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Abundant Life

"I have come that they may have life . . . abundantly"

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Baptizing Sara

By Mark Roberts, editor • robertsmark@sbcglobal.net

"I want to go to heaven. I need to be baptized because I want to go to heaven." The words instantly arrested my attention. They expressed in short and succinct fashion much of the essence of Christianity. But more than anything, those words grabbed me because they were spoken to me by my daughter, Sara.

On July 14, 2004 I baptized Sara Anne Roberts into Christ Jesus. It is the second time that I have been in the waters of baptism with a child of mine, and of course, will be the last time such happens. Every baptism is unique and marvelous, but there is something truly remarkable at seeing one that you have given physical life to receive the greatest gift of all, spiritual life. It was an amazing evening that Sara and Dena and I will never, ever forget. As I look back on that night a couple of things stand out from that wonderful moment.

Heaven is the greatest motivator of all. July 14 found our entire family at Florida College summer camp. Becca was working in the kitchen during junior camp, Sara was a camper, and Dena and I were counselors. It was Wednesday night and I was asked to speak to the campers in the devotional service. What do you talk to 185 kids about that will hold their attention and motivate them to serve Christ? I just couldn't think of anything better than heaven. So I spent some time pointing out what the Bible tells us about the greatness and wonder and glories of our eternal home because sometimes we forget just how great heaven really is. In truth, much of what the world says about heaven and how the world characterizes it is not very appealing. Who wants to float on a cloud and play a harp forever? But the Bible's grand pictures of heaven not only destroy such falsehoods about our eternal home, they are anything but dull, drab or dreary. When we see heaven as it is portrayed in Scripture it motivates us to do everything possible to be sure and be there. That is why those verses are given to us!

When good and honest hearts hear about heaven they will say, like Sara, "I want to go there." That is not, as they say "rocket science," but sometimes we forget it. Sara's baptism reminded me afresh of the power of heaven to draw us to the Lord.

Christianity makes one part of a big family. I really appreciate the way baptisms are handled at camp. To avoid any kind of *en masse* emotional response baptisms are taken very seriously and made a private affair. No child is baptized without parents being called first. A child can take some friends down to the river to witness the baptism, but not non-Christians and only a few friends at that. There's no rush of the entire camp down to the river where some attention-starved kid might decide to get baptized just for the attention or because everyone else was doing it. Most kids have no idea a camper was baptized. It is not even announced until Saturday morning when everyone is going home.

So there we were, standing on the beach of a winding river – my family and a few friends. I'm counting those friends now and thinking of them and most of them were people Sara really didn't know very long at all. They were just people, some young and some not so young, that had made a mark on Sara's heart by living as disciples of Christ. Some of them she had known for only four days, but they were terribly important to her and she asked them to come see her do the most important thing any human can do. Peter talks about people of "like precious faith" and underscores that bond that makes us one in Christ. Do you know what that is about? Isn't it neat how with fellow Christians you can be with them for only a few minutes and feel close to them and like you've known them forever? We share the most important thing and the most important bond, so everything else just naturally follows. Being a Christian makes one part of family that stretches around the globe and one day will be permanently united with the Father never to be separated

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Instrumental Music . . . Again

By Mark Roberts • robertsmark@sbcglobal.net

I remember growing up and listening to sermons on why we don't have a piano, and how the silence of the Bible doesn't authorize anything, and why "sing" in Ephesians 5:19 means exactly what it says and no more. During those lessons I wondered "Everyone knows this! We all know better than to roll a piano into church!" Yet our lack of instrumental music in worship persists in being one of the most visible issues separating us from the denominational world and as such it is continually under attack. Don't believe me? Witness the "Ministry Impact '04 Together" Conference.

The Ministry Impact 04 Together Conference is an event with speakers and members from the Independent Christian Church (ICC) and churches of Christ coming together to talk about "sharpening leadership skills" and "empowering your church for evangelistic growth." It will be held in October at Crossroads Christian church in Grand Prairie, Texas. Lynn Anderson, the conference facilitator, says in a letter about the conference that it will help people from the ICC and churches of Christ "(1) regard each other as brothers in Christ and (2) join hands to plant churches . . . we will consider how we may work together to follow the great commission and to encourage the unity Jesus prayed for." He acknowledges the differences between non-instrumental folks and the ICC but says "I am convinced that the time has come for us to once again begin working side by side in the spirit of unity and bond of peace. We may never be in full agreement. And may never be one organization. But we can reach . . ."

