

Johnnie Armstrong's Campfire Message

Another summer has come and once again we find ourselves in this beautiful place that God has provided for us. For some of you this is the first time for you to be here but many others have gone before you in these 59 years, some of those were probably your grandmothers or mothers or sisters who sat where you are sitting in anticipation of what God had in store for them in this place called Crestridge.

We've come, first of all, to praise our Lord for His Son Jesus who came to this earth many years ago to live among us, to teach us the true way for the journey of our lives, to suffer for our sins and die that each one of us here tonight could have eternal life with Him and all we have to do is believe in our Lord Jesus Christ and He will save us. I pray that tonight if there is one here who does not know Him, that tonight you'll say yes to Jesus and know that life has real meaning to it. Our theme for this summer is "Not My Own" which comes from 1 Corinthians 6 where it says "You are not your own, you were bought at a price." That price was from Christ who died on the cross to give you and me eternal life.

Our verse for this week says "He (Jesus) existed before anything else, and He holds all Creation together." All Creation, that includes you and me, He literally holds our lives which is the main part of Creation, together in His hands!

You say how is that possible? In Ephesians 3, the Scripture proves this when Jesus says, "I will only reveal myself to those who love me and obey me." And again our Lord says in John 14:23, "We will come to them and live with them."

It was difficult for the disciples to understand what He was saying. How was it possible for Him to live with them in this sense?

It is interesting that our Lord used the same word here that He gave them in John 14:2, "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there you may be also." Our Lord was promising His disciples that, just as He was going to heaven to prepare a place for them and would welcome them one day, now it would be possible for them to prepare a place for Him in their hearts and He would come and live with them. The body of the believer would be the Temple of the living God and the human heart would be the home of Jesus Christ.

It is difficult for me to think of a higher privilege than to make for Christ a home in my heart, to welcome, to serve, to please, to fellowship with Him there. One day that I shall never forget I invited Christ to come into my heart. What an entrance He made!

After Christ entered my heart and in the joy of this new-found relationship, I said to Him, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be Yours. I want to have You settle down here and be perfectly at home. Everything I have belongs to You. Let me show You around and introduce You to the various features of the home that You may be more comfortable and that we may have fuller fellowship together." He was very glad to come, of course, and happier still to be given a place in my heart.

Let me tell you about how it was as He looked around in my heart. Think about the rooms of your heart as I talk about mine.

The first room was the study, the library. Let us call it the study of the mind. Now in my home this room of the mind is a very small room with thick walls. But it is an important room. In a sense, it is the control room of the house. He entered with me and looked around at the books in the bookcase, the magazines upon the table, and the pictures on the wall. As I followed His gaze I became uncomfortable. Strangely enough, I had not felt badly about this before, but now that He was there looking at these things I was embarrassed. There were some books there that His eyes were too pure to behold. There was a lot of trash and literature on the table that a Christian had no business reading and as for the pictures on the wall, the imaginations and thoughts of my mind, these were shameful.

I turned to Him and said, "Master, I know that this room needs a radical alteration. Will You help me make it what it ought to be, to bring every thought into captivity to You?"

"Surely," He said. "Gladly will I help you. That is one reason I am here. First of all," He said, "take all the things that you are reading and seeing which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Now put on the empty shelves the books of the Bible. Fill the library with Scriptures and meditate on them day and night. As for the pictures on the wall, you will have difficulty controlling these images, but here is an aid." He gave me a full-sized portrait of Himself. "Hang this centrally," He said, "on the wall of the mind." I did and I have discovered through the years that when my thoughts are centered upon Christ Himself, His purity and power cause impure imaginations to retreat. So He has helped me to bring my thoughts into captivity. May I suggest to you if you have difficulty with this little room of the mind, that you bring Christ in there. Pack it full with the Word of God, meditate upon it and keep the immediate presence of the Lord Jesus ever before it.

From the study we went into the dining room, the room of appetites and desires. Now this was a very large room. I spent a good deal of time in the dining room and much effort in satisfying my wants. I said to Him, "This is a very commodious room and I am quite sure you will be pleased with what we serve here."

He seated Himself at the table with me and asked, "What is on the menu for dinner?" "Well," I said, "my favorite dishes." They were the things I liked, worldly fare. I suppose there was nothing radically wrong in any particular item, but it was not the food that should satisfy the life of a real Christian. When the food was placed before Him, He said nothing about it. However, I observed that He did not eat it, and I said to Him, somewhat disturbed, "Savior, you don't care for the food that is placed before you? What is the trouble?" He answered, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me." He looked at me again and said, "If you want food that really satisfies you, seek the will of the Father, not your own pleasures, not your own desires, not your own satisfaction. Seek to please Me, and that food will satisfy you." And there about the table He gave me a taste of doing God's will. What a flavor! There is no food like it in all the world. It alone satisfies. Everything else is dissatisfying in the end.

