



"Did you hear about Shorty?" Like any barber, Jim was mighty pleased to get terrific barbershop talk. "About Shorty?" "Yep." "You mean Shorty, the barber? No, I didn't hear a thing about him. Why?" "Well, he's--he's got religious all of a sudden!" "Religious? Not Shorty! Are you sure you haven't got your wires crossed? You mean somebody else."

"Of course I don't. I know Shorty Panell. We both belong to Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Elks; we're good pals. And I got it straight from him yesterday. He even tried to convert me."

"You're crazy, Jim. I know Shorty, too. I guess there isn't anybody around this town who doesn't know him. But listen, Jim, I know him well enough to know that he's just not the type to get religious--that's all. It's just not Shorty's line--religion's not. Just like me, he figures it's okay for women and old codgers and people who are sick."

"I know, Bob. But I tell you; he's changed his ideas. Changed them completely. He sure gave me a sermon last night. A sinner...lost...needed to be saved...Jesus Christ the only answer...confess sin...believe...or go to hell. That's the gist of it. You know, I wouldn't be surprised to see him quit barbering to peddle his salvation wares full time--a minister or something, you know."

"That's ridiculous, Jim."

"Yes, but then--well, the whole thing's ridiculous. What I can't get over is that Shorty really thinks he has something. You know, when he talked about the happiness this religious stuff has brought him, he looked like--like he'd just got a check for a million bucks. He looked just that tickled. Bob, Shorty's a different man. I can't explain it exactly. But he's not the Shorty Panell I used to know. He's absolutely different."

"I guess he must be, because what you've said sure doesn't sound like him."

"I know. But...Look him up and have a talk with him yourself if you don't believe me,

Bob. Seeing's believing, you know."

"That's what they say, Jim." Bob raised himself out of the barber chair and handed Jim a crinkled green bill and three shiny quarters. Absently, he flipped on his straw hat. "So Shorty's got religion...I still can't believe it. But I hate to call you a liar, Jim. I'll have to look him up. 'Bye now. Thanks for a good cut."

And so the story spread until everybody in town knew it as well as they knew Shorty. Many, like Bob, were incredulous: it was impossible. Others were skeptical: how long would it last? Everybody was puzzled: just what had happened to Shorty?

Shorty's experience has long since been replaced by other headline news in Moses Lake's barbershops and gossip columns. Occasionally, though, some still wonder fleetingly just exactly what did happen to Norman Panell. This is his story:

One day when Shorty was on a vacation financed by his gambling wins, he met a friend who started talking religion--about the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible. Shorty knew that the Bible is the Word of God--at least, that's what he'd been told. Actually, he knew little about what it says or, for that matter, about the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, as his friend pulled out a New Testament and pointed out a verse, Shorty couldn't help feeling a bit curious. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Shorty read it, then, chewing his lip thoughtfully, stared past his friend.

All--that word bothered him. He now realized that it included a lot of swell fellows--men who were living good lives, busy lives. It meant that he was a sinner. Shorty resented the implication. His friend turned a few pages and, with a word of explanation, pointed out another verse. Almost angrily, skimmed it. Then, slowly, carefully, he re-read it "The wages...of sin ...is death" (Romans 6:23). The words stunned Shorty. In a dreadful moment he saw himself standing before God, hearing the verdict, "Guilty--a sinner," followed by the solemn pronouncement of an irrevocable death sentence.

What could he do? Shorty became desperate. He knew that even when he made a special effort to be good, he did things "short of the glory of God," things which God would consider sin. Was there no escape? Must he live the rest of his life under a death sentence? Was this to be life for him? The question haunted him for days. Life was no longer worth living.

In despair he read Romans 6:23 again. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life..."

"But the gift..." He thought of Christmas and the gifts he had received--things people gave him without expecting him to pay for them or work for them--things people gave him just to show they loved him. "Could it be that God loves me, and because He does, He wants to give me a gift?" Shorty wondered, then quickly brushed the idea away. Why should God love him? Why should God give him anything? He deserved nothing--but death.

He looked at the verse again: "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

"It looks like that's what it means, though," he muttered. "God wants to give me life--as a gift." And Shorty was right. "God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The Lord Jesus Christ paid the death penalty to give sinners the gift of never-ending life. Like any other gift, eternal life must be accepted. And because this life is through Jesus Christ our Lord, since it is actually in Him, we must accept Jesus to get this life. That's what Shorty did. He didn't just "get religion." He got Christ that day when he cried to God, "I know I'm a sinner. I know I deserve to die. But thank you for loving me enough to send Jesus Christ to die in my place. Dear God, I want to accept Your gift of eternal life. I take Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior."

When Norman Panell prayed that prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ came into his life and made him a new man. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Because Shorty had accepted Jesus not only as Savior from sin and its penalty, but as the Lord of his life, when God asked him to leave his business to prepare for the ministry, he sold his barbershop and enrolled in the Prairie Bible Institute. Christ is now running Shorty's life. And Shorty has never regretted the change of management.

What God has done for Shorty He can do for you. His gift of eternal life is yours for the asking--yours for the taking--yours by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.

To contact me, write:

Gary Tomás Panell
1211 Pollock Avenue
Zillah, WA 98953

or email admin@gtpanell.com