

Sam

I can still hear my friend, Sam, sitting up and crying out “Jesus!” “Jesus!” as for the first time he believed in that Wonderful name. Falling back on his death bed and closing his eyes he repeatedly mumbled “peace! peace!”.

We had met Sam and his family through business matters more than fifteen years earlier. Our teenage boys were my primary helpers on the room addition we did for him at that time. Sam and Helen made those days working in their home a wonderful experience, both for them and for us. We realized immediately that they were two remarkable characters.

Sam was one of those unforgettable people that was always the “life of the party” in any situation. Whenever he was in a group his authoritative voice and intriguing demeanor always found him at the center of what was being said and done. He had played for the St. Louis Cardinals farm team and thereafter lived an intense life in his job and in caring for his children. It was evident there was much care for one another in the home; and we laughed hilariously often at his humorous and self-deprecating stories and conversations with Helen. Even when it seemed he was upset it was evident he was just squeezing the fun out of every living moment.

Nevertheless, through over fifteen years of occasional contact, he never showed any serious interest in things about God. Then, one day his cancer came back with a vengeance and he suddenly was face to face with the end of his days. Fun and the “tough guy image of a real man’s man” didn’t matter any more. Fear began to possess him as he reflected on his life, not knowing what would happen to him “on the other side”.

At that point Sam and Helen wanted Christine and me to visit their home. As we entered, I can still hear his voice, filled with fear, yelling out to his wife “Get my anxious pills! Get my anxious pills!” He was so driven by terror of the unknown and of the consequences of the life he had lived that he was filled with anxiety, even as the cancer was spreading through his body. Without taking pills for anxiety it seemed he would mentally explode. The tough guy, the proud face was disappearing. A new horizon was appearing, and he was less afraid of what others would think of him if he asked questions about God and the Bible. In his living room that day he asked me to tell him about eternal things from the Bible.

As visits continued in his home, he worsened in health, but increased in spiritual hunger. When he was finally taken to hospice for his last days of physical care, our conversations continued. It was an incredible moment when he cried out to Jesus. His sense of being near death was so strong that he forgot the room was filled with his family. After he called on the name of the Lord, the sense of peace was incredible. In his entire life he had never known peace.

After that glorious moment of discovery, he confessed to me an amazing thing. Sam said, “Richard, tell my family what has happened. I am over seventy years old and I have wasted my entire life. Please tell them so they won’t waste their lives too.”

His family asked me to take care of his funeral service and I had opportunity to share with the attendants about Sam’s life and decision. Both his daughter and his daughter-in-law wrote a letter to me soon after. It was so precious that each of them especially expressed thankfulness that their Sam had found peace.

Peace can be just a word that passes easily over our lips. But, when I saw a life of fear exchanged gloriously for mere hours of peace, the impact on everyone was tremendous. Most of all, I rejoice yet today that my friend Sam became my brother Sam when he called on the name of Jesus. It was evident he had met Jesus Christ, the one who is the Prince of Peace.

