

## Percy's Midnight Hour

This is a TRUE story.

Although this story took place over 35 years ago, every detail is just as vivid today as it was then.

This story is about a man. A black man. Remember the children's song "Jesus loves the little children?" The lyrics say, "red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world." Of course as Christians, we all claim this to be true but sometimes I wonder.

I wish I could begin Percy's story by saying he was a warm, wonderful and loving man. Unfortunately, that was not the case. I knew little of Percy's background other than things I learned after becoming employees for the same company.

As a young boy, Percy had worked for our present employer back in the late 50's in a restaurant our boss owned. It was my understanding that our present boss had taken a great liking to Percy and ended up practically raising him. As for Percy's real parents, I never heard that part of the story.

In order to relate this story in it's proper time frame, when I first met Percy I was still 5 years away from being liberated from this world's Death Factory. Percy was in that same Death Factory as me, only he was in a different department. Percy was in the '*unbelievers*' division, while I struggled thru life in the "*hang-on-little-buddy-do-the-best-you-can-department*." I include these facts to point out that I had received Jesus at the tender age of 7, and like most 'Christians', I was doing the 'best I could' which until that time wasn't very good.

It was about 1974 or 75 when I received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. From that day forward my life changed dramatically. From that day forward, I learned that God and Jesus still could speak to people in a very real and personal way. The only two things

Percy and I had in common before that was, we both worked for the same man here on Earth and were both laboring in 'THE DEATH FACTORY' ran by an evil god. I only mention these circumstances to point out that prior to receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, I was not in much of a position to be of any help to Percy. I was much too busy trying to hang on myself rather than try and help Percy get promoted into the 'believers' department. About the only difference in our lives (Percy's and mine) was that when I sinned, I suffered guilt. Percy seemed to enjoy his sin.

My day finally came. I finally recognized the TRUTH for who He is, and Jesus began to break my bonds of unbelief which had held me captive for so many years. Many remarkable things began to happen in my life; concern for Percy's eternity being one of the first.

It was just about at this same time when it was discovered that Percy had cancer. God began dealing with my heart to go see Percy. (Keep also in mind that I was still not much more knowledgeable in God's Word than I had been for the first 33 years of my life.)

Every time God would bring this up, I'd think 'Boy oh Boy'!!! The thought of going to anyone to tell them about Jesus filled me with an unreasonable fear that defies description. I knew from eyewitnesses at work that Percy was prone to drinking and extreme violence. Every time those thoughts would come, I'd see visions of Percy pulling a gun, or knife, and killing me deader than a mackerel. (Something he had done many times when his wife, who was a Christian, would try to witness to him). I would come up with more reasons for not going than Carter has pills.

God *would not* relent. I stalled, I hemmed, I hawed. Always it came back, "You've got to go see Percy." I knew, without doubt, that Percy wasn't saved. So, I assumed that I was to go and tell Percy about Jesus. Then of course there were always those

stories. Once, when Percy was drunk, his wife had actually shot at him to keep him from killing her. Don't think those stories didn't fuel the flames of my fear. Boy oh Boy, and I'm suppose to go and tell this man about Jesus. I can remember thinking, “*God, you've got to be kidding.*”

Time (moving right on along as it's prone to do when facing some NECESSARY but dreaded task) seemed to have all but run out when I heard the report on Percy's condition. All known treatments had been tried. All had failed. Percy had been sent home to die.

Keep in mind also, that although we had worked for the same company for 5 years, I really didn't even 'KNOW' the man. I had used that as an excuse on several different occasions.

Now that we have a pretty good understanding laid out, we can tell the story of 'PERCY'S MIDNIGHT HOUR'.

It was the Saturday before Percy died when I again saw him. I arrived at work that day and Percy was the first one I saw. I remember thinking, “That's strange, he doesn't even look like he's ever been sick one day in his life,” I always thought a person dying of cancer would look really bad. Percy looked as healthy as a horse. I really don't remember giving another thought to Percy after we exchanged greetings so I went off about my job. By this time I had become really proficient at quelling the voice of God's Spirit.

It was exactly 6 days later, at exactly 9AM, when God shook me from my lethargy. I would like to say, when it becomes *necessary* for God to wake someone up, it will only require very few words from him! It *will not be necessary* for him to say “This is God”, because you will know. It is also foolish to debate whether God's voice was audible from your inside or the outside. The only answer I could give about that is, it's both. It's from everywhere.  
Now back to our story.

