

**Thanks to Keith Tompkins** for inviting me to share with you today.

**Hebrews 10:24&25 says:**

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

**Intro:** I’m going to speak with you today about a subject from scripture that I believe is one of the most fascinating and far reaching and often least understood subjects in scripture. The subject is the Kingdom of God. But before I get into that, I want to share my personal story of how Jesus Christ saved me and changed my life.

**Testimony:** My sophomore year at the U of WI Stout I was just like many other college students... I was focused on partying and school – in that order! My girlfriend at the time whom I’d been dating for 3 years, (she’s now my wife) had become a Christian through CCC. My response to Renee’s new found faith was not enthusiastic. This could end up raining on my party. You see, I was still believing the lie that the “only way to have fun was to do bad things”! Brothers, think about that lie. Isn’t that straight from the pit of Hell. Many of our sons and daughters believe this lie, and some of their lives end up ruined because of it.

I grew up the youngest of 4 children. My parents were religious, attending church every Sunday, my dad throwing a 20 in the plate every week (I noticed). The church we attended was dead and did not emphasize the gospel and/or a relationship with God.

But like most kids before we lose our common sense as adults, I did believe in a personal God and a loving and forgiving God. However, I was completely ignorant of the biblical definition of a Christian, but I truly thought I was one. I thought I was a “pretty good guy” and God generally approved of me, there were a lot of people worse than me on whom God would focus His judgment.

Just like the Ethiopian man in Acts chapter 8, I needed someone like Philip who could explain what the truth of the scriptures say about God and me and salvation. A man by the name of Dave Johnson with Campus Crusade for Christ was my Philip. Dave called me on a Sunday night, told me he’d received my name from my girlfriend Renee. He wanted to meet to talk about an opportunity at Stout having to do with campus ministry. There were many circumstances at the time that led me to say yes to Dave. I don’t want to take the time to share all of it, but suffice it to say that God had me in a very open minded and needy place at the time. Well, I met with Dave Johnson in the student union at Stout and this is basically what he shared with me from scripture:

- 1) God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life (John 3:16, 10:10)
- 2) Because of sin, we are all separated from God, if we die in our sin we have no hope for eternal life (Romans 3:23, 6:23)

- 3) Jesus Christ died for you and for the whole world (John 3:16 and all of scripture)
- 4) It's not enough just to know these things intellectually. This revelation from God requires a response of faith. Either you believe and repent of your sins (accept Jesus Christ and His teachings), or you go it alone - your own independent way. (Romans 10, John 1-3)

Dave then asked me if I had ever made a decision to believe in Jesus? Out of pride I lied and told him "YES"... I've trusted in Christ!"

Right after our meeting however, I rushed home to my dorm room. By God's providence no one was there, I crawled up in my lofted bed, went through the gospel information that Dave gave to me again, and prayed a prayer of confession, repentance and salvation. "Jesus, if all this is true please save me from my sins and come into my life, change me into what you want me to be."

Let the adventure begin... in the words of Jesus I had now crossed over from death to life, entering into a new Kingdom, my eternal life had begun right then and there almost 30 years ago when I was 20!

The first scripture verse I learned was 2 Cor: 5:17. "Therefore if any man is in Christ he is a new creation, the old is gone, behold new things have come." But the Christian life is not easy. I absolutely loved my new found relationship with God, but it was super hard at school with my partying friends. I found myself alone many evenings when friends were out. I was depressed. But I couldn't go back. As the bible says in Col 3, "my life was now hidden with Christ in God"! Do you ever feel that way brothers? Sometimes you have to remove yourself from "the group" to be faithful to your Father.

Literally the next week, Dave returned and began discipling me. I became the "founding member" of CCC at Stout. We approached people in the student union to share Christ. Surprisingly, something like 1 out of 6 or 7 were just bored enough with homework or whatever to listen. That was exciting. We shared with many people and prayed with a few. Dave guided me through Cru's discipling materials. I attended weekend conferences, spring break conference and eventually went away for the whole summer on a summer project. Cru offered me an absolute greenhouse environment to grow rapidly in my knowledge and more importantly application of God's word. God was establishing a rock hard foundation for me in His word through this ministry. I still feel so blessed to have had that experience.

There's a handful of truths that began guiding my life then, and these same truths guide me to this day.

