

I Love to Tell the Story

A Personal Testimony of Pradesh Shrestha

I had never seriously considered the reality of God nor my lack of relationship and responsibility to Him until September 1983 when I lay seriously ill on a hospital bed in Santa Fe, New Mexico. There, in an isolation room in St. Patrick's Hospital, the doctor told me they had finally diagnosed my illness; the antibiotic I would have to take was known to be potentially lethal for some patients but there was no viable alternative.

I was shocked. I agreed to take the medicine but that night I could not sleep. *Where will I go if I die now?* For the first time in my life, I took an honest look at myself. And when I did so my conscience was troubled, because, whereas I had always perceived myself to be a good person, now I saw myself as one with something fundamentally wrong within. If there is a Heaven and if there is a Hell, I felt I would end up in Hell.

My Religious Background

I was born in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. My parents, specially my mother, had always worshipped idols, observed rituals, fasts and holy days on the Hindu calendar. My mother deeply believed in reincarnation, the Hindu doctrine that the soul is almost endlessly reborn in one body after another. The Hindu concept of salvation is liberation from this supposed chain of rebirths and the sufferings of life. On important religious days, we would go as a family to Nepal's most renowned Hindu shrine, the Temple of Pashupatinath in Kathmandu where we bowed down to idols. As any other Hindu boy I had grown up fascinated with the stories of Rama, the hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, and Krishna, the hero of the other great Hindu epic Mahabharata.

I went to a school in Kathmandu run by Jesuit Catholic priests. There I had some exposure to what I thought was the Christian Religion. But, in fact, we were never explicitly taught any Catholic doctrines nor from the Bible. The only exception I can remember is that we once memorized the Ten Commandments. However, the Second Commandment mentioned in the Bible, namely, the prohibition of idol worship (Exodus 20:4-6; Deuteronomy 5:8-10) was, oddly enough, excluded, thus giving me an impression that Christianity was somewhat like Hinduism. It seemed to me that the Christian idols were the statues of Mary and the crucifix, that every Jesuit wore around the neck, one of which was also hung up in every classroom.



During the nine years of Jesuit schooling, although I was taught morals (for which I'm thankful), I learned nothing about the Person of Jesus Christ -- that He is fully God who came in human flesh 2000 years ago -- and His finished work of substitutionary death on the cross for our sins and His subsequent resurrection from the dead, all in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies which were written centuries before He was born in Bethlehem of Judea in Israel. Thus I reached Class Ten, in

total ignorance of the Bible that contains this wonderful message of salvation. By then my vague and confused personal belief was that all things come by chance via the random process of evolution and that physical death forever ends the existence of a person. I had no idea of my absolute accountability to God nor of the eternal misery that awaited my Christless soul.

I Begin to Realize I Am a Sinner

So as I lay awake late at night on my hospital bed, I found myself without God, without hope, all by myself, filled with memories of my childhood and youth. At school I had been a relatively good student securing desirable grades. I was, I suppose, even liked by most of my peers and teachers. Generally, I felt good about myself that I was not like others who did many unseemly things openly and unashamedly.

But now I saw myself in a different light. Had I not also cheated in exams? Had I not been proud of my so-called achievements and despised my colleagues inwardly? Out of view of my teachers, had I not sometimes been very unkind and dealt selfishly with my friends? I repeatedly lied, coveted, and sometimes stole, too, never hating my wickedness in doing so, but instead making every attempt to hide my sins, fearing I might get caught. Moreover, at home in the family, had I not often grieved my parents with haughty words and stubborn disobedience? Had I not harbored deep ill feelings towards my brother? Countless sins of my youth haunted me. And though I had once worshipped Hindu gods and though I grew up under Jesuit education, I had no knowledge of the True and Living God. Out of desperation I cried, "God, if you are there, don't let me die. I will change my ways." Indeed, before then, I had never thought I was a sinner that needed any change. On the other hand, I did not yet know that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and incurably sick, unable to change and rescue itself from its wretched condition of self-centered, self-deified existence.

Gradually, the medication did its work and I got better. But as I got better, I gave less and less thought to the things my conscience had so keenly felt at the hospital. Few months later someone asked me about my health. I replied thoughtlessly that luck had always favoured me, even in the case of my illness. The person knowingly made a strange remark, "Maybe, it's not luck!"

The Light of the Glorious Gospel



At that time, I was a student at The Armand Hammer United World College of the American

West located in New Mexico. Graduation Day came. It was difficult parting from the dear friends from all over the world. A few of us remained on campus doing summer jobs.