So much here is found wanting. For example, Lynn Anderson is concerned that we "regard each other as brothers in Christ." Is that a real issue? Who is it that is denying that folks who were taught the Gospel correctly, believed in Jesus and confessed Him, repented of sin and were baptized for the remission of those sins according to the New Testament are not brethren? Now, if someone becomes part of a church practicing error (say, for example, in how it worships) then he is a brother *in error*. But he is a brother. I suspect that what Anderson really means is he hopes the Conference will lead people to "regard each other as brothers in Christ **fully and without any reservation like 'brother in error.'**"

Further, I'm concerned about this "join hands to plant churches." I read as much about churches joining

together evangelistically in the New Testament as I do instrumental music in worship: nothing. Churches in the New Testament sent directly to an evangelist (Phil 4:14-16) but there is no account of any kind of church network coming together to plant churches. This sounds like some sort of oversight group or board is going to be created to determine where churches are needed and then tap churches for funds and manpower to get a work going in such places. In the New Testament local churches operated under elders that shepherded that flock and no other (1 Peter 5:2). Mainstream churches of Christ have not respected that principle nor local autonomy for a long time so now we have some sort of supra-church organization being formed. It will consist not only of congregation of churches of Christ but even with the ICC, a religious group that teaches error on worship. Further, is anyone else wondering what name these planted churches will use and whether they will have pianos or not?

What is clear is that this Conference cannot be something God approves of because Anderson specifically states "we may never be one organization." What? Didn't Paul say we are not to be dividing up into differing groups but instead ought to be of one mind (1 Cor. 1:10)? Doesn't Ephesians 4:4 teach there should be one church, not two? How then can these folks get together to talk about everything but what is dividing them? Doesn't it bother them that we are not one organization? It bothers Christ! Then why won't anyone study these issues and strive for true biblical unity? Yet instead of dealing with the issue of instrumental music these folks have elected to do nothing about it except totally ignore it. How can that possibly be helpful or pleasing to God?

A final note: the Conference brochure and letter I received pointed me to a website for more information (www.BluePrintTour.org). There I found the Conference promoted under the banner of "**Blueprint for the Future of the Church.**" That may sound bold, but I'm convinced it is not false advertising. In mainstream churches of Christ many are at work to gloss over the instrumental music issue and even cause it to be commonly accepted by Christians. Some mainstream churches of Christ are already using instruments in some services. Now we know why we need to keep hearing sermons on Bible authority, the silence of the Scripture, the pattern for worship and why instrumental music is unacceptable to the Lord. The future some plan for churches of Christ is very different from the future the Head of the church is interested in. So we must constantly work and teach so that we can be true to His vision for His people. †

A Letter to a Son Going to College

By Rusty Miller • mil1341@dellepro.com

My son,

As you prepare to go away to college, I thought I should warn you about some things the devil will use to attack you. Please do not think this is all he will do (remember 1 Pet. 5:8), but I believe there are three areas in which he will attack with the most effort, and I wanted to offer advice on how to deal with each one.

The temptation to sin sexually: At college, there will be more young women your age than you have ever known. A great many of them will dress provocatively, and indeed, many of them will have already been sexually active. Some of them, confused by such cultural phenomena as “Sex and the City,” will promote the myth of “casual sex,” the idea that sex is not a big deal, and can be engaged in without thought to consequences, particularly to the soul.

As I said, the idea is a myth. Besides the dangerous and troubling physical consequences of such action, there are eternal consequences that make this a matter of grave importance. From the beginning, sex was given by God to married couples, both for procreation (Gen. 1:28) and for pleasure (Song of Solomon 4). It is a significant part of the “one flesh” relationship designed for marriage. Outside of marriage, Paul says it is the only sin that one commits “against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

In addition, there is great joy to be found in remaining pure until marriage. Being able to present yourself to your bride in a pure way is one of the greatest wedding gifts you can give her, and I hope you will make it your goal.

The temptation to sin with alcohol: Among the biggest temptations facing college students away from home is the temptation to abuse alcohol. Many will tell you that alcohol is harmless, or that “one little drink is not going to hurt you.” There are several things I would have you consider.

