

NOT IN WORD ONLY

**God's work of salvation in
Matthew Biddinger**

Saved February 4, 2009

My name is Matthew Biddinger, and I was born into this world on April 21, 1969. Through the grace and mercy of God, I was born again into his kingdom on February 4, 2009. My parents were religious, and they faithfully took me to church where I learned many basic and foundational truths of the Bible. They lovingly raised us the best they knew how and always provided for us in the things we needed, but the truth of salvation was never understood. My early life and youth were plagued with empty salvation experiences and repeated hollow rededications, but nothing I did could ever bring peace to my soul. As I grew older, my discontentment with church and the desire to follow after my own lusts both became stronger. I made what seemed to be many mistakes and wrong decisions while growing up, but the hand of God led me to the places I needed to be in my life in order that I might find him.

In May of 1987, I followed the choices of my best friend from high school, and we entered one of the state universities in Michigan that fall. It was there that my faithfulness to church and the life I was raised to live all but disappeared. I was irresponsible with my education and nearly failed in most of my classes. I pursued my own lust and my own ways, but I could never fully get away from the pricks of the Holy Spirit. I tried to improve my condition and appease my conscience by involving myself with a Christian organization on campus, a bible study in my hometown, a so-called Christian girlfriend, and other religious things, but the shallowness and vain hypocrisy of them all consumed me with emptiness. I always felt that the Christian life should be more than what I saw, and I could never seem to attain to it nor saw anybody that had attained to it. I was even more disillusioned than before and had lost hope that things could be different. Like the song says, "Feeding on the husks around me, till my strength was almost gone, longed my soul for something better, only still to hunger on."

The same year that I went to the state university, God led my twin brother to a small Christian University in Ohio. My parents went to visit him for a long weekend in March 1988 and as providence would have it, I went with them. I think my parents were hoping that I would change my course and go there. However, I just could not imagine trading the opportunities and resources of a large state university and all it had to offer for the nothingness of a small Christian university. I remember scoffing at the idea of attending a little no-name place in nowhere Ohio, but I also recall something inside of me telling me this is where I was supposed to be. On the last night of our visit, I was sitting alone in the corner of my brother's dorm room trying to comprehend all that I was feeling. I decided to make a list comparing the advantages of the two schools. In one column I listed the advantages of the state university – access to all sorts of educational opportunities, extensive resources for learning, collegiate level sports, night life, etc. In the other column for the small Christian school, I had one thing – that I could find God. This was the first time in my life that I can recall actually hearing the voice of God in my heart – "Come after me, and you will find me". I had no idea the depth of what that meant at the time. [Incidentally, it was at this time that

somewhere in Mississippi God was working salvation in the man who would eventually be my pastor nearly twenty years later.]

I transferred to the small university in the fall of 1988. I was in a good place where everything was centered on Christ and Christian values. I made good friends, took my education seriously, and involved myself with different ministries both on and off campus. Life was good and I thought that I had found God as he promised me six months earlier. Little did I know this was only the means to something much greater to come twenty years later. I met my wife in April 1990, and we were married after I graduated the following year in July 1991. The job market was poor that year and only a few people from my class had found jobs by the time we graduated. By God's providence and grace, I was one of those people and we moved to Michigan about an hour from where I grew up. I was content to go back to my home church, but Carrie was not. She was afraid that we would not be faithful because of the distance and I'm certain she was right and I'm very thankful this wisdom prevailed. As such, God led us to Southside Baptist Tabernacle in Ypsilanti, Michigan. It was here that we meet men like Tim Rutherford, Charles Shipman, and Jim Grapp – men who God would use to shape the rest of my life.

Once again, I thought that I found what God had promised me, but something was deeply wrong inside. I was still discontented in my soul. I tried to get help and counsel from the man who was my pastor at the time, but he was not able to provide anything of value. In mid-1993, I watched Jim Grapp go through lostness and saw what he was after the Lord saved him. The Bible became more than just stories to him – it became something real; something that lived in him and something he lived out of. I was drawn to it like nothing else before and I would spend many hours with him soaking up all I could. This went on for about a year until the providence of God changed my family circumstances and when my wife Carrie became pregnant with our first son. I travelled a lot for work, and we did not want that while raising young children. There was very little job opportunity in Michigan, but moving away and losing my connection to Jim Grapp did not seem like an option. Shortly after, he told me that he and his wife were moving to Pontotoc to be members of Grace Baptist Church, so I reluctantly accepted the only offer I received which was with a Los Angeles division of the company I was working for. I felt very lost inside – like everything God had let me find was slipping away. What would I do without the man that God has sent to help me? Again, little did I know this was only the means to something much greater to come.

