



Plenty of Time

She had that bland, vacant stare you see in the faces of characters in B-movies and bad television dramas. Sitting in her chair, slumped a bit to the left, she appeared to be someone drained of everything vital, any spark of living.

...but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)

Aunt Norma was an intelligent, independent, business-woman. She combined a sharp, calculating intellect with a tender heart ready to help anyone in need. Norma was an artist and creative hobbyist who actively pursued oil painting, watercolors, sculpture, gardening, and flower arranging. She was a civic-minded person, a member and office-holder in all those local civic groups that met for monthly luncheons at the Tallcorn Hotel on Main Street.

Norma was a stalwart backbone of the First Baptist Church. For many years she taught the Primary Sunday School class, was active on multiple committees, sang soprano in the choir, was church treasurer, and sat on the Building Committee when it came time for the church to move from downtown to the suburbs.

Though she was not what one would call wealthy, she worked hard all her life as an insurance agent, and was financially comfortable.

She gave to many charities and missions groups. She was one who not only contributed financially, but would actually correspond with those called to the mission field. Aunt Norma was herself a world traveler—usually under the auspices of some church or civic organization. Over the years she visited Hawaii (back when that was still a novelty), China, Japan, New Zealand and Europe.

Because it is the way of all flesh, Norma aged, and one day she dramatically plummeted out of the strength of her self-sufficiency. On that day her family determined that her age and physical and mental condition required that she move to the nursing home. She did so grudgingly. It was a painful moment of transition for her—an admission that she was no longer her own person, but now dependent on others.

And, for her, it was the beginning of the end.

The mind of that intelligent, sometimes cunning woman quickly spiraled downward, and it wasn't long before the shining mirror of that inquisitive mind was replaced by a blank, expressionless stare. In what seemed to be a very brief span of time, this avid reader, civic activist, and devout Christian was reduced to little more than an empty, unthinking shell of a person awaiting death.

A Reasoned Response

One of the more common responses to the evangelistic call to know Christ is that there will always be plenty of time for that later. "I'll see to that later." "I don't need to do that now." "Plenty of time for that when I'm older." While it is true that there can be death-bed conversions, more often either death comes so quickly, so traumatically, that there is no time for such a decision, or, as in Aunt Norma's case, the end comes when the mind is no longer capable of reasoned thought.

And accepting Christ is a *reasoned* response. One does not stumble into eternal salvation; one does not acquire the Holy Spirit by osmosis from one's parents. That same Spirit moves in the unbeliever—drawing, illuminating, coaxing—and the unbeliever consciously, purposely makes a decision to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord—

...that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

(Romans 10:9-10)

A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.

(Acts 16:14)

—or not:

When the dove was weary she remembered the ark and flew into Noah's hand at once. There are weary souls who know the ark, but will not fly to it. When an Israelite had slain, inadvertently, his fellow, he knew the city of refuge, he feared the avenger of blood, and he fled along the road to the place of safety. But multitudes know the refuge, and every Sunday we set up the signposts along the road, but yet they don't come to find salvation. The destitute waifs and strays of the streets of London find out the night refuge and ask for shelter; they cluster around the workhouse doors like sparrows under the eaves of a building on a rainy day. They piteously crave for lodging and a crust of bread. Yet crowds of poor benighted spirits, when the house of mercy is lighted up, and the invitation is plainly written in bold letters, "Whosoever will, let him turn in here," will not come, but prove the truth of Watts' verse: *Thousands make a wretched choice / And rather starve than come.*

(Charles Haddon Spurgeon)

None of us, believer or no, has a guarantee that when our time comes we will be in our right mind. What a horrible contemplation that someone—not antagonistic toward God, but simply a chronic procrastinator—might put off their decision indefinitely, only to lose

their reasoning faculties before the decision is made.

Hospitals and nursing homes are filled with people who no longer care. If Aunt Norma had not already established a relationship with Jesus Christ before she reached the nursing home, it never would have happened. This life-long student of Scripture suddenly was apathetic about it and the things of God. Prayer ceased. Worship ceased. A desire to attend church ceased. Bible study ceased. To her, it simply no longer mattered.

Already Justified

But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8:37-39)

Norma had forgotten God, but He had not forgotten her. In the covenant of Christ's blood—the covenant in which her salvation was grounded—God the Father does not forget those who are His own. No matter her physical or mental condition, no matter that her diminished mind had become cold to the indwelling Spirit, her eternal life with God had been secured long before. She had already been justified; her salvation was in the bank, secured behind the impenetrable door of the vault, never to be withdrawn.

By the time Norma was near death, by the time she was at that point where, in the movies, the dying soul "makes peace with his Maker," it was already too late. She was incapable of making that decision. If, at that point, she had never believed in Christ's atonement for her sins, she was already on her way to hell.

But she *did* believe; she *had* made that decision. So now Aunt Norma is part of that healthy and joyous throng before the throne, praising the One who lifted her out of that tortured body of flesh, to reign with Christ forever in a body glorified and pure like His.

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Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:9-11 niv)