Lori's Story



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Back to God
Ministries International

About Lori's Story:

The message printed in this booklet was originally broadcast over the radio on *The Back to God Hour* on April 19, 1981. The words were spoken by Dr. Joel Nederhood, then director of the Back to God Hour.

Soon after Lori's story aired on *The Back to God Hour*, Lori's parents, Lois and Phil Persenaire, received letters from across North America. Because the message was also translated on some of BTGMI's international programs, they also heard from people overseas.

"We would never believe that the Lord could use Lori's story in so many ways," said Lois. "But we're thankful that we had her and the Lord has used her like that and that Back to God Ministries could share it even further."

Our thanks goes out to Phil and Lois Persenaire for sharing Lori's Easter story with us once again.

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die."(John 11:25-26)

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is not only Jesus' story; it's Lori's story too. I want to tell you about Jesus today—I want to tell you about His victory; but I also want to tell you about Lori and about her victory. His victory and hers are very, very closely related. I don't think Jesus will mind if, on this day which belongs to Him in a special way, we also think about Lori who died and who in that moment experienced the fruits of Jesus' victory.

But first Jesus' story, and I could choose any one of four separate accounts in the Gospels to convey the reality of Jesus' release from death and of His escape from the tomb. Once when He greeted one of His most aged apostles, He declared: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18). The Gospels have preserved the electrifying record of that great morning when Jesus, who had been dead, rose in the newness of eternal life, and walked forth 'to be with His beloved followers. I choose this from the Gospel according to Matthew:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb.

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The story of Jesus can be put into a few brief words, which He spoke once to His disciples—these words also are found in the Gospel that describes the resurrection account we've just read:

> *We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!"(Matthew 20:18-19).*

So much had happened before the morning of resurrection: agony and anguish, most bitter, most shameful, most painful—this had been Jesus' experience before the great day dawned when He arose victorious from the grave. And in smaller measure, scaled down to fit our narrower lives, we human beings also go through suffering and bitter pain before the day of victory comes for us. As I say this, I think of Lori, a young woman who went through so very much before the day of release and victory finally came for her.

I want to tell you about her today because I, and all who know her and love her, know that her victory could only have happened because of Jesus' victory. Lori died December 17, 1980, after having been sick for nine months with a cancer that ravaged her. With each passing day it seemed that her faith grew more intense and radiant so that when the end finally came,

she and all who stood around her bedside knew that it was not the end for her, but the beginning of life eternal.

The pains that had finally driven her to the hospital had become severe one night when she was out with her dear friend, a young man whom she hoped soon to marry. He drove her to the emergency room of a local hospital, which she never left until after an operation revealed that the killer cancer had established an unbreakable grip on her body. The operation could not really help, and the doctor, telling her the bad news after surgery, wept. Five months later, Lori described that moment to a group of Young Calvinist youth met in convention in Holland, Michigan, as she prepared to go into the hospital once again. These are her words:

> "Thursday morning, when the doctor told me of the outcome of my surgery and that I had cancer, tears came from his eyes. He had a daughter who was my age... and it really hit him hard. He was a neat guy—he was a Christian. But tears didn't come to my eyes then; because so many people were praying for me. God was holding me in His almighty arms and He was just comforting me. He was so strong then; He built me up and He made me strong and He helped me through all those terrible days."

Those who have talked to me about Lori's final illness tell of a brave young woman who through God's grace achieved a maturity and sense of purpose that all of us can well envy. Dale Cooper, a chaplain at Calvin College, tells about the privilege he had of attending her dying. He says:

“Not to tell you what I saw would make me sadly derelict, for we have here an occasion for deep-down praise. Indeed, hers was a magnificent dying that it was my awesome honor to attend.”

For 13 weeks prior to her death, Lori languished away, as several desperate medical protocols were used in her case, and those who entered her hospital room then were amazed at her testimony and her cheerfulness; her interest in the lives of others was astonishing. And always there was the willingness to tell people about her faith in Christ and her confidence that He would take her through. As she talked to her young friends she told them of the Bible's impact on her life. She said:

> “I really learned the value of God's Word. Psalm 23 meant so much to me. And Isaiah 41, verses 10 and 13, I clung to for life. God said, "Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will hold thee with my right hand of righteousness. For I the Lord am thy God. I will hold thy right hand, saying un to thee,

> fear not, I'll help thee." I clung to that promise. He said He'd help me, and I needed that help so bad. God's grace was sufficient for me, and it was shown in many ways."