It was Friday at exactly 9 AM (this is very important to our story). I had just turned into the parking lot of K-Mart in Nashville, Tenn. The reason I noticed the exact time was I could not get into the store until 9 AM to make my delivery and for that reason I had just looked at my watch. Today, over 35 years later, I could take you to the exact spot in that parking lot when God said, “You’ve GOT to go see Percy!!” I can promise you, Percy was not even in my thoughts at that moment. Inside or outside matters not, I can promise you, the voice of God almost knocked me out of the truck. With only 6 words I knew I had no choice but to go, and that this was a matter of utmost urgency. My first thoughts were, “When can I go?”.

Percy lived in the roughest part of Nashville, and my truck had been broken into several times before. I remember thinking, if I go now, not only will merchandise be stolen but more than likely the truck also. My very next thought was, “I know, tomorrow is Saturday and I only work ½ days on Saturday, so, I'll go tomorrow after the truck is unloaded”. For anyone who believes that God doesn't know your every thought, let me just say, He does. Immediately, as I had this last thought, God spoke again. This time even louder and with even more urgency. When God spoke the first time, I would not have believed that He could possibly speak any louder and with more urgency. Guess what, I was wrong! The second time God said, and I quote, “Tomorrow at noon will be too late”. In just those 7 words, God gave me understanding that Percy would depart this life before 12 noon Saturday. My very next thought was, “I know, I'll go tonight after my truck is unloaded”. This time I heard nothing else. I only *knew* I had to go this day, and that I had NO CHOICE. That unreasonable fear was gone, for the time being. The only thing I **KNEW** was *I 'had to' go*.

That work day finally ended. I called Percy's home to see if I could come over. His wife answered the phone and acted as if

she had known me all her life. She couldn't seem to stop saying just how much my coming would mean to Percy. I told her I was on my way.

As I drove to see Percy, that unreasonable fear started to return but I had no thoughts of turning back. I was going. Even if it cost me my life, I no longer cared. God had finally ask me to do something, and I WAS GOING.

I decided to leave my BIG BIBLE in the truck. I carried in my little New Testament inside my coat pocket. Deep inside.

I knocked on the front door, wondering all the while, "What am I to say and to do?".

Percy's wife let me inside the front door where she stopped and whispered, "You just don't know what your coming means to Percy." Then she added, "I've been telling Percy for months that 'someone' from work would come and see him. Every time I'd tell him that he'd say, "No honey, I know they're all busy". She said every time Percy would say that he'd hang his head, and she'd realize just how much it hurt him to think that all his friends, some of which he'd worked with for 20 or 30 years, had no time to visit a dying man. You could see and FEEL the hurt in her eyes and voice as she told me this. It hurt me, and I hardly even knew the man.

Well, time was running out. I knew she didn't know that Percy would be gone come morning. I certainly wouldn't have known how to tell her. She didn't know if I was a Christian or a Heathen. She didn't know and didn't care. She only knew I cared enough to come. I've never felt as welcome anywhere in my life, before or since, I only knew it was a good feeling and I welcomed it.

"Percy's back here," she said as she led me to the rear of the house. Upon entering what turned out to be Percy's bedroom, the first thing I noticed was what appeared to be a very, very old man

sitting in a rocker. I remember thinking “that must be Percy's grandfather”. The man appeared to weigh no more than 75 or 80 pounds. I remember looking around this very small room for Percy. There was no one else in that room. My eyes came, for the first time, upon the face of the man in the rocker. It was Percy. At the moment he recognized me, his face lit up like a small child's at Christmas. Such a look of joy on the face of a dying man, I'll never forget it. Never.

How could this man have changed so much in only 6 short days? It was almost beyond belief. He appeared to be about 100 years old, and about 60 pounds lighter than when I saw him last, *only 6 days before.*

We began a general conversation. I sat there the whole time thinking “what will I say?”, all the while feeling that little new testament inside my coat pocket.

About every 10 minutes or so, great waves of pain would come on Percy. His wife would stand behind him and rub his lower back as hard as she could. It was almost more than I could bear watching. These onslaughts would last a minute or two, and then we would resume our conversation as best we could.

Finally, Percy's wife said she needed to go to the kitchen for a few minutes. Percy almost had a fit. “What if the pain comes back and you're not here?” I did not know at the time, but this had been a continual thing for weeks and weeks. It was easy to see this woman had to have some relief, even if only for a few minutes. I finally managed to convince Percy that, should that happen, I would take her place. Percy agreed, so his wife left the room. Only a few minutes later, that agonizing pain did return. So I did as promised. It was during those times, as I stood behind Percy, I felt God's compassion for the first time in my life. If this had been my mother, father, sister or brother, it would have been understandable. Though I hardly even knew this man, the

feelings of love and compassion were almost overwhelming.