We were supposed to be in Los Angeles for three to five years, but thankfully, the Lord only had us there for eight months. The division moved their headquarters much sooner than planned and we relocated to the Memphis, Tennessee area in March 1995. We were excited! Memphis was only ninety minutes from Pontotoc, and we thought we might be part of Grace Baptist Church and could pick up where we left off with Brother Jim. However, it became clear very quickly that God had determined something different. We spent the next 10 years in churches that were filled with legalism, hatred, and death. I learned a lot of so-called doctrine during this time. I even finished my

Theology degree (such as it was), but it was all taught by blind leaders who did not know the truth of God's ways. It was all just knowledge, words, and facts – there was no life in it all.

I so desperately longed to have something real that in 1996 I was deceived by a very emotional experience. The pastor and everyone around me called it salvation, so I accepted it as that. But almost immediately I knew something was wrong. My soul was still empty, my heart had no comfort of the truth, and I had no peace. I was like a spiritual yo-yo – up one moment and down the next with my experience. The fact fit with all we or anyone in our church knew, so the problem must have been with my lack of faith – or so I thought. I was trapped in a terrible place and didn't realize the severity of it nor what it was doing to my family spiritually. We spent time with Brother Jim and his wife over the years and it was through these times that God provided us a crucial lifeline to the truth.

Through a significant series of events, God led Jim Grapp in 2003 to be the pastor of the church we had been attending. Again, we were so excited. Everything we had hoped for since leaving Michigan was coming to pass. We were with the man that God sent to help me; we were now going to be fully part of Camp Liberty and the other churches; my family would be under the truth with no more deception; and most of all, I had finally found what God had promised me in 1988; all was good – or so I thought. Again, this was only the means to something much greater to come.

Things went well for a couple of years and as time passed, I became more solid in the false salvation experience that I had. By this time, we were fully a part of Camp Liberty and God knit our hearts together with them. However, it became increasingly clear that Bro. Jim did not have the relationship with Bro. Terry as we thought he had. In the fall of 2005, he and Bro. Terry had a falling out over some things and suddenly we were caught in the middle. On one side, we believed that God used Bro. Jim over all the years to be an immense help to us, but on the other we knew that God had made us a part of Camp Liberty. I felt that I could not let go of either one so I prayed and hoped that they would reconcile before the February 2006 camp meeting. To our great disappointment, that did not happen. We spent those months in turmoil not knowing what we were supposed to do. Looking back, I am very thankful that despite their disagreement, neither one of them tried to force me to a decision. Rather, they told me that I had to follow God and decide for myself.

During this time, I began to draw close to Bro. Greg Moffitt and some of the other men at Lighthouse Baptist Church. One day while at lunch with him, I was crying as I explained the great conflict we were in and how we were deeply torn between staying with Bro. Jim or staying with Camp Liberty. He related the story of Elijah and how God sustained him with water from the brook and food from the ravens. He said those things were provisions for his life, but when the brook dried up, God sent him somewhere else. Perhaps, he said, that Bro. Jim was to you what the brook and ravens were to Elijah, but now the source of help was dried up and it was time to move on. These words gave me tremendous liberty – liberty to let go of what I held on to for over ten years.

On that great understanding, we went to camp that February without Bro. Jim and without the church. It was sad and exciting at the same time. The next month, we attended a meeting at Lighthouse where Brother Terry was preaching for the week. Brother Terry was very gracious to us and even told us that we could stay with Bro. Jim and still attend camp during the meeting weeks and that they would love us. I told him that we could not be part of a church that did not want to be part of Camp. He looked at me and said, "Well, I guess you have some decisions to make." I knew right then what we needed to do. On the way home that night, I told my wife what Bro. Terry said and that I believed we were supposed to be at Lighthouse. She immediately told me she felt the same thing but was afraid to tell me. We were very happy with the clarity that God had given us, but we were unclear of the timing. I thought we needed to help Bro. Jim with some physical things at the church before we left. Fortunately, God had other plans.