This young woman went through intense suffering and extreme discomfort during the course of her final battle with the disease that ended her earthly life. She described her chemotherapy to the young people who listened, deeply moved:

> "They put this tube in my arm here—it goes all the way down to my stomach; they'd give me my medicine through that-for eight and a half days straight; it made me really sick. And then I had other complications; I got an infection. I was unable to eat, and I was hooked up on tubes. I was hooked up on one arm with my intravenous feeding and the other arm with my chemotherapy. But God was still with me. He didn't leave me. I remember, and I remembered then that John 14:18—that verse that said, 'I will not leave you as an orphan in the storm, but I will come to you.' In other versions it says: 'I will not leave you comfortless, but I will come to you.' Christ had given me that anchorage that they're talking about. I had found it in Him, and I just had to tell my nurses and

friends why I could accept my illness. It was God's grace.

"Anchored in Christ," that was the great theme idea of the young people who were met in that large convention, and that was the secret of Lori's courage and patience. When one is anchored in Christ he or she is united with the great Victor who conquered death. This is the reason that those who know Him through faith can face serious illness and death with living assurance that Christ will give them the victory, too.

Christ has risen, hallelujah! And we say hallelujah, not simply because Jesus' resurrection from the dead was a magnificent victory for Him, but we say hallelujah because we believe that in Jesus' resurrection eternal life became a reality for all those who believe in Jesus Christ. We have read the words of a young woman—a young woman who has died; but no, she is alive through the resurrection power of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, Jesus wants us to know that Lori who died is alive in His presence, because she believed in Him and anchored her life in Him. And He wants us to know that everyone who has died, and who will die, with faith in Him will be saved from the destruction that death brings. For those who die in Christ, the grave becomes the entryway into heaven itself.

In a sense it is no surprise that Jesus rose from the dead: He was and is the Son of God. Throughout the course of His ministry, He had spoken of ten of His

death by crucifixion, and in the same breath He had said that He would rise again on the third day. Later, on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter told a crowd of listeners that it was not possible for death to hold Jesus. But what is surprising is that the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible for all those who believe in Him to be raised through His power to newness of life.

Jesus is the first fruits of a harvest of people who have died. There will come a day when everyone who has died with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will be reunited with a glorified body. 1 Corinthians 15 puts it this way:

> *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).*

Jesus' resurrection has made it possible for Lori to die victoriously. He wants you to know that today; because He wants you to believe in Him, too, so that you will be able to live and die happily.

Here, let me let Jesus speak to you now. Go back with me to the village of Bethany where we can join Jesus and His friends. It is just a few days before the crucifixion—just a few days before His own resurrection. Jesus has just entered the village; He came because He had been summoned by Mary and Martha, His friends. They had called Him to come because their brother, Lazarus, who was also Jesus' dear friend, was sick. It appeared as if Jesus had arrived too late, for by the time He came Lazarus had been dead for four days. Decay was already ruining the corpse. His tomb had been sealed to shield others from the corruption that had taken over.

Without going to Mary and Martha's house, Jesus goes directly to the place of burial. He observes the usual tokens of grief; then Martha comes up to Him. Her tone is almost reproachful as she speaks, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."
"Your brother will rise again," Jesus says. "I know," she replies, "he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

And then Jesus makes His great announcement that today falls on our ears as the most joyous message we could ever hear. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

Then the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John goes on and tells how Jesus spoke to Lazarus who was within the sealed tomb and called to him: "Lazarus,

come out." The Bible describes Lazarus' dramatic reentry into the realm of the living this way:

> *The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." (See John 11:17-24.)*

On this day when we celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not only celebrate the fact of Jesus' resurrection, but we celebrate the great fact that Jesus is the resurrection. He is not only the person who conquered death once for all, but in doing so, He became the great moving power which gives the fullness of eternal life to all those who believe in Him.

Surely, this is the point of His announcement to Martha, "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." With this statement, He declares that those who believe in Him are actually protected from death's great power.

When one examines the experience of a young woman like Lori drawing closer to the day of her own death, it is clear that she knew that because of her relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, she was moving forward to happiness. Let me just quote something she said when she spoke to all of the young people who listened to her that warm August morning. She said:

> "I never expected anything like this to happen...But I am just glad I have Jesus. I'm not afraid of tomorrow; He's there to take care of me. And if I should die, I'm not afraid, for I'll be very happy with Him."