A Jordanian classmate and I shared a room together. I used to receive letters from "Mom", the mother of Shaunna, a student from the Midwest who had once invited a dozen of us international students to her home for Christmas. I liked to write to her also, just commonplace things. She is the one who had commented, "Maybe, it's not luck!"

One day in June that summer, one of Mom's letters arrived. I was reading it aloud to my roommate. A short paragraph in the letter strangely arrested me, and I could not read it aloud anymore for tears welled up in my eyes. This is what was written. She wrote that the previous Sunday they were singing a hymn at church:

*I love to tell the story,
Of unseen things above;
Of Jesus and His Glory,
Of Jesus and His Love!*

No doubt the hymn had been sung many times before. But that day the words stirred her heart. As she sang, she thought of the many foreign students who had crowded her house in winter, who did not know the Saviour she did. And she thought of me. She asked herself, "Do I really love to tell others about the only Saviour there is?" Thus she was moved, she said, to write me and tell me of her certitude that Jesus Christ is the only God and Saviour of man. She added tenderly, that there could be no eternal permanence in her relationship with persons like me apart from their putting their personal faith in Jesus Christ. I was deeply touched though I did not fully understand her words. No one had ever communicated such things in such a manner to me.

Being in close confidence with Annie, a Chinese friend from Hong Kong, I shared the matter with her, copying verbatim the paragraph from Mom's letter. Soon I received a lengthy reply in which she expressed her joy that Shaunna's mother had attempted to share the Gospel with me. She added that she had also wanted to share the same with me before but had felt

unqualified to "preach" the Gospel. Besides, she said, she had feared that if I ever became a Christian it would hinder my relationship with my Hindu family. Now, she wrote, she realized that it was Satan who had convinced her not to share the Gospel with me. In the letter she explained the way of salvation, quoting many verses from the Bible. She said God wants us to become His dear children by trusting Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour because He died for our sins and rose again from the dead on the third day. She wrote how another student, Leroy, had shared that, though parting had been sad and that they may not see each other again, yet, he and Annie and Shaunna would be sure to meet together again in Heaven...

The letter greatly affected me. My initial reaction was, *How dare she seek to convert me, a Hindu? And what audacity to write to me that, of so many of our friends, only she and her two friends would go to Heaven?* But, knowing Annie, I knew she had written these things out of a genuine concern for my own welfare.

I had first recognized and acknowledged my innate sinfulness one year before when I was hospitalized. Now I read in the letter the plain declaration of the Bible, *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). I also read, though I did not right then believe, the wonderful words of the Gospel, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His Only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

My friend explained that God's dear Son, Jesus Christ, suffered and paid for the penalty of our sins by means of His death on the cross, and that if we believe in Jesus Christ we would be saved from the everlasting punishment that we deserve as sinners, quoting from the Bible, *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

Multitude of thoughts carried me late into the night. One Bible verse cited in the letter troubled me most: *"He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and He that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him"* (John 3:36). I had two opposing thoughts warring within me: First, how could the Bible be possibly true when millions in Nepal have never even heard the name of Jesus? Second, if the Bible is in fact true then I must suffer everlasting punishment for my sins. Thus, on the one hand, I did not want to accept the possibility that the Bible may be true; on the other hand, I simply could not shake off the possibility that the Bible, after all, may indeed be true! I just did not have the facts to make an honest judgment let alone "believe" anything.

Suddenly, I was craving for answers to a host of questions. Who is Jesus? Why should I believe in Him? What does it mean to believe in Him? Why should only Christians go to heaven? Why not Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims? Who is Jesus Christ? Is He just a man-made figure, as the demigods in Hindu mythology, or is He a real Person? If what the Bible says is true, I am lost indeed and in danger of eternal damnation. But is it true? How can I know for sure?

I began to ask around with the sincere desire to find out what was the truth concerning Jesus



Christ. But, to my surprise, no one I asked was sure nor did anyone seem concerned. That itself was a revelation for me. I began to realize that the assumption I had always carried with me as a Hindu, namely, that the people in the Western world, including America, are all Christians, was not true. I went to the school library hoping some book would answer my questions. I read an article on religion and philosophy in the Encyclopedia Britannica. I became certain for the first time that Jesus Christ was indeed a real historical Person and not a myth. In one of the dormitory lounges I came across a Bible someone had apparently discarded. I also found in another place a copy of the Gospel of John. I began to read because Annie had advised in the letter to read from the New Testament.