After two months we visited Lighthouse again for their birthday celebration in May 2006. During that week, Bro. Jim took me aside before our mid-week service and asked me why I had not already left. He said he wasn't trying to make me leave, but knew what God had put in our hearts and that we did not have to stay for his sake. We took that as God's final nudge to get us to Lighthouse. We told Bro. Greg all what happened, and he graciously led the church to accept us as members that following Sunday. After nearly fifteen years of wandering and being trapped in horrible places, we were overjoyed to finally be part of a true church, and I was finally getting to enjoy the promise God gave to me back in 1988. Once again, I had no idea what was coming, and this too was only the means to something much greater to come.

It only took a few months of being at Lighthouse and being under the preaching of Bro. Greg to realize that the experience I had ten years prior was not measuring up to true salvation. As I learned more truth, I tried to tack it on to my experience to make it something, but it had no foundation to hang any truth on. I sought counsel from Bro. Greg, and he asked me to go through the details of the experience with him. Afterward, he said he heard a lot about repentance, but nothing about saving faith. He said that faith was oftentimes the smallest part of salvation because it can happen so quickly and it is easily overlooked, so he instructed me to take my time and look deeper at what I thought I had. I did this for several months until it was time for camp meeting in February 2007. As I was riding to Pontotoc the first night with another church member, they asked if I would share my testimony. I started going through all the details of it and using all the new words and understanding I had learned since coming to Lighthouse, but I could not find the point of faith. I would try to tell it in different ways and with different words to make it sound like faith, but in the end, there was nothing – only a void of darkness and emptiness in my soul that overwhelmed me. I rode the rest of the way in silence and then sat through services like a zombie with no recollection of anything that was said. When the services ended and they were getting ready to show the annual slide show, I immediately found brother Greg and took him to another part of the building. He seemed bothered that I was taking him away from the slide show, but I could not wait any longer. I fell in his lap weeping and crying, "I'm lost Bro. Greg! I have been looking at my experience like you told me and I cannot find faith. It's just not there." There wasn't much for him to say so he

simply prayed for me. I don't recall much from that meeting. I was in shock and numb to most of what was going on. I felt like my life was a shattered mirror. I could see bits and pieces of reflections of my life, but nothing made sense to me. My life was one big deception that I forced myself to accept all these years. I was filled with shame and confusion. Aside from telling my wife and a few others, that night, I didn't say a word to anyone until the following Sunday when I told the entire church. I stood before them weeping and embarrassed as I made a public confession of my lostness. I had spent my whole life living out of various self-made experiences that were nothing more than words propping up a house of spiritual cards. In one way, it was very good to finally know my true condition. For the first time in my life, I knew that salvation was not going to be based on my words or my works, but Gods.

For the next several weeks, I continued in daily bible reading from C.H. Spurgeon's Devotional Bible. It was a daily devotional where he provided running commentary on scripture, but it was only dead words on the page to me. One morning as I began to read, I put it down and cried out to God for help. I told him that I did not want another experience with stronger emotions or bigger words. I just wanted something that was true – I just wanted him. I picked up the book and started reading. The reading for the day was somewhere in the book of Exodus and I was getting absolutely nothing out of it. However, right at the end, he jumped to Isaiah 43:18-19 which reads

“Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?”

I was blown away. I literally fell out of my chair weeping and thanking God at what I just read. Just a few moments earlier, I had told God that my desire was to have something real and then he immediately let me see this. I took that as a promise from God – a promise that regardless of all my word only experiences and all my biblical knowledge, he was going to do a new thing that I would know.

However, I misunderstood the promise and like Moses, it caused me to wander in unbelief for a long while. I thought that “remembering not the former things” meant I had to let go of everything I heard or learned before, and I began throwing it all overboard. I trusted nothing of my former understanding or education, and I started a journey to look for the “new thing” that would thrust me into a true salvation experience. I stopped my bible reading and ceremonial prayer time and if there was anything preached that I had heard or done before, I discarded it as a former thing that was to be remembered not. I even stopped singing during the congregation songs and hymns because I could not bear anything to be word only any longer. While I'm sure there were many things that were rightly thrown away, I know I ignored and stepped over many good things on my quest to find the new thing that should have been held on to.

