

## Grave Matters and the Hope Beyond

I cried until I had no tears left to give. I had fled to a lonely place, my guts twisted, and hardened within me like the knot on an old oak tree. For hours I breathed only in sobs, drowning in my new found hopelessness, and overcome by my shattered innocence.

I was only twelve and I had just lost my very best friend in a car accident. Derek was my first cousin, born exactly one month before me. I had never imagined life without him. That one of us could die had never crossed my mind. I had not yet been battle hardened by life and I was surely ill equipped to handle its finality.

Thankfully, my Mimi gently explained to me that he was in heaven now. Those words brought such comfort; almost as if a dark curtain were rent allowing healing light to stream into my broken heart. Warily I picked myself up. I had to share this news with Derek's mother.

I thought of this the other day when someone mentioned that Brother Paul Baggett would soon be holding a revival in the area. I grinned like an old possum at the mention of his name. Now there's a fellow who understands a thing or two with regards to matters of life and death. I reckon he's preached a thousand funerals. I attended one a while back. Knowing his reputation as a loud and colorful evangelist, I did not know what to expect. However, my reservations quickly dissolved as he very humbly began his eulogy, displaying great reverence for God and respect for the grieving loved ones.

He proceeded to honor my late friend for the wonderful Christian life he had lived and noted the effect that it had made on others. He told first hand stories that caused many heads to nod along. I noticed a few tears.

Then Brother Baggett began to quote the Scriptures. I recall **Revelations 21:4**. (*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*) He also quoted others about Heaven and the wonderful rewards awaiting those who have trusted God's saving grace through faith in Jesus. Soon these powerful truths were illuminating the room. I beheld a wonderful transformation in the people. It was a very familiar one. For it was the same one I had experienced with Mimi so long ago.

As he continued the atmosphere became so charged that the "preach" in Brother Baggett could no longer be suppressed. He began to march back and forth upon the altar rallying the believers to do what they were called to do, believe! His big ole' smile took hold. He painted wonderfully upon the canvas of our hearts with the Words of the Master, and a beautiful picture of Jesus' triumph over death burst forth. I felt as though I should be the first to stand and shout, but somebody beat me to it. I don't know if I've ever had more "Church" than I did that day.

How could there be such great joy in the midst of such loss? Simple, the focus had turned to the big picture, the total victory of the cross. A plea was made for those living apart from Jesus to give their life to Him. Who was I to argue? Funerals practically force us to deal with the fact that we too will one day have to stand before God. Check the records, there's a 100% mortality rate right here in Desoto County!

But anyway, Brother Baggett did a fine job in my estimation. I'm sure my friend would have approved. It was a true celebration of his graduation. Baggett said that if he died before his wife and she got some lame ole' preacher to do his burial that he would kick that casket lid open and preach his own funeral! I partly believe him. It was a bold statement, but after hearing God's Word on the matter, we were all feeling a little bold that day.

–Guy Sheffield 1-23-06