

Chapter 7

The Drifting Ship Finds a Pilot

I was enjoying the associations I had made at the little church in our neighborhood, but it was a social satisfaction. At the same time there were periods of depression and a heaviness of spirit which I could not understand. With hindsight I recognize these disturbances to have been a turmoil of my soul caused by the convicting of the Holy Spirit and the alteration of my past beliefs. My study of the Word in preparation for my teaching of the Sunday School class was doing the work in me that was finally to bring about my conversion. A long-closed window was being opened in my heart, a long-drawn blind raised. For the Scripture says. "The entrance of His Word gives light." (*Psalm 119:130*)

One day an odd conversation occurred between our pastor, Mr. Shiny Face, and me. The pastor asked about my spiritual progress, and I replied that I was disturbed and in a deep quandary, not knowing in truth what was wrong with me. Mr. Shiny Face turned to the pastor and asked: "Parson, don't you know what ails this woman?" But the minister did not reply. As I walked home through the night, I pondered on the things which troubled me. Not long after this conversation, the momentous day arrived when I received the revelation that calmed my troubled heart and changed the course of my life.

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On a certain Sunday our church was without a minister. Our pastor, along with all the other ministers, was away attending an annual ministerial conference. Although our pastor was away, we still had our regular Sunday School hour. Afterward we gathered in the main auditorium. It was church time, but there was to be no regular service instead different local ministers took their turn in speaking briefly. Later the thought turned to the coming of a new minister for our church after the conference.

There was a considerable divergence of opinion as to the type of minister who would best suit the needs of the church. Some thought the pastor should be one who would be adapted to the older members

of the congregation. Others thought he should be attuned to the thinking of the young people. There were those who felt the new minister should devote his entire time to his calling, and then those who believed a part-time minister was sufficient.

This frank discussion of the qualifications and selection of a pastor horrified me with its seeming lack of reverence for a servant of God. I had been accustomed to having a priest for a minister, one selected and sent to a parish by the Catholic hierarchy. The congregation would accept their choice without question and in the spirit of reverence and obedience. This first experience of a church membership selecting their clergyman according to his characteristics and suitability to their special needs seemed to me as bad as bartering for a worldly possession, hiring a new employee, or voting for a political candidate. It was to be the people's choice, not God's. There was no prayer offered for His guidance in the selection.

As I sat there, greatly agitated and mediating upon the strangeness of the congregation's action, once more I felt the *Hand* upon my shoulder. I heard the Voice of the Almighty sound clearly in my heart, and this is what He said,

“Tell them, it is not a minister they need to seek, they need to seek Me.”

I was frightened, for though I had many times before felt the touch of *His Hand*, I had never previously heard *His Voice*. I trembled with a pounding heart until I thought everyone around me must hear it. I could not rise to my feet. I was filled with a great consternation. But again, insistently, the *Voice* echoed in my heart:

“Tell them, it is not a minister they need to seek, they need to seek Me.”

With renewed fear and terror I clutched tightly to my chair. I was certain everyone had heard what I had heard. Yet I could find neither strength nor courage to obey the command, until for the third time with unmistakable force and authority, the *Voice* rang through my inner being, “TELL THEM!”

Suddenly I found myself on my feet. Though I could scarcely find my voice, I managed to falter,

“He said, it is not a minister you need to seek, you need to seek HIM!”

In a moment, so fraught with the power and omnipotence of God, were the words He had spoken through my unsure throat. Suddenly everyone present found a place at the altar. I had never in the time I had attended this little church seen the altar used in this way. In fact, I knew nothing of the “altar call.” I had never witnessed one. As I recall now, it still seems strange that all of us, every one, should have moved as a single being to the altar – some praying, others singing as God visited His people.

At the altar myself, it was as though I were alone there, unmindful of anyone near me. I was in the grasp of the Holy Spirit, pouring out to Him all the transgressions of my life - my headache, my heartbreak. I didn't know how to ask God to save me. I knew not the words or the way. I didn't ask Him to convert me or to be born again, I only said:

“God, if there is a God, as I have always been taught to believe, and if you could forgive me, if in your great storehouse of mercy you have mercy enough to extend to me, if you could give me peace and the assurance that I will not be sent to Hell, but achieve Heaven, then I will give to you the rest of my life.”

At that instant, something happened in my soul. The burden that was on my heart for years was rolled away and into that heart came a deep, settled peace. The fear of Hell was removed from me and the surety of coming into the atonement of God filled my whole being. That beautiful assurance of meeting God at the end of the road and knowing that Heaven is my eternal home has never left me. I am reminded of the lines of the song:

”At the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the light
and the burden on my heart rolled away. It was there,
by faith, I first saw the light and now I am happy, happy
all the day.”

Note: Patricia Beall Gruits remembers this day clearly. “Mother took Jim and I by the hand and rushed us the two blocks home. We burst into the house and she called

to my dad, "Harry, I'm not going to Hell." Dad responded, "Who said you were?" Mother answered, "I've known it since we have been married."

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The natural thing for one in love to do is to try to express that love in doing things for the object of one's devotion. After I was saved, a great zeal to work for the Lord seemed to possess me and the desire to please Him. At that time, I was not aware that there was any place for a woman in the ministry, but I set out on my own to do everything my hands found to do. I began to give myself to prayer - praying for people who needed the same kind of peace I had needed, telling them how I had met God, and how wonderful He was to deliver me. I set out to work for God and to do everything I could that others might find Him and through Him have peace.

I confess my efforts were blundering and feeble, but I continued to try to keep my word to God who had shown me such merciful favor. I believe the reason so many people do not appreciate God's peace and salvation as they should is because they never fully realized the torment of knowing they were lost and hell bound. I had known I was without hope, and when God in His mercy gave me hope, peace, and the joy of His salvation, nothing in the world could be as wonderful.

The members of my Bible class, with which I continued, realized that something had happened to me. They expressed a desire to have the same experience themselves. Often the teaching in the class would be interrupted while someone inquired about salvation. Some, who had been saved and had already known the Way but had not lived it, were challenged by my experience to begin anew. Our class became alive with knowledge of the Lord and an eagerness to serve Him. Always their testimony was the same. They had been inspired by the change in my own life and ministry. So we continued serving the Lord in ministering to the needs of others, both temporal and spiritual, in accordance with the passage from *James 2:17-18*:

"... Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone. . . Yea, a man may say, thou hath faith, and I have works! Show me your faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."

I love the Lord with all my heart, all my life, and strength. Whatever I have is His. He can place His Hand on me or anything I possess. It is His! When I left the altar that Sunday morning, I did not as always before voyage forth alone. One went with me who guided my every step. I was no longer a ship adrift upon a lost and lonely sea. I had taken on a Pilot - One who had His Hand upon the helm and was directing the ship surely, peacefully into the sheltered waters of a safe harbor.