The mistake of stepping over and discarding good things went on for almost two years, but there were a few moments along the way where God gave me rebukes and also some great truths to hold on to. The main rebuke came from Bro. Brian Purdy. We were speaking one day, and I stated

that I was struggling like the lame man at the pool because I had no man to help me. He immediately and sharply rebuked me – “Don’t ever say that again! God has given you a man to help and his name is Greg Moffitt. You cannot say that you have no help.” The first truth was the story of Rahab in Jericho. Up until then, I had pictured myself as one of the Israelites fighting to bring down the walls of unbelief. In reality though, I was Rahab who was trapped in the walls of unbelief and my only hope of deliverance was to cast out the scarlet cord as a token of trust in the words of the sent men. The second truth was where Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well and said, *“If you knew who it is that said to thee, give me to drink; you would have asked of him, and he would have given you living water.”*

The Spirit showed me that I did not know who Jesus really was. This devastated me. It was difficult for me to fathom how a person who was raised in church and knew so much about the bible still did not know who Jesus was. But it was a truth that I had to acknowledge and own. The third truth was during the preaching the week of Thanksgiving 2008. I remember it distinctly because I was driving home with two of my boys and one of them got sick. It made me late for church, so I just stayed home to take care of him while Carrie went without us. She brought me home the CD and I took it to work with me the following day. I started listening to it while I ate lunch and about six minutes into the preaching Bro. Greg said, “if you have ever said that you’ve done all you can do, then you are blaming God.” I immediately stopped the CD as a flood of times came to my mind where I remember saying those words. Again, this devastated me. I never would have blamed God outright, but Bro. Greg was correct – by saying I’ve done all I can do, I was in essentially saying it was God’s fault that I was not saved.

As if these rebukes and truths were not crushing enough, probably the most impactful and distressing ones came during the New Year’s Eve service 2008 and the next Sunday of 2009. Sometime during the events of the New Year’s Eve service, I happened to walk up on a conversation that Joshua Moffitt was having with another church member. He was expressing his frustration and disappointment with all the ways that the lost had wasted God’s words that year. His comments disturbed me, and I started defending myself in my mind that I was not a waster. How could I be when I was faithful to attend the services, men’s prayer meeting, and other things? I did not understand how this was me. The more I contemplated this over the next few days, the more weighty and painful it became. When I got to Sunday, my mind was in turmoil, and I could not focus on much of anything. Bro. Greg asked me after morning services if I wanted to talk, but I honestly had no more words and I told him that I did not know what to say. When the evening services came, I had somewhat composed myself and was doing better. As I walked into the kitchen I was hit again with another overwhelming truth. One of the men was reading aloud to others from John Flavel’s book *The Fountain of Life* and he read, “the sinner has rejected the grace of God.” It was like someone punched me in the face. What little composure I had was immediately knocked out of me and I turned into the storage room behind the kitchen. As the door closed behind me, I fell to the floor and fell apart. I did not understand. I have never rejected you – how could this be? I don’t

remember anything from preaching that night, but the next morning I was talking to Bro. Brian Purdy about these things and how I was struggling to understand how they could be true. He said that just because I didn't understand something did not mean that it wasn't the truth. He said I need to believe it and trust God to show me. I hung up the phone and told God that I did not understand how I was a waster and a rejecter, but since Lord had spoken them both to me, they must be true. Lord, please help me to understand.

