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The Greatest Experience of My Life

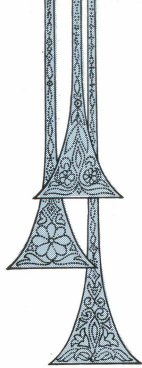
John Allen Chalk

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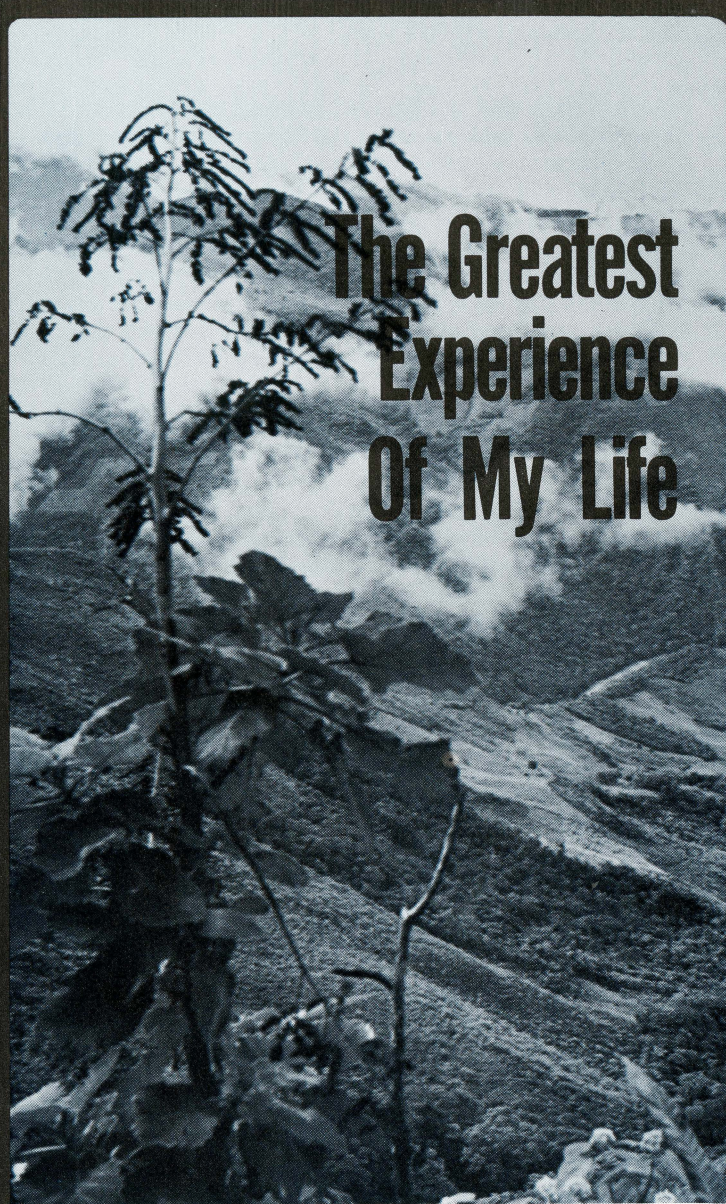
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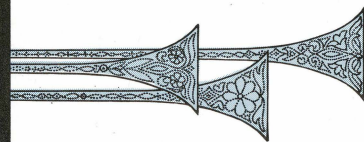
HIGHLAND CHURCH OF CHRIST
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The Greatest
Experience
Of My Life



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The Greatest Experience Of My Life

I have just been thinking about some of the special days and events in my life. What are some of those unforgettable moments in your life? Or, how long has it been since you recalled some of the more important events in your life? Many of us remember college graduation. Others cherish the day of their marriage, and it should be remembered with deep feeling. For parents it is probably the dates our children were born, and for mothers who risked their lives, the actual circumstances of each child's birth. The day that big job offer finally came will not be forgotten by some. And many other situations, peculiar in some strange way to each person listening to this program, will always be remembered.

But to think about these occurrences in our lives is not to come to the real heart of what I want us to consider. What is the one most unforgettable event in your life? The greatest experience of my life came when I finally decided to surrender my life to God, to obey

Christ, and to let the New Testament guide me in my conversion to the Christian life. If you have never experienced what I will describe in the next few minutes from the Bible, I hope that you will either write me immediately following our study or that you will contact the nearest Church of Christ for whatever assistance we can offer in helping you to "the greatest experience in your life."