Occasionally, visitors would come for a tour of the campus. I was showing an elderly couple around. They said they were from Las Cruces, New Mexico. After the tour I said goodbye to them a little ways from where their car was parked. They reached the car and the lady called out to me to come over. I walked over to them thinking, *Surely, she wants to give me money.* But she took out and gave me several small booklets that I quickly realized were about God and the Bible! I took them and walked back into a building. My hands were trembling as I opened up the plastic and held in my hands a booklet titled "The Way of Salvation." Now I felt I could not escape God. He seemed to surround me from every side! In less than three weeks, all these things took place: the letter from the Midwest, the letter from Hong Kong, the Bible in the lounge, and now this booklet from someone I had never met and who had no idea what was going on in my heart and mind those very days! But something inside me tried to reason that it was all chance coincidence.

It was about a week later that a classmate came from her home in Las Cruces and invited another friend and me to her house. We both went with her. I took with me the Bible, the booklets and another book which I had begun to read with great interest. I had had this latter book, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell, since the previous Christmas when Shaunna's father had given it to me, but I had forgotten all about it much less bothered to read it. Now I came across it in my belongings and began to read it carefully.

I was amazed when I began to find satisfactory answers, one after another, to my inquiries. In my friend's house in Las Cruces, I would read and think for hours whenever I was alone. I became convinced that the Bible is a historically accurate document however ancient. I now knew that Jesus Christ was crucified on a Roman cross almost 2000 years ago while Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea in Palestine but that Jesus Christ was innocent. I also knew that Jesus Christ had made the unmistakable claim that He was the eternal Son of God; that He became a man to sacrificially give His life as the only sufficient payment for the sins of every individual person of entire human history; that personal, explicit faith in Him is the only hope for a person to be saved from the eternal consequences of sin.

And I was struck by the unique event of history, the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, three days after His death and burial. Mohammed's tomb remains occupied, Confucius did not rise from the dead, Buddha's corporeal remains were distributed. But over

five hundred eye-witnesses saw Jesus Christ, many touched Him and conversed with Him for forty days after His definite death and burial. *Surely, He is not just a moral teacher or religious leader. He is more. If Jesus in no uncertain terms claimed to be equal with God, would not relegating to Him the title of a mere man, no matter how great a man, be tantamount to accusing Him of being a fraud? And surely, no fraud could be rightly called a good man. Therefore, He must be what He claimed to be for who would dare call Jesus a Liar?* The more I read, the more I wondered why anyone would not become a Christian.

My Personal Lord and Saviour

While we were in Las Cruces, I told our host about the elderly couple who had come for a campus tour and how they had said that if I ever came to Las Cruces, I was invited to their ranch for horseback riding. We contacted them and off we went for horseback riding. After the ride, we sat down for some refreshments our hostess had prepared. Before we ate, her husband prayed. I don't remember what exactly he prayed but I shall never forget the scene as he reverently bowed his head to pray.

Back at my friend's house, in my room, I read more. There was a prayer I remember reading written at the back of the book. I could identify myself as a sinner needing Jesus Christ to save me from my sins. I was amazed at the change that had come over me. *How differently I think of God and Jesus Christ and the Bible than I did just few weeks ago.* Every now and then I would try to share a little from my readings to my two friends. One day, they both came over to me. One said something to the effect that I might as well become a Christian now. I don't know if she was joking or not but I replied something like this, "I already believe. You should also believe. All that the Bible says is absolutely true." She asked something about how my Hindu parents would take it. I could not hold my tears for I knew they were lost without Christ.

Sorrowing on the one hand and yet rejoicing with joy unspeakable on the other, that night I wrote to "Mom" and Annie that I had received Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour and Lord. I also wrote to my family in Nepal telling them how wonderful it was to personally know that the Lord Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh to die for the sins of the whole world including me and that He now lives risen from the dead to save to the uttermost all those who come to God by Him! *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man comes unto the Father but by Me"* (John 14:6). Lying on the bed, I found myself talking to my newfound Heavenly Father. It was most natural to do so. I knew He heard me.

From that day on in late July 1984, I have known what it is to be a child of God, what it is to be a sinner save by grace and mercy. *Grace*, because though I deserve nothing, I have all things: forgiveness of sins, adoption into God's family, fellowship with God, everlasting life, inheritance in Heaven that will never fade away and much more! *Mercy*, because though I deserve everlasting punishment, I know He has saved me from the coming judgement wrath of God because when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He actually bore the wrath of God in my stead and for the whole world.

Dear reader, I have found not a religion but a real and blessed relationship with God. May

you, too, consider the Person of Jesus Christ apart from whom there is no other way to get right with God.

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-Living One,
His wounds for me shall plead!*

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me!*

- L.H. Edmunds

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