A few weeks passed by, and February camp was upon us. We attended as usual, and I don't recall feeling anything in particular as we went. It was a normal camp with the good preaching and good fellowship. On that Wednesday morning as Bro. Terry led the singing, I could feel the realization of being lost swarm over me like a dark blanket. Everyone was singing and enjoying the songs, but I was doing neither. I hadn't participated in hardly any congregational songs since I learned I was lost, and I felt very separated at that moment. I felt a tap on my shoulder and when I turned around, I saw Ms. Becky Dye standing there crying. As she began to hug me, she said, "I remember those days of being lost and not being able to sing." I started to cry with her. It was very helpful to know that someone saw me and looking back, I realize that it was God telling me that he saw me. When we came to the evening service, my heart was longing to sing, but I knew I couldn't. As Bro. Terry opened the services, he started by saying, "I want to sing songs that the lost can sing with us." I could feel my spirit start to rise up and I was very glad. Finally...songs I could sing with truth. The first song was "Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior" and I remember singing it as a prayer to God – it wasn't just words. When Bro. Terry announced the next song, "Just As I Am", my heart groaned with disappointment. I hated this song growing up because it was just an old, stodgy, traditional song that was sung at the end of every service. The only thing I liked about it is that it meant church was over. Nonetheless, we started singing and I heard the truth of the words for the first time.

Just as I am, without one plea
BUT that thy blood was shed for me
AND that thou bid'st me come to thee
O lamb of God I come

Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt;
Fightings within, and fears without,
O Lamb of God, I come

The hardness of my spirit began to melt as I sang these words. They expressed exactly how I was feeling – conflicted and filled with many doubts. Full of fighting my wrong thoughts and assaulted with all kinds fears. I could feel the invitation but was frozen in my place with unbelief.

Bro. Mike preached that night from Luke 14:16-24 about the certain man who made a great supper and bade many. He said, “I am the servant who has been sent to say ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’” Right away I could feel the invitation of God on my heart, but I kept hesitating in my fears and misunderstanding of the promise that God first gave me. I was still looking for the new thing.

But the more he preached, the more urgent and pressing the call came. I knew I had to do something, but didn’t know what, so I went to the altar. Bro. Terry was dealing with Kelly Fugua right next to me. I was trying to keep one ear on what he was saying and one on what Brother Mike was preaching. After a while, God saved Bro. Kelly. I was frustrated because I was not finding anything and I cried out “God, I am laying right next to him – surely you see me!” I stayed for a while longer, but nothing was happening. I got up and went back to my seat dejected and greatly discouraged. The Spirit on me was powerful and if I could not find God in this, then I didn’t know when I would ever find him. Bro. Mike continued to preach, “COME for all things are NOW ready.” I could still feel the pressing and urgency. I knew that I was being invited to come – not to a physical place but a literal one and I knew I could not get there on my own. Just then, Bro. Mike started to preach the second part where the servant was sent to bring in the maimed and the halt. God was making provision for me to get there despite all my imperfections, but I still found myself halting. Like Pilgrim, I knew I needed to run, but I did not know which way or where to. My heart cried out, “Lord, I have no man to help me!”. At once I heard the words of Brian Purdy ring in my ears, “You have a man to help, and his name is Greg Moffitt”. The next thing I knew, I was on my feet urgently making my way to Brother Greg. I don’t recall this, but Bro. Charlie Garza said he was sitting in my direct path and saw me coming. He saw the earnest look on my face and said it was evident that he had to clear the path. When I reached brother Greg, I fell in his lap and broke into weeping. Before too long, Bro. Greg asked me what was going on. I told him I was afraid. “What are you afraid of?”, he asked. My response was not rehearsed, but my heart spoke without hesitation and said, “I’m afraid of getting word only again”. He exhorted me and said, “Nothing about what God has been doing in you for the past two years has been word only – you can’t even get that anymore!” When he said that, something happened in me and suddenly there was no more fear or turmoil.

Everything was peaceful. I wasn’t sure what happened, but I knew for sure that something did. I asked Bro. Greg what I should do, and he said, “just go ahead rest because you’ve been wearing me out for a while”. Everyone was rejoicing, but it took a while for the reality of what happened to soak in.

I was a bit confused for several days afterward, because I didn’t recall ever hearing that new thing I thought I was looking for. All I knew was that my soul was quiet. When I shared this with Bro. Greg he gave me these words from scripture.

*Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven – Psalm
107:30*

*And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and
assurance for ever. Isaiah 32:17*

I realized that God fulfilled the promise he gave to me twenty-one years earlier, “Come after me and you will find me” and the promise from when I was first lost, “I will do a new thing, shall ye not know it”.

For a certainty, the salvation of God in me was no longer in word only.