- 1) Truth #1: The only way you can really live for Jesus Christ, and do anything that matters to Him, is to live under the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit. You know - that part of the Trinity that many churches

completely ignore. Jesus said: "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I don't leave, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you... He will guide you into all the truth... He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16).

Without the Spirit of God there is no reality of living with and in Christ from day to day. Our faith will wither, we will be impotent for the Kingdom, and the enemy will neutralize us or flat out triumph over us up in this life. But as it says in 2 Cor. Ch 3 "where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom." Freedom from sin and its consequences, freedom from the fear of man or any loss in this life, freedom from confusion, freedom to have a sound mind in Christ, freedom to enjoy the love and gentle care of the Father in heaven, freedom from anxiety and stress brought on by the trouble Jesus told us we would have in this world, freedom to have a good night's sleep. I learned from Cru the importance of relying on the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit. Brothers, I don't claim to always be filled with the Holy Spirit, but this I do claim, He is a gentle guide and a Counselor who is patient with me and always ends up bringing me back to my spiritual senses when I drift at times.

- 2) How to share my faith. This has been so significant to me and others over the years! Anyone in a real relationship with God can share their faith. I know that *some* are gifted with evangelistic gifts, but *all* believers can share the essentials of the Gospel from scripture. And the less polished the better! Paul said, in 1 Cor. Ch 2 "I came to you in weakness and fear and trembling, not with persuasive words, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Sharing your faith has to have at its core a reliance on the Holy Spirit to do the work that only He can do.
- 3) The third most important thing I've learned is to "live with eternity in mind". To have a "top of mind eternal perspective" Brothers, we have one life to live, we better choose wisely to live it for God! Psalms ch 39 says "Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere breadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure.

Why would David pray "SHOW me Lord how fleeting his life is, that his days are a mere breadth". I believe for two reasons: 1) To make the most of his short life for God; 2) To be reminded that this life is about God, not about David

What is the greatest sermon ever preached in the history of man? It is without question or debate the Sermon on the Mount. Found in three of the Gospel books, the sermon on the mount explains God's will for his Children in His Kingdom.

The scriptures teach that the Kingdom of God is here, but it is not yet in full affect. "The Kingdom is NOW but not yet!" Jesus acknowledged this truth directly in the Lord's prayer "your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven". What does that mean, except that Jesus was telling us to pray that God will and His ways in heaven would be in effect and operation right here on earth. Even though this world we live in is broken and messed up world, God's will can reign through believers. Christians (which literally actually means "little Christs") would expand God's Kingdom during there time on this earth, however much time we have, none of us knowing how much.

Lord, teach us to number our days and use our time and resources wisely for your Kingdom! This isn't always easy because we can't actually see God's Kingdom. We have to place our faith in His words that His Kingdom does exist. CS Lewis wrote something that I find helpful... "the unseen world is actually more real then what is seen; because the unseen world is eternal, and what we see here on earth is only temporary". Is that not a wise and truthful perspective? CS Lewis also wrote, "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians largely ceased to think of the other world (the Kingdom of God) that they have become so ineffective in this". The saying that "you're so heavenly minded that your of no earthly good" is patently wrong! Brothers, we need to think more of the Kingdom of God right here and now, not less.

I'd like to share one other powerful teaching with you on the Kingdom of God from Luke Ch 12: 16-20). Please listen closely as I read this parable. Jesus said... The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and bild bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God"

Brothers, this man was so focused on his temporary riches that he completely missed the reality of God and His Kingdom. He was either unaware or he did not care that God does in fact keep an account of man on this earth. The last sentence states, "this is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God". How can anyone be rich toward God, except by loving Jesus Christ and doing His will on this earth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And now the hard part of my talk. Keith mentioned in the intro that I have 4 children and that one of them (Nicolas) is in heaven. On July 25 of 2011, my wife Renee, my three children, and myself met at an accident scene where my 21 year old son Nicolas lost this life. Nicolas pulled out in front of a pick up truck and

was hit broad side at high speed, killed instantly. No one else was hurt, not a scratch. Even our little dog Lucy in Nicolas car at the time was unharmed having been ejected from the car. Every parent's fear had happened to us. It's not right, children should always outlive their parents! But because of Satan, sin and this broken world things often don't work right in this world. Jesus words are true when He said, "in this world you will have trouble". This was more trouble then my wife and I could ever have imagined would happen to us!

