

Big Dad At Rest
A Tribute To Bruce Keyser
By: Keith Keyser

My father wanted me to speak at his funeral, but I told him that I am simply not emotionally strong enough to fulfil this request. So with love and respect for my father, I would like to say a few things in print, & rely on my good friend and brother in the Lord Larry Price to read them for me.

First, as a family, the Keyzers would like to thank each of you for coming and supporting us as we grieve. Those who are helping us in many ways - large and small - are too many for us to enumerate. Nevertheless, special mention must go to Nate & Heather Wilcha for their faithful care and service towards my parents. Their kindness is a practical demonstration of the love of Christ, and we appreciate them opening their home when ours was unsuitable to accommodate my father's special needs. We also want to thank the believers gathered in the Lord's name at Grace Gospel Chapel for their continued prayers and support during my father's long illness & the trials that accompanied it. We are also grateful to our extended spiritual family of Christians in many places who have prayed and expressed their sympathy - and are even now - praying for us.

Often times when someone dies the thoughts of people become theologically fuzzy. Many eulogies are guilty of indulging in wishful thinking or mere human sentimentality. Obviously people want to think of their loved ones as being in a better place, but what confidence can we put in such notions? A classic hymn was running through my mother's mind during the last few days of Dad's life: "When we all get to heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be/when we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory." The problem is: We're not all going to heaven. Wishing that our loved ones are there or that we will one day go there, doesn't ensure a place in the presence of the Holy God.

Of course, the Bible teaches that the Lord wants everyone to go to heaven: He "...desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4.) Nonetheless, salvation from hell and God's righteous judgment against our sin is only to be found in the One Mediator between God & Man, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5.) Apart from personally receiving Christ as Lord and Savior one is doomed to a lost eternity in the Lake of fire.

Keeping in mind these biblical facts, I can say on the authority of God's Word, the Bible, that my father is in heaven with the Lord. One night in approximately the year 1948 an old man came to preach at an assembly of Christians in Pottstown. Many of the regulars of that congregation considered this speaker to be rather dry or boring. Nevertheless, as this man, Mr. Mills preached the Word of God Bruce was convicted of his sin & of his need for a Savior. He saw that Jesus

Christ died on the cross to pay for his sins & to purchase him out of sin's slave market to be a servant & son of God. By faith, he received Christ as his Lord & Savior, and began a spiritual journey that culminated in his going home to be with the Lord this past Sunday night.

The Christian Gospel offers a relationship between God & human beings. The Lord Jesus defined eternal life in this way: "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3.) The account of Abraham & Isaac on Mt. Moriah is one of the most beautiful Old Testament stories foreshadowing the unparalleled sacrifice of the cross. Like my father & I, this father & son had a close relationship. But their bond was even closer, for Isaac was the son that God miraculously gave to the aged Patriarch when he was beyond the normal age for fathering a child. His wife, Sarah had always been infertile, & she was now also past the age where one could conceive & bear a child. These scientific facts notwithstanding, Almighty God gave them this special son, Isaac, whose very name means "laughter." What joy he brought to their lives!

It is well known that my father & I shared a prodigious sense of humor that always seemed to find the hilarious aspects of even the mundane things in life. We had many stock phrases that brought to mind inside jokes between us. Certain classic songs never failed to bring smiles to our faces; I'll never hear about a boll weevil without hearing him sing: "Looking for a home/just lookin' for a home." No one ever approached the eviction of a flying squirrel from his dining room with greater gusto than my dad; wielding a dirty work broom on mom's beloved lite blue carpet. (The spectacle reduced me to tears & convulsions of uncontrolled laughter!) When it came to hunting, he never let me forget bagging my first tree (I missed the deer, but took a nice gash out of a small tree ten feet in front of me! He photoed me with my quarry.) To make matters worse, he had a knack for hanging out in the heated truck, while I froze in the forest. He would nap, eat, nap some more; then come out & shoot a deer, gut it, drag it, & nap again. Brian & I can share many stories about our adventures with Big Dad in the mountains of Potter County.

Like Abraham & Isaac of old, our special friendship was a gift from the Lord. Many times people imagine that God is austere or harsh - a sort of cosmic kill-joy. But that could not be farther from the truth. God is the giver of every good & perfect gift, especially the gift of His Son. He wants us to have joy. The things of this world that we imagine will bring us joy so often disappoint us. That is because joy is only to be found in a relationship with God Himself. As Psalm 16:11 reminds us: "In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Big Dad & I were able to enjoy one another's company so much because we shared the joy of the Lord in common. As two born again, children of God we could appreciate God's goodness in the pleasurable times of life, as well as in its moments of sorrow.

Returning to the story of Abraham & Isaac, Genesis 22 tells the tale of how God demanded that the former offer Isaac in sacrifice to Him. By this time the promised son was at least in his late

teens, & could have easily overcome his father & thwarted the offering. The recurring theme of the passage, however, is that “the two of them went together” (vs. 6, 8.) No word of complaint is heard from Isaac as Abraham bound him to the altar. The silence was only broken by God calling out from heaven to stop the father from striking his son with a mortal blow. A ram was offered up instead of Isaac, & the father & son were able to resume their lives, having passed the test successfully.

More than two thousand years later, another Father & Son came to that same place. They came with the unwavering resolution to open a way for sinners to be saved from wrath & bondage, & to open the way for them to have a relationship with God the Father. In order to do this, the Father would strike the Son with the blow that our sins deserved. In my dad’s last moments in this life, I reminded him of the Son’s words to a condemned thief who was hanging on the cross next to him. The Lord Jesus said to him: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43.) Moments later my father breathed his last, stepping out into eternity, & into the presence of the Lord, for believers have confidence through Christ to be able to say: “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8.)

The wonder of this Gospel is that the Father voluntarily offered up His Son to death, & the Son likewise willingly gave His life as “a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45.) As strong & as brave as my father was, he would - quite reasonably - have rather avoided his sickness & death. Yet the Son of God came to earth for the express purpose of dying for our sins, so that we might be freed from their penalty & power forever. What is more, because Christ rose from the dead in triumph, the power of His resurrection will one day raise believers’ bodies to live with God in glorious forms that will never know pain, corruption, or decay. My father will rise again, because Christ has risen. Because the Lord lives, he will live also.

I am so thankful to the Lord that He gave me a father who loved our family sacrificially - one who was faithful to us in the good & bad times of life. But above all, one who preached the gospel to us, exhorted us to follow the Lord, & always reminded us that serving God is the chief thing. In my early teens he challenged me to give my mind to the study of Christian biography & the Scriptures (as opposed to more trivial areas of knowledge like popular culture, which had been claiming my attention.) He was a man of his word and one whose integrity permeated his business and personal lives. He has gone before us, but I know that I will see him again, for the Scripture promises that “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thes. 4:16.) Farewell, Big Dad, you have entered into your rest in the Lord Jesus.