

Articles by Ben Sutton

Ben Sutton

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Then Jesus Came

I was on my way up the Great North Road, home to my dear wife and two little girls, after nearly two months of working with the Lord in Kent, England. Ahead of me I saw a tramp, unsuccessfully "thumbing" for a ride. By the look on his face, he was staggered as I braked the Gospel Caravan to a stop, but when he got beside me, I was even more staggered, for if ever a man stank, it was this one. I asked him where he wanted to go and he replied, "Grantham." My heart sank; fifty miles to go with a stench like that! I felt like scratching myself all over, but decided that this was one for whom Christ died, so I spent the time telling this man of Jesus and His mighty power to save. At Grantham, I gave him the price of a meal and bed, then drove on, heaving a sigh of relief as I let both the cab windows down.

Some time after this, as I sat thinking about the incident, the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart: "Ben Sutton, you were like that man. You stank in the vileness of your sin; you were unclean in the sight of a holy God; you were stumbling along the road of ruin. Then Jesus came, and picked you up, and is now taking you where you want to be."

In

Acts, we read of the conversion of the Apostle Paul. His story begins with this description: "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord..." (Acts 9:1). Then Saul, the Christian-hater, meets the risen Lord Jesus and after a few days we find him, not Paul the Christian-hater, but preaching Christ

in the synagogues to the amazement of all who knew him. What a wonderful change when Jesus came!

I have before me one of many letters, all in a similar strain, which I have received from different souls I have been privileged to point to Christ. This one is from a young lady in Mosborough, Sheffield. It reads:

Dear Uncle Ben,

I have so very much enjoyed the children's meetings. The chorus I like best is 'This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine.'

The first night I came to the meetings was Monday, the twenty-eighth of September, and ever since I have come away with a very warm heart, and I know now that I love the Lord Jesus, because I have changed in my ways, so your meetings have helped me in a very great way.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Snowden

The great Paul, from Christian-hater to Christian preacher; the little Sheffield girl who knows now she loves the Lord Jesus because she has changed her ways.

And now, may I add my testimony to these, to tell you how Jesus came into my life.

B.C.

I was preaching on Doncaster race course one day when a bystander ventured the remark that perhaps my father was a parson and that I'd never known real life. I told that man that if my father had heard him say that, he would probably have broken his neck! My father was a hard-living, hard-drinking, hard-hitting miner, and the

only other occupation he had ever known, outside of serving in His Majesty's Navy in the first "War to End Wars," was when he worked the "Crown and Anchor" board on the race courses, and when once or twice he tried his hand at bookmaking. My earliest recollection of my father is coming downstairs one morning and finding him lying on the kitchen floor, where he had been all night, surrounded by beer bottles -- empty ones -- with the black beetles crawling all over him, attracted by the smell of the beer.

There were four brothers and one sister in the family, and if it wasn't one who was in trouble with the police, it was another. Between us, we had quite a record of drunkenness and disorderliness, larceny, and even desertion from the peace-time Army.

But there was one touch of sweetness that influenced my early life. That was my dear mother. I was the youngest of her little brood. She loved me dearly, and I her. One day I was traveling with her on the bus when there was a tremendous collision and the next thing I knew my mother was dying, while the doctor stood shaking his head, saying, "No hope." Nine years old, and mother gone! Oh, how many nights I lay far into the morning, sobbing for God to send her back to me again.

One after another my brothers left home, while I was left in the care of a stepmother who was to me just the opposite of everything my dear mother ever was. I remember one day, after a very unpleasant time at home, I walked over a mile to the graveyard where my mother lay buried, and knelt beside that silent grave, and wept till I could weep no more, just longing for the sound of that beloved voice that had faded away forever.

At fourteen and a half, I started work at the coal mine and received weekly, for my pocket money, the princely sum of one shilling (about twelve cents) for every six days worked. Then, early in my teens, I left home with all my worldly goods in a little suitcase. The first part of my wanderings took me to the home of my brother Jim, who immediately took me under his wing, until, one day, I signed on a ship and sailed away to seek my fortune -- or such were my romantic thoughts. Soon I was in the grip of "the booze." I remember my twenty-first birthday was spent in the North Atlantic. We had lost the convoy, and were in the midst of a hurricane in submarine-infested waters, but I was so full of whisky that my back carried four long scars, caused by my being so drunk that I could not feel the radiator burning me as I lay against it.

All through the war it was booze, battle, and blood. Some of my best pals died under my eyes, but never once did my own escapes cause me to thank God. In fact, I grew more and more calloused and more and more evil-tempered as the years went by.

On the Juno beachhead at Arromanches, not long after "D-Day," I was longing for a drink, but we had completely run out. I decided that I would go ashore and find something that would bring temporary satisfaction to my craving. I dressed the best I could, and went over the side on to the end of Port en Bressin pier. I walked on toward the town, passed a German ack-ack ship that still stank with dead bodies. I could hear in the distance the roar of guns as our boys fought on toward Caen. Then I saw that the gates were guarded, and the way to the town was closed. I walked along the dockside till I came to a row of houses whose fronts were on the dock

but whose backs were on the street outside. A shell had torn a hole clean through one. On either side of the door was a notice board: one in German with a skull and crossbones; the other in English which said "Danger -- Booby Traps." I thought to myself, "Booby traps or booze," and decided to risk it. The hair stood up on the back of my neck as I made my way through that dark death trap; then out into the street I went to spend the rest of the evening indulging in my favorite pastime.