In a room this size, there are many here who have suffered the loss of loved ones. Isn't death just awful?! An acquaintance of mine just lost his 20 year old daughter to suicide. Praise God that she was a believer in Jesus Christ. Yes, it is true that some who commit suicide will be in heaven. There is only one reason why people don't make it to heaven and that is rejection of the one and only Son of God and Savior Jesus Christ. Pain and agony and brokenness that leads some to commit suicide does not nullify the costly price Jesus paid on the cross for those who believe.

Brothers, I absolutely hate the fact that my son died. I'm not bitter, but I do hate death. I've come to understand from scripture that God hates the pain and the death that we experience here on this earth. That's right... God hates death! In 1 Cor. Ch 15 The bible says "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Right there it is, God calls death "the last enemy"! God hates death so much that He abolished it, he destroyed it (abolished death once and for all) through the sacrificial death of His very own Son. 2 Timothy ch 1 says that Jesus Christ "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." He did this for you, He did this for me, He did this for my son Nicolas because He and the Father love us all so much. My families' hearts are broken over the loss of our son Nicolas. We're filled up with tears and sorrow and we have a long road ahead as we continue to grieve and adjust to our lives without our precious son Nicolas. My wife Renee and I can say by experience that there is no human being on this planet capable of relieving the sorrow from this kind of loss. But God understands and has truly sympathized with us in our sorrow. Isaiah 53 says that Jesus is acquainted with sorrow, a man of grief and suffering. It even says he took our sorrow and grief upon Himself. In a way that I can't even put into words Jesus is doing that for Renee and I. He understands and He and the Father gently provide for those who suffer. We would give almost anything to have Nicolas back with us. But we also realize that if he were given the chance, he would not return to us from His heavenly home! It's so good to have this knowledge from the Bible, this assurance from the Holy Spirit. I realized 2 weeks into our loss of Nicolas that the worst two weeks of my life had been the best 2 weeks for my son!

I want to read to you something beautiful that Nicolas wrote about a month before he went to heaven. He was struggling with life, with disappointments, with depression, etc. I don't have time to get into his full story, but Nicolas had many physical challenges, which produced both physical and emotional suffering

throughout all of his life. But he was also highly gifted. He had a very intimate relationship with God and he lived passionately for God. He was the best listener and counselor ever, and also a great communicator. He is writing here, probably 2-3 weeks before his death while in the throws of depression, about his life being a garden in Zion. Zion is a term used to describe God's Kingdom, often used in reference to God's Heavenly Kingdom. Here's what Nicolas wrote.

*It's taken awhile, but I think I'm finally beginning to see my first tree come up from that endless garden. How foolish to think that my lowly plot had already produced many trees... Oh how everyday life often compares to the spiritual, though the fact is it takes trees many years of care and growing before it even looks like a tree, much less produces fruit! But I rejoice that my little tree has popped out of the ground with deep roots attached. I suspect we never truly live to see it produce any fruit, for often times our little tree goes unnoticed until it's crushed. But I don't care because my little tree was planted in another garden as well, and her name is Zion (heaven). Her gardener is gentle, patient, and so much more!*

*But there is one that saves me. I see it in my earthly tree and HE offers me more comfort and hope than anything. Jesus! For it is only by His faithfulness that I can and will hear the words "well done good and faithful servant". I don't want to win this race for prizes or blessing, I want to win it simply because I want to hear you say the words to me... ("well done good and faithful servant"). So you see, the fact that I've caught a glimpse of those words being spoken to me could mean only one thing. I am saved because God is faithful!*

And that in the end is of greatest important. "I am saved because God is faithful".

I'd like to end with a quick story. Flying upside down. A story of a fighter pilot on a night training exercise who unknowingly was flying the plane upside down. The plane was flying at low altitude. Unaware that she was flying upside down, she pulled up on the stick thinking she would fly skyward. Instead of course, the plane went straight into the ground in a fiery crash.

People all around us are flying upside down in this life - on the brink of ruin. All of us before learning the truth in scripture about God and His salvation were doing the same thing - we were flying upside down on the brink of disaster. There's a Psalm that says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is destruction". Every person on this planet is one heartbeat away from their eternal home, which is either destruction alone in hell, or paradise in heaven with the Father, Son, the Holy Spirit and all the saints who have died in Christ. It's our commission through Jesus Christ to get others right side up in this life so they can be saved for all eternity.

Thanks, closing prayer.