church, regardless of which one I belonged to, could never save me. It was also very clear that my good works and best efforts could not earn or merit Salvation for me. But in the Scriptures I read the **GOOD NEWS** - the Lord Jesus Christ did enough, through His death on the cross, to save me.

God's Grace

I also read in the New Testament that 'the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people'.¹⁰ Here was the great difference between man's way of Salvation and God's. Man's way of Salvation was as follows: belong to a particular Church, do your best, work your way to Heaven. But what was the end result of this? Both my Protestant friend and I knew only too well the end result! We were left **HOPING** we would get to Heaven and **HOPING** we would not go to Hell. Not only would we be **HOPING** from day to day but, when it came to our time to die, we would have nothing to hold on to. We would have no assurance.

God's plan of Salvation was so different to this. Paul makes it clear that 'the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people'. This verse speaks of the grace of God which is God's unmerited favour to the sinner. The verse makes it very clear that Salvation is by grace. It means that God reaches down to helpless sinners, revealing to them the fact that He loves them so much

that He sent His Son to the cross on their behalf. Jesus took the sinners' place by becoming their substitute and paying the penalty for sin they should have paid. Christ suffered Hell on the cross so that sinners need not go to Hell.

Paul also tells us that 'God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins'.¹¹ God's Word says we are justified 'FREELY'. This means Salvation is given freely by God to sinful people. The sinner is not required to work for it or to earn it. Salvation is God's **GIFT** to the sinner. God could give this free gift to sinners because of the fact that their sins have already been paid for by Jesus. I could now see that Salvation was God's **FREE GIFT** to **ME!**

NO LONGER ON THE CROSS

From a young age I had grown accustomed to seeing images of a dead Christ on a cross. These were displayed in Chapels, schools, cemeteries, halls, on rosary beads, prayer books, in people's homes, in motor cars and even in baby's prams. Unfortunately, this image of a Christ who was dead was the predominant image my family and most of the people I knew had of Him.

What a joy it was to read in the Scriptures of a Christ who is alive, to learn of a Saviour who had remained on the cross for a number of hours, yet long enough to pay the penalty for our sins. When this had been accomplished He cried out, "It is finished!" Then he bowed His head and gave up his spirit'.¹² Later that day, His friends removed Christ's dead body from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. He was **No Longer** on the cross. Yet for many people today, over two thousand years later, it seems as if He is still on the cross.

And He is **No Longer** in the tomb! Three days after His burial, when some of Jesus' disciples visited His tomb, they were met by angels, who asked, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive?" They said, "He isn't here!" He has risen from the dead."¹³ The apostle Paul writes, "I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said."¹⁴

The Scriptures make it clear that this risen, living Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ascended to Heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of His Father. And 'He is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf'.¹⁵

I knew it was time to make a decision. Was I willing to depend, for my salvation, upon an image of a dead Christ? Or would I put my faith in a living Saviour?

NO LONGER HOPING

*By faith I reached out to God, saying, "Lord, I know I am a sinner and that I deserve to go to Hell. I know that there is nothing the Church can do for my Salvation. I also realise there is absolutely nothing I can do to merit a place in Heaven. Throughout my lifetime I have been **HOPING** that I could be saved as a result of a combination of the Church's work on my behalf and my own good works. I thank you for showing me that this is not possible. Thank you for showing me in the Scriptures that Salvation is a gift which you freely give to the sinner. I am so grateful that you not only loved the world, but you loved **ME** enough to send your Son to die as my substitute and pay the penalty for the guilt of my sins. Thank you, Lord!"*

Now I am no longer depending upon religion or good works to get me to Heaven. I have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and I am depending upon Him to save me. My faith is in 'the Son of God, who loved ME and gave Himself for ME'. I have repented of my sins, and have been forgiven. Now I know what John meant when he said, "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life."¹⁶ I am trusting Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I am depending for my Salvation upon Him alone and on the work He did on my

behalf as He suffered and died upon the cross at Calvary. Because of this I have God's promise of eternal life.

I am **NO LONGER HOPING**. Now I **KNOW** that I will be in Heaven some day. This assurance is not based upon whether a person is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant. It is based upon the fact that, as He suffered and died upon the cross Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of all who will put their faith in Him. Jesus Himself said, "This is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."¹⁷

INVITATION

Dear Friend,

Perhaps you have been 'doing your best' for many years. Maybe you have spent a long time **HOPING** that membership of a particular Church can get you to Heaven. But today you are still only **HOPING**. You have no assurance that all is well between you and God. You may be sincerely **HOPING** that, as a result of your prayers and religious exercises, you will earn salvation. But you do not **KNOW!**

Instead of looking to religion or looking to your own good works to save you, why not look to the Lord who said, "Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other".¹⁸

The Lord invites you to come to Him right **NOW!** "Come now, let's settle this," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."¹⁹

Acknowledging the fact that you are a sinner, turn to the Lord right **NOW** in sincere repentance, asking Him to forgive you and trusting Him to save you.

Then you will be able to say:

**"I am NO LONGER HOPING. Now I KNOW I am going to Heaven,
because I am depending upon the Son of God who loved ME and gave Himself for ME."**

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Scripture References

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| 17: John Ch.3 v. 16 | 18: Isaiah Ch.45 v. 22 |
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