Conviction

Then one day a wonderful thing happened to me. I met and fell in love with the young lady who was to become my wife, and into my life of sin and darkness came a touch of the sweetness I had known from my mother as a boy. As the war drew to a weary close, I decided that I was going to live a new life. I would get a shore job, get married, and settle down to a decent, respectable life -- or so I thought. I got married all right and also found work at the mine, but I had reckoned without the soul-destroying power of alcohol. I came ashore expecting to get one of those homes fit for heroes to live in that we'd heard so much about during the war. I found I had to break the lock off an army barracks gate and live in a squatter's hut.

I began to add gambling to drinking, and oh, the shame of it, often stood on the dog track and watched the bookmaker pocketing the rent which I had taken from my broken-hearted wife. Sometimes my little home would be the scene of violent outbursts; the table would be upended, the windows shattered and crockery broken, as I broke the bounds of common sanity while the demon of drink raged within me. My little daughter

would fly into hiding and my dear wife break her heart, as Satan had his way in my life. Often my brother and I would go out to get drunk together, and frequently we would finish up in a drunken brawl.

Then one Saturday morning I said to my wife, "I'm going out and I won't tell you when I will be back." She answered sadly, "It's no use asking you any more what time you will be in." I commenced to drink at eleven o'clock that Saturday morning in a public house named "The Winter Gardens," in the town of South Shields. It was there that it happened. I had idled the time away until two o'clock. Over on my right, a man was trying to play jazz on the piano; behind me, a couple of drunks were singing out of tune and out of time. In front of me, the barmaids lolled about the counter. Then I looked up at the clock. I noticed that it was an advertisement for Guinness beer. Now and again around the clock would appear the words "Guinness time." I began to think about time. When did it start? When would it end? Then suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, one word thundered into my mind: "Eternity."

I have been in close proximity many times to bursting bombs and exploding shells, but never felt the shock such as I experienced when the searchlight of God's holiness shone into my sin-blackened heart, and into my mind, cobwebbed with evil and dark with nature's Christless night. I stood for a moment, aghast at my own sinfulness as conviction flooded like a tidal wave into my being. I slammed my beer glass down on to the counter, and stumbled out into the cold January afternoon. All the rest of the day I walked blindly through the streets, afraid to cross the road in case I should be knocked down by a vehicle and ushered into the awful presence

of the Almighty Being who was even now dealing with me. Memory after memory crowded into my mind; first, the wan features of my dear wife; then, the tear-stained face of my little daughter; the unpaid bills; the awful wartime experiences; the silent grave of my mother. Then I remembered that, some two years before this, I had gone to take my brother-in-law out on the town only to be told that their drinking days were over. I had asked them the reason for this most unusual decision and was promptly told that they had both been "saved," and that they were attending church. I remembered how I had exploded with laughter and had told them that the next thing that would happen would be their being carried off to the lunatic asylum. Then, vowing that I wanted nothing more to do with their sort of crazy life, I had left their home determined never to return. And now, as I walked the streets and conviction deepened, I remembered how my brother-in-law had been wounded on the shell-torn, corpse-littered beach at Dunkirk, and mentioned in dispatches for his gallantry, and that he had been a drinker like myself; how once he had smashed a beer bottle over another man's head in a public house brawl. Then I remembered the remarkable change that had become evident in his life since he had been, as he said, "saved by Jesus." Suddenly I decided to go to that house again. By now it was eleven at night.

"Jesus Will Change Your Life."

Soon

I reached the bottom of the stairs that led up to my sister's door. A great battle was raging within me. An insistent voice was dictating to my will, "Go home: they'll think you're mad. What will you say to them? You,

Ben Sutton, the boozier, the gambler. No one wants you. Quick, you just have time to catch the last bus home." But another voice, thank God, one that I have learned to recognize and love, was gently, firmly saying, "Come."

I went up the stairs, and knocked. When my brother-in-law came to the door, his face fell. He thought I had come for trouble -- my usual occupation on a Saturday night. I remembered saying something like this, "Can you tell me something about Jesus? He woke everyone in the house, shouting "Hallelujah." And tell me about Jesus he did, till 2:30 in the morning. But I just could not take it in. I just could not grasp what he so earnestly tried to tell me. I shall never forget his face, as he looked at me and said finally, "Look, Ben, every Sunday night the gospel is preached, and tonight (for it was now Sunday) a very sincere servant of God, Mr. Mallen, of Chester-le-Street, will be preaching. Now," he said, "I will guarantee, that if you will come and hear for yourself the preaching of the gospel, Jesus will change your life."

