

Free At Last

As I sit to write this story, the tears flow at once, full of joy and full of pain. I do so look forward to the time when every tear shall be wiped from our eyes, but until then His grace alone is sufficient for me.

It's not a happy tale but one of deep sorrow, of a girl of nine raised in a home to parents who had no idea what a "good" family looked like. My earliest memories were happy and fun, of sunny days spent at the beach in Bermuda; of very well-meaning and kinder than average Christians taking me to church. It was in that setting that I first heard about God, and the idea that he was good seemed perfectly natural. As I grew older I learned other ideas like omnipotence and sovereignty, other such very noble thoughts. And filled with high ideals and lofty principles, took on life with vigor. The possibilities seemed endless to a very fine scholar like me. At least that was what everybody told me.

What people did not know was that, at home, life was becoming unbearable for a girl of ten. My parents' fights had escalated to physical ones, and the violence and bloodiness of the nights in my home were constantly filling my mind during the day—so much that I thought of little else. My mother depended on me to take care of my three sisters and one brother so that she could work. My father was rarely at home. So you see, there was no way I could fall apart. If I did, what would happen to us? I tried to do the right things, as I understood them from church.

BUT WHERE WAS THIS LOVING, OMNIPOTENT, SOVEREIGN GOD ANYWAY?

Well, we moved. I had been accepted into one of the finest schools on the island and still nobody knew about my life at home. My family moved to a new home and I thought, "Great." A new start, all would be well. The violence had stopped, and things seemed to improve. I breathed out for the first time in years.

And then my life changed unalterably. One night the door opened; it was a familiar voice. "Come in and talk to me," the voice said.

"Where is my mother," I asked.

"At work," the voice replied.

I went into the room and the Terri who came out I did not recognize. It was the first of what would become a regular horror filled with the sort of fear that freezes you forever.

I looked for help. Nobody thought that I was important enough to disrupt their life, especially the good people at church, since I was such a troubled kid.

I left home. I met bad company, the only company around on the streets.

WHERE WAS THIS LOVING, OMNIPOTENT AND SOVEREIGN GOD?

And why would he play this sick joke on an eleven-year-old? What had I done to deserve such a thing?

Eventually I grew tired of the street life of escaping. I found a job, and because of my education realized I could do very well at business. There were endless opportunities and nobody seemed to really care about my past. They just wanted me to do a good job and I just wanted to make enough money so that I would never have to be unsafe again. So I worked like a dog, did well in my career and was rewarded with the money and excitement I needed. But that feeling inside of utter loneliness and the terror of intimate discovery was gnawing away at me.

Again it happened. Great life on the outside, terrified on the inside. MONEY AND SUCCESS DID NOT DO IT.

At age 25 I was married. Again it happened. Great life on the outside, terrified on the inside. FAMILY DID NOT DO IT.

I think we were both the privately desperate yuppie couple. We began to attend a church where the Sunday school teacher (David N., a former friend and student of Martyn Lloyd-Jones) was teaching from the book of Romans. By the time he reached chapter eight, the Lord opened my eyes and I came to see that God was God, even if I didn't like him, and that the wages of sin is death.

I was not a victim in this scenario but an offender. You see, I never wanted God to control me; and that horrible childhood of mine provided me with all the ammunition I needed not to obey him. It seemed completely unreasonable of Him to expect me to love him with all my heart mind and soul. After all, look what he put me through.

The ability to love Jesus was God's gift through faith to me, most definitely not born of my desire, as I was His bona fide enemy, but most graciously given. I deserved death. He gave me the ability to know love and share that love where I previously knew none.

This was the beginning of healing and hope and sorrow for the severe pride problem which God must deal with continually in me.

You see, what I did not tell you was that I was one of the most secretly prideful children you could have met. Good in every way—after all that's what most everyone

told me. I thought I could do no wrong. On top of that, I thought I knew everything. I would not have said that at the time, but I thought Christians were dumb, believing in things they did not understand, using God as a crutch. It is not that my accusations were without merit, but upon self-examination, I began to think that I was in charge of my destiny and would not stoop to God's demand for the worship due him from my life, even in trauma. I was as a brute beast before him.

In his mercy he brought me to the end of self, completely hopeless and broken, seeing my condition before Him, a holy God who alone is worthy of the worship of my life. I know that hymn and what it means, "nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling." My chains fell off, my heart was free, free to enjoy God and his world.

Do I still feel pain? Yes. Do I remember the abuse? Yes, everything; but God who is rich in mercy works all things together for good to them that are called according to His purpose.

I now work in a Christian hotel listening for people who have come to the end of themselves, who need to hear that voice of Jesus telling them: *"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me for my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*