Becoming a Christian is a radical experience in anyone's life. On one occasion during our Lord's earthly life, a teacher of religion and a leader among the Jews came to Jesus indicating that he believed Him to be "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2). Jesus, sensing this man's sincere concern for God's truth in his life, said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). The footnote in the American Standard Version has Jesus say, "Except one be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Needless to say, the Jewish ruler, Nicodemus, did not understand this "Birth from above," this "new birth," or this "being born again." In fact, he immediately questioned Jesus: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). Jesus then further explained the new birth process in the following words. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew" (John 3:5-7).

When attempting to explain the change that Nicodemus, and a religious man at that, must experience in order to "see the kingdom of God" or "enter into the kingdom of God," Jesus looked around at his natural world and chose the most radical experience of human life — birth of a new human being. This is the moment at which a mother risks her own life and the moment at which the new child must breathe for itself — the crucial moment of life's independent existence. Jesus says to all of us, "Ye must be born anew."

The New Testament repeatedly refers to the Christian in terms of the radical change that occurs at his surrender to Christ. Paul says that the Ephesian Christians "were dead through (their) trespasses and sins" before God "made them alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:1-5). Later, in the same Ephesian Epistle, Paul describes conversion in these terms. ". . . that ye

put away, as concerning your former manner of life, the old man, that waxeth corrupt after the lusts of deceit; and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Before knowing Christ we live under the control of "the old man," the apostle remarks, but in turning to God through Christ we "put on the new man." This "new man" however, is not the result of our own human power but, rather, after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth." The Christian is called "a new creature" in II Corinthians 5:17, and the Roman Epistle describes the converted individual's existence as "the newness of life" (Romans 6:4). To emphasize the radical change that conversion brings into one's life, Paul remarks, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Galatians 6:15). And the footnote to this verse renders "a new creature" as "a new creation." Has the "new creation" by God, available to all men, become a reality in your life? Continue to listen through this lesson as we show how, according to Biblical teaching, this radical change can occur in your life!

But to summarize what I have just shown about conversion and to emphasize what it really means to become a Christian, listen to Paul's personal testimony: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Very significantly the New Testament explains in great detail how one surrenders to Christ. Conversion, therefore, is not an esoteric experience that has neither structure nor conceptual meaning. It must be remembered, however, that the explicit New Testament teaching about how we give ourselves to Christ in no way diminishes the dramatic nature of the change such surrender produces in our lives. We have already emphasized that in our study.

Coming to believe in Jesus as the Christ is no small event in one's life. This is revealed in a study of Romans 10:13-15. "... for, Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher: and how shall they preach, except they be sent? even as it is written,

How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15). Described here is a tough, thorough-going appraisal of the claims of Jesus, faith arises from one's open confrontation of the testimony presented about Him and His saving power. "To call on the Lord" is not to vocalize some unintelligible gibberish, but rather to honestly wrestle with who Jesus was and what Jesus can do in one's life.

The New Testament also records our Lord's demand that all men repent of their sins in order to experience conversion in their lives (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30, 31). Yet, a close study of this concept, as employed throughout the New Testament, brings one to the conclusion that repentance, in the Biblical sense, spells nothing short of revolution. Paul says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (II Corinthians 7:10). This is the change that Peter counseled on the day of the Gospel's first full presentation after Christ's ascension. "Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ," he instructed, "unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). To repent is to make an about-face away from sin to God. To repent is to decisively renounce sin as one's master and to turn to God for direction of every subsequent step.

The New Testament process of conversion also calls for a penitent believer to announce his new faith and declare his allegiance to Christ. Listen to this Biblical instruction: "... because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9, 10). There were Jewish rulers in Jesus' day who "believed on him" but because of fear and pride, the Bible says, "they did not confess it" (John 12:41, 43). To confess Jesus as Lord is to publicly affirm one's faith in Him and to declare before God and man that Jesus will be your Sovereign for all of life's conduct. Such a declaration of allegiance is unparalleled in human life.