Those words were like a straw held out to a drowning man. "Brother," I said, "I will be there, but I want you to do something for me now. I want you to come home with me and tell my wife what we've been talking about, because she won't believe me."

The taxi drew up outside our front door, and I saw the curtain draw back a little, as it always did when I arrived. I could just imagine my wife getting ready for the usual storm that would awaken the neighbors and start off my little girl screaming with fright.

My brother-in-law and I went into the house and, before my dear wife could open her mouth, I jerked my thumb

at my companion and said, "I've been talking to him about Jesus and tonight I'm going to church." She looked from me to him. "He is drunk," she said, "I know you too well. We will wait and see what you are like after you've slept."

After a few fitful hours of sleep, I rose and dressed. Still the terrible burden of sin weighed on my heart. Then, for the first time in my drunken life, I deliberately refrained from going out for beer on a Sunday morning. Four o'clock in the afternoon came around and I began to dress to go out. Silently, thoughtfully, my wife had been watching me. Then quietly she said, "Where are you going, Ben?" I looked at her anxious face, and said, in words that are now in the everyday vocabulary of our household, "I'm going to the gospel meeting."

As

I walked past the drinking place I knew so well, the time was about ten minutes to six. Another sixty yards and I had reached the most uncomfortable spot of all for the uninitiated---the church door. I glanced quickly up and down the street to make sure no one was watching me. Then, with wildly beating heart, I dove in through the door. My first impression, as I passed into the well-lit hall, was of someone taking hold of my right hand and giving it a hearty shake. Then I found myself sitting very near the front with an unobstructed view of the preacher. Oh, the message of that night! I should think I was the only ex-seaman in the place that night, yet the subject was the storm on Galilee. The speaker told of seamen and their struggles. He spoke of the great storm that raged around that little craft, manned by a handful of helpless seamen. Then he likened that storm to the

storms that go on in the lives of men. All through his discourse, I could see myself, my sin, my helplessness, my need. Then he came to the part where Jesus took command, and stretched forth His hands over the tumult, and said three words, that sped like polished shafts into the storm center of my soul: "Peace, be still." It was no longer the preacher that was speaking. It was the Lord Himself, and oh, the power of those words, "Peace, be still." Oblivious to the faces of those I passed by, I was on my way to the inquiry room. A few words of instructions, and there I was, a big foul-mouthed, drunken, gambling, black-hearted miner, down on my knees at that wonderful place called Calvary. "O God," I cried, "I'm a bad 'un, but take me, and forgive me, and help me, please." I felt the hot tears burning my face. I heard other men praying for me. Then it happened. Suddenly, the burden was lifted. An exhilaration, such as I had never experienced before came flooding into my being. For a moment I felt as if I could touch the ceiling. Then, what joy and peace was mine. One moment I was a helpless, hopeless sinner, bound in the chains of sin. Then Jesus came and I stood up "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

As

I left that night, the world was a new place for me. I felt as if I was walking on air. The stars shone brighter than I had ever seen them shine, even in the tropics. The bus I traveled home on that night seemed no less than a golden chariot to me, and the people in it like angels. I could have kissed the conductor as he came to take my ticket! Once off the bus, I ran up the street to my home. Then, as my wife opened the door for me, I said, "Sarah, I've been saved!" My dear wife looked at me with an

expression of astonishment on her face and replied, "You've been what?" How strange it must have seemed to her to hear her big, clumsy, erstwhile drunken husband, telling her of Jesus and of His power! She heard me in silence for a while, then said, "Ben, I shall watch you and see if that is true." And watch me she did. She saw my former friends come to ask me out to the usual round of senseless pleasure seeking. But again and again she saw the newfound power at work in my life. She heard me say, "The old Ben Sutton is dead now, thanks be to God, and I've got a new life to live to His glory." Soon she knew what a definite and remarkable change had taken place in my life, and one day, to my great joy, she said, "Ben, something has happened to you, and I'm going to find out what it is." That evening I was left in charge of the house to enjoy the happy companionship of my little daughter. Meanwhile, my dear wife had gone to the place where I myself had found the Lord.

It seemed a long, long time before I heard my wife's knock, but when I opened the door, she did not have to tell me what had happened; one look at her face was enough. Her first words were, "Ben, I've been saved." What joy filled our hearts and our little home that evening! We tiptoed into the bedroom, and knelt together by the side of the little cot where slept our little girl. Then, for the first time in our lives, my dear wife and I bowed our heads and prayed together. While we prayed, the tears ran down our faces. But those tears sprang from fountains of joy and thankfulness. I have no words to describe the bliss that overwhelmed our souls that night, as, together, we began to live for the Lord.

And, thank God, as the years roll by, we find the promise of the Lord is wonderfully true when He says, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He not only saves, but keeps.

One day not long after, two workmates were arguing and I heard one of them say, "Let's ask Sutton to settle it. He'll tell the truth." What a wonderful compliment to the power of my Lord. What a change in the life of a sinner when Jesus comes!

Ben

Sutton and his wife Sarah now make their home in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. Brother Sutton's preaching and teaching ministry extends across North America.