Someone (who I now know to be the Holy Spirit) managed to bring the conversation back around to God. I did manage to get the name of Jesus into the conversation. In fact, the very instant I spoke that glorious name, a very remarkable thing happened. Percy interrupted me in mid sentence. When I spoke the name Jesus, Percy replied, "I believe in JESUS CHRIST." You could have knocked me over with a feather. Words cannot describe the feeling I experienced at that moment. As close as I can come, is to say it was like the weight of the entire world was lifted off my shoulders. I KNEW instantly that those were the words I had been sent here to witness. The full understanding didn't come until later.

About 2 hours had elapsed since my arrival and I knew that about 2 more rounds of that kind of pain and they would be burying me.

As we said our goodnights and I got up to leave, Percy ask me to come back tomorrow. There was no way of telling Percy that he would not be here tomorrow.

Percy's wife walked me to the door. I could sense that she had something to tell me privately. She said, and I'll quote as nearly as memory permits. "I want to thank you so much for coming. You'll just never know how much it meant to Percy. This morning at 9 AM Percy started screaming, 'I'm dying, get me a preacher.' I called everyone I knew to call, but they were all TOO BUSY." Keep in mind, I had told her nothing about what God had said to me that morning at precisely 9 AM. It struck me as a little strange that a dying man cried out to God, and all the preachers were all 'TOO' busy. I've wept on several occasions since to think that God thought enough of me to send me to a dying man.

Well, to conclude this story as briefly as possible, let me remind you that at this time, I was dumber than a grub-worm when it

came to any knowledge of God's Word. My church background as far as prayer was concerned, was the old, 'if it be thy will' routine. I didn't know then that Jesus had come to destroy the works of the devil, the chief one being DEATH.

The Holy Spirit was there with us in Percy's room that night. He watches over God's Word to perform it and the only Word He could perform was that which Percy acted on. Percy had confessed before men that he believed in Jesus Christ. With that confession Percy was born again, instantly.

Come the next morning, I started in the back door at work and met another employee coming out. His very first words were, "Percy died this morning at 6 AM." I replied, "I know." He then said, "we're all going over there to see if there's anything we can do, wanna come?" I was kinda shocked when I heard myself reply, "No, I went and saw the man while he was still alive."

Percy was gone alright. Gone from the death-factory of this world. He didn't go out that back door however. He got out thru the door named Jesus. He made it out just before his mid-night hour. He made his confession around 8 PM Friday and departed for Glory at 6 AM Saturday. He made it with only 10 hours to spare. Ten hours isn't long when compared to 50 some odd years of Percy's life.

It was some months later when I saw Percy's wife again. She told me herself that on that Saturday Percy woke her up at 6 AM and calmly informed her that he was going. He then smiled, closed his eyes and left. Quite a change for a man who had screamed in terror because of his fear of dying. Sounds like 'someone' took the sting out of death. Would you care to venture a guess as to His name?

There are many more things I've learned about exactly what happened that night. Some I learned from Percy's wife. Some I learned from God. Percy had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ

many times in his life. At least on one occasion he had denied that it was THE TRUTH. Do you remember the words of Jesus? *Matt. 10: 32-33, "Whosoever therefore shall 'confess' me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in Heaven." "But whosoever shall 'deny' me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven."*

I was sent there that night as a witness. If I preached anything that night it was probably the world's shortest sermon. One word only- JESUS. Can you see the progression? Percy had at some time in his life 'heard' the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had at sometime in his life 'believed' in his heart that it was TRUE. He had at some time in his life 'denied' that he believed in Jesus. Then as Percy's midnight hour drew near, God in his mercy had heard Percy's cry and sent a witness to hear his confession. With only 10 hours to spare God snatched Percy right out of the jaws of hell itself.

Why would God do this? Because he loved Percy so much He gave his only Son into this world, right into that same death-factory just to get Percy out.

Percy may not have many rewards in Heaven. He didn't have a whole lot of time. Like the thief on the cross, Percy didn't even have time to be baptized.

There are some who will not believe this story. I could really care less what anyone or any denomination teaches or preaches. I do care what Jesus (The Word) says. Jesus said, "Percy made it". I intend to believe the one who was willing to die for Percy, you and me. His NAME is JESUS. Praise His Holy Name for ever and ever.