First, for most of your days in college, the state says it is illegal for you even to possess an alcoholic beverage. As Christians, are we not to obey the laws of the land? Second, the rehab centers and hospitals

are filled with those who thought alcohol was harmless, only to find themselves hopelessly addicted to it. In addition to that, the morgues are filled with those whose deaths were caused by the poor decisions that so often accompany the consumption of alcohol, and there are thousands of families torn apart by the sin of alcoholism. The impact on your decision-making processes also often leads to sexual sin. Finally, there is the cost of your soul to consider. Hell will also be filled by those who thought “one little drink won’t hurt me.” Consider Proverbs 23:29-35, as Solomon relates the degradation of the drinker.

The temptation to “skip church”: Satan makes this one very easy. You don’t have to make a decision to do wrong. You don’t have to do something vile. In fact, you don’t have “do” anything. All you have to do is sleep late on Sunday morning. It will be easy, because most of your dorm mates will be doing the same thing. No one’s going to wake you up and “make” you go. It will be easy.

Do not be so easily convinced. While the temptations of sex and alcohol are very dangerous, I believe in many ways, this is even more so. When you decide to “sleep in,” you give in to Satan just a little bit. But no one goes from Christian one day to reprobate the next. It is a gradual process. When you give in just a little, the next time it will be easier, and before long, you will find that you are “giving in” on bigger and bigger matters, sacrificing your Christianity and values for what is “easy.”

Heb. 10:25 teaches us that we are not to forsake “our own assembling together,” but the erosion on your values and indeed, on your soul, is what really matters here. There will be many times you may think you are too tired to get up and go. Get up, get dressed and go anyway. You will think that you can simply go to the evening service. Get up, get dressed, and go anyway. You may be the only one in your dorm who gets up and goes. Get up, get dressed and go anyway.

As I said, these will not be the only ways Satan tries to entice you, but these are prominent ways. Do not give in. Remember that you may be all that many of your friends ever see of Christianity. Be a shining example to them (Matt. 5:16).

With love,

Your Dad



SARA from p. 1

again. Laurie and Kelly and Jim and David and Ryan and Brad and Chanel and Anita and all of Becca's kitchen help friends live all over this country, but they will never forget that gathering that evening because they knew the family of God was being increased by one precious soul. And they wouldn't have missed being there for anything. Someone once said "It's a small world." No, we just have a big family.

It was very quiet down by the river. The sun was setting and twilight's long evening shadows made things seem very still. The water was as clear as glass and absolutely flat smooth and calm. Our good friends grouped around us and I asked Sara the most important question she'd ever been asked: "Do you believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God?" Without hesitation, and through not a few tears, she said "I do." Together we waded down into the still water and I looked around for a moment. The scene around made me catch my breath - it seemed like we were standing in the Jordan. So I made that ancient pronouncement of baptism's purposes and authority and then I plunged Sara under the clear water, bringing her up as a new creature in Jesus Christ. It was amazing and incredible and wonderful. A

friend later told me that he and some others were working across the river unnoticed by us, and that they got quiet for the baptism. As Sara and I went down into the water and I baptized her one of them said "Don't you know it looked just like that in the New Testament times?" He was exactly right. It did.

On the long walk back up to my cabin I thought about a lot of things. My mind thought of godly grandparents who helped Sara value the Bible and of a great church that has been an enormous help in her learning the Word of God and seeing what real Christianity is about. I am profoundly grateful to my wife for her incredible godliness and patience, and to Sara's big sister, Rebecca, who also serves the Lord and many times has been the trailblazer for Sara. I'm thankful to FC for providing that camp and being such a big part of my life. But over and over again I thought of the Lord who loved us so much that He came here so we could some day live with Him. I was the happiest any father can be in those moments, and yet I knew my Father was even happier. What an evening! The attention of heaven was resting on a small creek at an out of the way camp in Texas *because there my daughter, Sara, had become a Christian.* **Mark**

Visiting the DFW area? **Worship with us!** Westside now meets at 2320 Imperial Drive. Our building is directly behind Toys R Us on Hwy. 183, the Airport Freeway near the Irving Mall.

Sunday times are 9:00 a.m. for Bible study, 9:50 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. for worship. On Wednesdays Bible classes are at 7:30 p.m. See our website, www.justChristians.com or call 972-986-9131 for more information.

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