

By: Jim Sepulveda

The testimony that follows tells of a gentleman who had no need for God until He was handed a death sentence. Let's move quickly into this powerful story.

"Jim, if you own anything of value, you'd better make out a will," my doctor told me after severe chest pains sent me to the hospital. Tests revealed an enlarged heart, a damaged main valve, and two main arteries blocked by cholesterol. I would need double bypass surgery and valve replacement. "We give you only a 10 percent chance of making it," the doctor warned. I was terrified. At age 35 I was too young to die.

Six weeks before surgery God intervened in my life. Much against my own personal wishes, God arranged for me to attend a healing meeting. Once there, I was greatly agitated by what was going on, and was going to leave during the service when suddenly the speaker announced: "The Holy Spirit is telling me there's a man here who is scheduled for open heart surgery. If you will come down now, I believe the Lord's going to heal you." I glanced around as he waited. Surely he didn't mean me. No one came forward, "God has a work for this man," the speaker continued. "Let us pray and see if the Holy Spirit might reveal the man's name to me."

God revealed my name

Incredibly, God did reveal my name, and reluctantly, I went forward. After answering a few of his questions, here's what happened: Suddenly my knees buckled and I fell to the platform, wrapped in a warm blanket of peace and love. A red light appeared toward the ceiling, which came down and touched my head. A pure warm heat ran up my left side and stopped in the area of my chest. Then it felt like two little fingers moved things around inside my heart "Jesus, I love You." The words slipped from my mouth without conscious thought. "I know that I know that You've healed me. I love You." Up to this moment, I hadn't been to church in 13 years, sad to say.

Upon returning to my doctor, I told him about my experience in the auditorium. He wasn't impressed. "Jim, if you don't have open heart surgery, you won't last over 6 months." We discussed the situation at length, then a clear thought came to mind: Catheterization. Do it for the glory of God. I knew that was a procedure when doctors make an incision in one main artery, then feed a catheter into the heart to take pictures and ascertain the exact state of the heart.

"Doc, listen. I don't want that open-heart surgery. I want a Catheterization." He argued, but I convinced him. Several days later I was on the operating table. I was awake during the whole Catheterization process. Everything seemed to go very well. Then during the last maneuver I suddenly felt like a white-hot poker was stabbing my heart. Agonizing pain ran across my shoulders and down my side. I began to lose consciousness and felt the doctors pounding on my chest. As dark shadows closed around me, I could hear voices from far away, echoing like sound in a tunnel: "We're losing him ... losing him ... losing him..."

I opened my eyes. I was standing in a field, surrounded by acres of green grass. Every blade of it glowed, as if a tiny spotlight lighted them. To my right stretched a dazzling expanse of flowers, with vibrant colors I'd never seen before. I walked over a nearby hill, stopping as a light began to appear near me. The blinding aura was too bright to look at directly. I squinted down toward the ground, then saw a pair of sandals begin to appear at the bottom of the light.

As my eyes moved upward, I glimpsed the hem of a seamless white gown. Higher, I could make out the form of a man's body. Around his head shone an even brighter brilliance, obscuring a direct view of his face. Even though I couldn't see clearly because of the dazzling splendor, I knew immediately the identity of this Man. I was standing in the presence of Jesus Christ.

"It's not your time. You must go back."

"Jim, I love you." His voice washed over me . . . indescribably gentle, tender, peaceful. "But it's not your

time yet. You must go back, for you have many works for Me to do."

The brilliance surrounding Him reached out and engulfed me, immersing me in love and peace. I don't know how long I stood transfixed, but finally I turned away and began walking back over the hill. Then a blue mist of light began to come around me like a fog. It turned into a dark shadow, and everything turned black. Opening my eyes, I realized I was back on the operating table, covered with a sheet. I didn't know that until later my heart had stopped beating for 8 minutes. They had given me up for dead!

Everyone had left the operating room except for the main surgeon and one of his assistants. They were at the back of the room, filling out a report on my death. As I sat up, the sheet slid down my lap. They turned and looked at me, with their faces ghost white. "Get the rest of them in here quick!" the surgeon urged his assistant. The doctors performed numerous tests. Early the next morning the surgeon came to my room and announced he was releasing me from the hospital. "Come back this evening at 8:30 to my office. We'll go over all the results of your new tests."

That evening I told my doctor what I'd experienced during the 8 minutes I was clinically dead on the operating table. "Jim," he said, "let me show you something you won't believe." He showed me the new pictures of my heart. Rather than being enlarged, it was now normal size. There had previously been 85 percent blockage in two arteries; now there was none. The main valve was functioning normally. My doctor looked at me, tears in his eyes. "Jim, this Jesus you've been talking about has either replaced or repaired your heart."

Shortly afterward God called me into ministry. Since then I've had the opportunity to share my testimony to thousands - both here in America and in Europe. It's been the thrill of my life to see the Lord use me to touch so many lives, to see people turn their lives over to Jesus Christ and see the positive change that follows, as they grow in their personal relationship with Him. Before this all happened, as I faced the good possibility of dying, I was terrified. Now my fear is gone, as yours can be, replaced by the joy of knowing someday I will see my Savior again face to face.

Dead eight minutes

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and it's my prayer that it helps you come to believe on Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. If there's any doubt that Jesus Christ is the one to put one's trust in for eternal salvation ... there certainly wouldn't be doubt any longer if you had seen what I had seen during those 8 minutes I was dead.

Let us never forget Christ's promise to humanity as recorded in the Bible in John 20:29. Thomas was one of the Lord's disciples at the time of Christ's crucifixion. After Christ's resurrection from the tomb, He returned in bodily form and revealed Himself to His disciples, but NOT Thomas.

The disciples who had seen Jesus was later telling Thomas what they had seen and heard Jesus say, but Thomas was as doubting as you and I might have been.

"Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, Jesus then revealed Himself to Thomas also. The words Jesus Christ spoke to Thomas still echo across the universe, and through the soul of every person who longs to be right with God, and grow in relationship with Him:

"Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet believed."

What does scripture then say is the benefit? "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). There's a great difference between mere religious activity . . . and LIFE in Jesus Christ isn't there?