Now if Christ is in your heart, and I trust He is, what kind of food are you serving Him and what kind of

food are you eating yourself? Are you living for the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, selfishly? Or are you choosing God's will for your meat and drink?

We walked next into the den. This room was rather intimate and comfortable. I liked it. It had a fireplace, overstuffed chairs, a bookcase, sofa and a quiet atmosphere.

He also seemed pleased with it. He said, "This is indeed a delightful room. Let us come here often. It is secluded and quiet and we can have fellowship together." Well, naturally, as a young Christian I was thrilled. I could not think of anything I would rather do than have a few minutes apart with Christ in intimate comradeship. He promised, "I will be here every morning early. Meet with Me here and we will start the day together." So, morning after morning, I would come downstairs to the den and He would take a book of the Bible from the bookcase. He would open it and then we would read together. He would tell me of its riches and unfold to me its truths. He would make my heart warm as He revealed His love and His grace toward me. They were wonderful hours together. In fact, we called the den the "withdrawing room". It was a period when we had our quiet time together. But little by little, under the pressure of many responsibilities, this time began to be shortened. Why, I don't know, but I thought I was just too busy to spend time with Christ. This was not intentional, you understand; it just happened that way. Finally, not only was the time shortened, but I began to miss a day now and then. It was examination time at the college where I taught. Then it was some other urgent emergency. I would miss it two days in a row and often more.

I remember one morning when I was in a hurry, rushing down the steps, eager to be on my way.

As I passed the den, the door was ajar. Looking in I saw a fire in the fireplace and the Lord sitting there. Suddenly in dismay, I thought to myself, "He was my guest. I had invited Him into my heart! He had come as Lord of my home. And yet here I am neglecting Him." I turned and went in. With downcast glance I said, "Blessed Master, forgive me. Have You been here all these mornings?"

"Yes," He said. "I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you." Then I was even more ashamed. He had been faithful in spite of my faithlessness. I asked His forgiveness and He readily forgave me as He does when we are truly penitent. He said, "The trouble with you is this; you have been thinking of the quiet time, of the Bible study and prayer time, as a factor in your own spiritual progress, but you have forgotten that this hour means something to Me also. Remember, I love you. I have redeemed you at a great cost. I desire your fellowship. Now," He said, "do not neglect this hour if only for My sake. Whatever else may be your desire, remember I want your fellowship!"

You know, the truth that Christ wants my fellowship, that He loves me, wants me to be with Him, wants to be with me and waits for me, has done more to transform my quiet time with God than any other single fact. Don't let Christ wait alone in the den of your heart, but everyday find some time when, with the Word of God and in prayer, you may fellowship with Him.

Before long He asked, "Do you have a workshop in your home?" Down in the basement of my heart I had a workbench and some equipment, but I was not doing much with it. Once in a while I would go down and fuss around with a few little gadgets, but I wasn't producing anything substantial or worthwhile. I led Him down there.

He looked over the workbench and what little talents and skills I had. He said, "This is quite well furnished. What are you producing with your life for the Kingdom of God?" He looked at one or two of

the little toys that I had thrown together on the bench and He held one up to me. "Are these little toys all that you are producing in your Christian life?"

"Well," I said, "Lord, that is the best I can do. I know it isn't much and I really want to do more, but after all, I have no skill or talents."

"Would you like to do better?" He asked.

"Certainly," I replied.

"Alright. Let Me have your hands. Now relax in Me and let My Spirit work through you. I know you are unskilled and clumsy and awkward, but the Spirit is the Master-worker and if He controls your hands and your heart, He will work through you." And so, stepping around behind me and putting His great, strong hands over mine, controlling the tools with His skillful fingers, He began to work through me. There's much more that I must still learn and I am very far from satisfied with the product that is being turned out, but I do know that whatever has been produced for God has been through His strong hand and through the power of His Spirit in me. Do not become discouraged because you cannot do much for God. Your ability is not the fundamental condition. It is He who is controlling your fingers and upon whom you are relying. Give your talents and gifts to God and He will do things with them that will surprise you.

I remember the time He inquired about the playroom. I was hoping He would not ask me about that.

There were certain associations and friendships, activities and amusements that I wanted to keep for myself. I did not think Christ would enjoy them or approve of them, so I evaded the question.

But there came an evening when I was leaving to join some companions, I was in college at the time and as I was about to cross the threshold, He stopped me with a glance. "Are you going out?"

I answered, "Yes."

"Good," He said, "I would like to go with you."