This young woman's faith was centered on the Lord Jesus Christ. She knew that she was a sinful person, she knew that Christ had died for her sins, and she knew that she wanted to serve Jesus with her life.

After her death, her parents found her journal, and from it they learned of the way she had realized that she should be prepared to die at any time. She wrote about two young friends of hers in Williamsburg, Ontario, who had been killed in an automobile accident, and then she commented, "Lord, I realize you could take me at any time."

And the word "me" was underlined. And frequently in her journal many months before there was the slightest hint that she would soon die of cancer, there were references to the words from the Bible: "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Among those who believe in Jesus, the day of resurrection celebration is, you see, a time for celebration of something mighty and glorious that has become real for believers. When one is united with the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, he or she is united with that

Person who is life itself. As Jesus Himself said once while He was here:

> *"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will...For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself…" (John 5:21, 26).*

When one believes in a Savior like that, death loses its power. And Lori realized that. It was not easy for her in August of 1980 to stand before thousands of young people and tell them of what she had gone through and about what she could expect for her future. The doctors formerly had been impressed with her progress and the shrinking of the cancer, but by the time she spoke, they had told her that the process of death was beginning again and that the cancer was growing. Within days after she spoke she would have to enter the hospital once again—those were the circumstances.

From a human point of view, they couldn't have been more bleak. All of her dreams and plans had to be set aside. But she spoke to all who were assembled there so that possibly God would use her message to bring someone closer to Himself. The theme of the convention at which she spoke was this: Anchored in Christ. And she was praying that the young people who listened to her would have lives that were anchored in Christ. When one is anchored in Christ

through faith in Him, one's future is glorious and happy.

I tell you the story of Jesus' victory over death, and I tell you the story of Lori's victory over death through Jesus Christ, in the hope that you will understand how important it is that you believe in this life-giving Lord. I wish that I had a word of hope that I could speak to those who reject Jesus, but I have none. I say I wish I had because there are so many people whom I know and admire and respect and love who have never committed themselves to the Lord. But I have no word of hope for you so long as you reject the only Person who is able to give life to people like us. But I have this word: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? It means to believe that Jesus Christ has taken your sin and paid for it on Calvary's cross. Lori's mother told me that during her last hospitalization, her family would often go to her hospital room, and there they would sing the great hymns of faith. And Lori's favorite was the well-known hymn—

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

And one of the verses of that hymn goes like this:

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought—

My sin-not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

That's faith in Christ-believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and He is the Person who has taken your sins and paid for them completely.

Do you have this faith? I'm asking you. Even if you are very young, I am asking you. I remember my pastor many years ago, during the Second World War, speaking at a memorial service for a young man killed in battle, saying: "The old must die; the young can and often do die."

Young and old, we are all vulnerable to accident, disease, and attack. It is absolutely necessary that we be ready for death. And the only way we can know that death will be the gateway to eternal life for us is that we are anchored in Christ. He is the resurrection and the life, and those who believe in Him, though they die will most certainly live.

Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life, His story of victory over death is Lori's story; and her story is His. Jesus is alive, and you can live forever with Him if on this day you believe the good news we have discussed.

Let Lori's words conclude this message:

"I'm here telling you my story not so that you will feel sorry for me—your prayers will

help—-but because I want you to have your life anchored in Christ. I just want to tell you to have that precious relationship with God now. Because you don't know what tomorrow will hold. I was super healthy all my life, and I never expected anything like this to happen. . . But I am just glad I have Jesus. I'm not afraid of tomorrow; He's there to take care of me. And if I should die, I'm not afraid, because I'll be very happy with Him."

"In 2 Corinthians 12:9 Paul quotes Christ: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Then Paul goes on to say—and I say with him—'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' Thanks for letting me share my story with you. God bless you."

PRAYER

Lord, today we rejoice because of Jesus' victory. And we rejoice, too, as we remind one another that His victory has made it possible for all those who believe in Him to experience eternal life. And so, as we give you thanks for what happened to Jesus, we also thank you for the many people who throughout the years have died with faith in the resurrected Savior. We know that because of His victory, they have experienced victory too. We think of Lori, who died with her life anchored in Christ; we thank you for the testimony that has come from her lips and has entered our hearts today.

Lord, through the power of your Holy Spirit, grant that many people may hear and read the good news of the resurrection on this day, and that they may believe it. Jesus Christ, you have said that all those who believe in you will never die. Through faith, bind many people to yourself and bring them into your kingdom.

For your name's sake, Amen.


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