This is the point at which the New Testament teaches that one is properly prepared for baptism. Having come to faith which Jesus taught was a prior condition to baptism (Mark 16:16); having begun the revolution of conversion in repentance from all past sins, another prior condition to baptism (Acts 2:38); and

having openly vowed your allegiance to Christ as Lord of your life, just like a man did before he was baptized in Acts 8 (Verses 36-38); one is rightfully and properly, according to Biblical standards, ready for union with Christ in baptism. Baptism brings one into living contact with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, Paul teaches in Romans 6 (Verses 1-7). Baptism unites us with Christ, we learn in Galatians 3. (Verses 26, 27). Baptism is that point at which God reaches into a man's conscience and thoroughly cleanses it (I Peter 3:21). This is the point at which we enter Christ, begin to live the "new life," and take a radically different perspective (Colossians 3:1-4).

The whole point here is that becoming a Christian constitutes a radical experience, "the greatest experience in one's life." This is taught by the language of Jesus and the New Testament writers. It is also the conclusion reached from the study of what one must do, according to Biblical teaching, to fully surrender to God through Christ. I am talking today about "the greatest experience of my life," and about what can be "the greatest experience of your life."

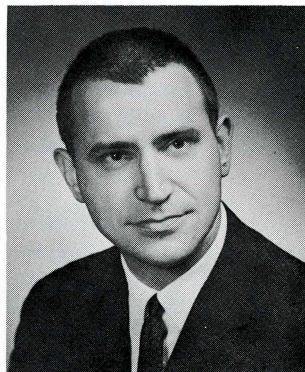
I would plead with every listener to Herald of Truth today, listen to Christ's call. "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). His call is for every burdened man, for every anxious soul, for every distressed heart. "Come . . . and I will give you rest." Not me, not any other man living or dead, but Christ "will give you rest." Isn't that all the more reason why, as I have stressed in this study, that we ought to follow His teachings, that is, if we are to receive and enjoy His rest.

We come to Jesus not only to learn of Him but to experience a completely new life. If I could leave you with only one thought it would be this: "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). No matter how dark, regardless of how much turmoil, in the face of great wrong, when you come to Christ in obedience to New Testament teaching, you become "a new man or woman, boy or girl." Everything is changed, all is forgiven! When we come to full faith, as we repent of all past sins, and upon publicly stating our faith in Him as Christ and Lord, we are "baptized into Christ" and "into his death," we have the assurance that we "also . . . walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3, 4).

We come to Jesus to have all our sins forgiven and removed. Saul the persecutor and troubler of Christ and the Church, heard the God-sent preacher, Ananias, say, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). These are words of promise and hope for all sin-laden men and women today. "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." The words "wash away" are not crude representations from a primitive age. They express the radical change, the immediate release from sin that Jesus brings into an obedient man's life.

We come in full obedience to New Testament teaching to be members of the body of Christ, the Church. How significant and thrilling to know that every time a man or woman surrendered to Christ in New Testament times he or she also, at that point and because of that obedience, became a part of the Church or body of Christ. Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:13).

What I have just discussed with you from God's word is a reality in my life. For many years I tried to know this "new life" and attempted to be this "new man" under my own power and by my own self-improvement. The change that New Testament conversion brings into one's heart and life can only come from God. The only way that power can be unleashed in your life is through your obedience of Biblical teaching. There is no other way for you to be sure that your surrender to God has been accepted. No joy can compare; no peace is similar; and no serenity can be known like that which the Christian knows. Let me close with Paul's sober challenge to you and me: "Try your own selves, whether ye are in the faith; prove your own selves. Or know ye not as to your own selves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed ye be reprobate" (II Corinthians 13:5). Make your "calling" sure this very hour. Follow the clear directions of God's Word into that greatest of all changes, conversion to a living relationship with Jesus Christ.



John Allen Chalk, dynamic evangelist and long-time radio speaker, is the first full-time speaker on the Herald of Truth radio program.

He began his work with the Herald of Truth on January 1, 1966. Previously, Chalk was the featured personality in a 13 week Herald of Truth television series.

A native of Lexington, Tennessee, he began preaching at 15. Chalk and his wife and two children now live in Abilene, Texas where he spends full time working with the Herald of Truth.

He is a graduate of Tennessee Tech and has written a book, "The Praying Christ and Other Sermons" and two tracts. Chalk was nominated for the Outstanding Young Man of Tennessee in 1964 and was named Cookeville's Young Man of the Year in 1963.