"Oh," I replied awkwardly. "I don't think, Lord, that You would really want to go with us. Let's go out tomorrow night. Tomorrow night we will go to prayer meeting, but tonight I have another appointment."

He said, "That's alright. Only I thought when I came into your home we were going to do everything together. We were going to be partners. I want you to know that I am willing to go with you."

"Well," I said, "we will go some place together tomorrow night."

But that evening I spent some miserable hours. I felt wretched. What kind of a friend was I to Christ, when I was deliberately leaving Him out of my associations, doing things and going places that I knew very well He would not enjoy? When I returned that evening, there was a light in His room and I went up to talk it over with Him. I said, "Lord, I have learned my lesson. I cannot have a good time without You. We will do everything together from now on." Then we went down into the play room of the house and He transformed it. He brought into my life real joy, real happiness, real satisfaction, real friendships. Laughter and music have been ringing in the house ever since.

There is just one more matter that I might share with you. One day I found Him waiting for me at the door. There was an arresting look in His eye. He said to me as I entered, "There is a peculiar order in the house. There is something dead around here. It's upstairs. I think it is in the hall closet." As soon as He said the words, I knew what He was talking about. Yes, there was a small hall closet up there on the

landing, just a few feet square, and in that closet behind lock and key I had one or two little personal things that I did not want anybody to know about and certainly I did not want Christ to see. I knew they were dead and rotting things. And yet I loved them, and I wanted them so for myself that I was afraid to admit they were there. I went up the stairs with Him and as we mounted, the odor became stronger and stronger. He pointed at the door and said, "It's in there! Some dead thing!"

I was angry. That's the only way I can put it. I had given Him access to the library, the dining room, the den, the workshop, the play room, and now He was asking me about a little two-by-four closet. I said inwardly, "This is too much. I am not going to give Him the key."

"Well," He said, reading my thoughts, "if you think I am going to stay up here on the second floor with this odor, you are mistaken. I will take my bed out on the back porch. I'm certainly not going to put up with that." And I saw Him start down the stairs.

When you have come to know and love Christ, the worst thing that can happen is to sense His fellowship retreating from you. I had to surrender. "I'll give You the key," I said sadly, "but You'll have to open the closet. You'll have to clean it out. I haven't the strength to do it."

"I know," He said. "I know you haven't. Just give Me the key. Just authorize me to take care of that closet and I will." So, with trembling fingers I passed the key over to Him. He took it from my hand, walked over to the door, opened it, entered it, took out all the decaying stuff that was rotting there and threw it away. Then He cleansed the closet, painted it, and fixed it up, doing it all in a moment's time. Oh, what victory and release to have the dead thing out of my life!

Then a thought came to me. I said to myself, "I have been trying to keep this heart of mine clean for Christ. I start on one room and no sooner have I cleaned that than another room is dirty. I begin on the second room and the first room becomes dusty again. I am so tired and weary trying to maintain a clean heart and an obedient life. I just am not up to it!" So I ventured a question; "Lord, is there any chance that You would take over the responsibility of the whole house and operated it for me and with me just as You did that closet? Would You take the responsibility to keep my heart what it ought to be and my life clean and pure for You?"

I could see His face light up as He replied, "Certainly, that is what I came to do. You cannot be a victorious Christian in your own strength. That is impossible. Let Me do it through you and for you. That is the way. But," He added slowly, "I am not owner of this house. I am just a guest. I have no authority to proceed since the property is not Mine."

I saw it in a minute and dropping to my knees, I said, "Lord, You have been a guest, and I have been the host. From now on I am going to be the servant. You are going to be the Lord." Running as fast as I could to the strong box, I took out the title deed to the house describing its assets and liabilities, its situation and condition. Then returning to Him, I eagerly signed it over to belong to Him alone for time and eternity. "Here," I said, "here it is, all that I am and have forever. Now You run the house. I'll just remain with You as servant and friend."

He took my life that day and I can give you my word, there is no better way to live the Christian life.

Remember our theme, you are not your own, Christ bought you with His own life, and "He holds all Creation together" you and me! Will you let Christ settle down and be at home in all the rooms of your

heart? To truly live the Christian life, you can't pick and choose which rooms you will allow Him to come in to; He wants your whole heart, the moment of truth is now, young people, what will it be?

"Isn't it strange that Princes and Kings and clowns that caper in sawdust rings and common folk like you and me, are builders of Eternity -
Each is given a bag of tools, a shapeless mass and a book of rules – and each must make 'ere life is flown – a stumbling block or a stepping stone."

Which will you be -

As you listen to this song, let it sink deep into your heart, because you see, if you have a need, I know He has the answer. Reach out and claim it dear ones, because you see, you are standing on Holy Ground.