



A TRIBUTE TO MAJOR W. I. THOMAS

Capernwray

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News

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A voice I'll miss and a picture I'll never forget

"Ian Thomas, Torchbearers." Invariably that's how he would answer the phone should he be alone in the house or manage to get there first. His answer to my question "How are you?" would often be "I'm beautiful" or "just as beautiful as yesterday." I mentioned that when writing to have you join the celebration of dad's 90th birthday three years ago. I miss that voice, frequently tinged with a humorous quip that reflected a still sharp mind and ever present sparkle in the eye. Just over a month short of his 93rd birthday, well beyond three score years and 10, age became a thing of the past for dad. For him eternity will now probably have lost all connection with time since eternal life has more to do with a Person than with the chronological. Jesus stated plainly what God said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, the God Isaac and the God Jacob", - they who had been dead for a few thousand years, a long time, really could not be any more alive! They are enjoying a life beyond the grave, life outside of time, earth time at least. The Lord Jesus, who is the Source of that life, makes absolutely certain that we know there is life beyond the grave, and how we can experience it. His life, as dad would frequently remind us, to be shared and enjoyed "now, not just in heaven but on the way to heaven."

Major has joined that "great cloud of witnesses" described in the 11th and 12th chapters of the book of Hebrews. Much to the great joy of heaven, that cloud grows daily as death gives way to life and what was seen with the eye of faith becomes even more real than anticipated. (Dad now really can lick that left index finger to turn the pages of his heavenly Bible!) . Many who are named along with the unnamed, there in Hebrews, were the topic and illustrations in his sermons and conversations for the pages of Scripture had come to life through his own experience of Christ. It is not insignificant that one of the last photos of dad has captured him smiling over his well-used Bible

opened at Luke 24. It might be going too far to say that he is pointing to the words of Jesus as he enlightens two discouraged disciples of their foolishness in being slow of heart and not believing all that the prophets had said. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Luke 24:27.



Dead? Never! Jesus couldn't have been more alive. He certainly pointed everyone with whom he spoke to Christ no matter what part of the Scriptures he expounded! "Who else," he would say, "is there to talk about!"

So those messages and sermons rooted in truths from the Old Testament would lead us to "Christ the biggest thing God said." Many of you reading this may recall other titles of his sermons such as, "The man who forgot to remember" or "Any old bush will do" that brought Moses out of the soiled pages of that well marked Bible and pointed us to Christ.



It is by faith that we discover the pleasure of God for "without faith it is impossible to please God." Hebrews 11:6 We are urged on by that photo album of characters to ensure we look confidently to the "author and finisher of our faith," the Lord Jesus Himself, who was the ultimate in that kind of living on His earthly journey. One marked by loving dependence and absolute obedience and which completely satisfied the Father.

Dad's own earthly journey of faith began with a tug in his heart and the response to a friend who shared his own discovery of a good thing. It would lead to what he described in his testimony as "My most memorable encounter with God."

As a child he recalled his family being "oncers" as it was considered respectable to go to church on Sunday morning "wind and weather permitting." He was given a Bible but not encouraged to read it. However in his own words said, "even before I reached my teens, there was an unspoken quest and an indefinable urge within my heart, - a longing after God. I can remember talking to Him about the trivial things which mean so much and loom so large in the little world of a small boy, - but my words echoed into space! God was 'somewhere out there,' but I did not know where to find Him. I did not know how to get His attention." However through a boy who invited him to a Bible Class and summer camp run by Crusaders (Now Urban Saints) God got Ian's attention and he accepted Christ as a twelve year old. He knew then that he was now a child of God with consequences far beyond his wildest dreams. However that was, as he put it "not my most significant encounter with God," for seven years later, "in spite of my noblest endeavours, I was baffled at my inability to bring others to the point of accepting Christ as their Saviour, an increasing sense of futility in all that I attempted to do, the increasing consciousness of personal

failure and defeat in my sincere desire to honour Christ by reflecting His likeness in my life.' Ian Thomas was desperately tired and very, very discouraged. At that point he told the Lord that as much as he loved Him, knew he was redeemed and heaven-bound, he just did not have what it takes to be used in God's service or bring glory to His name and so, at the age of 19 apologetically said to God, "I quit!" The rest as they say "is history." It really was a vital part in His Story and on many occasions Major declared that "Torchbearers was born out of despair." In his own admission he stated, "I had begun to feel like the Mississippi steam boat that stopped every time it blew its whistle! There was enough steam to make a noise, but not enough power to drive the pistons."

Much to his surprise, though he thought the Lord Jesus Christ would be disappointed at his admission of failure, it was almost as if he heard a sigh of relief and the Lord saying to him "Thank you! I have been waiting for this for seven years,



- all that time, with great sincerity but with misguided dedication you have been trying to live for me, a life that I only can live through you. At last I am in business!" It was in that memorable encounter that Major realised that Christ does not give us strength but is our strength. He does not give us victory but is our victory and explained that on that occasion "I got up from my knees that evening to begin the adventure of

letting Jesus Christ be God in the man, as once as man, He had allowed the Father to be God in Him." Within five weeks the Lord had taken him out of medical school and launched him into a ministry, which, for 70 years took him into every part of the world to share the Life of the One he encountered so that others would enjoy the reality of Christ as he did.



Dad's journey is done but I can still hear the voice I miss and have a picture I won't forget that encourages me to stay in the Word and that points me to Christ. Notice that after the challenges given in Hebrews 11 and 12, chapter 13 gives us a charge. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith." I can almost hear dad say, "don't copy me!" "Let God by His Holy Spirit, who is indispensable to your humanity, govern your behaviour, so that he can be the origin of His own image, source of His own activity, dynamic of his own demands and the cause of his own effect!"

That way of life and that way of faith was dad's way amongst us on earth but his pulpit is now in heaven for he has joined the great cloud of witnesses who challenge us to fix our eyes on Jesus and discover daily that He is Christ "the same yesterday, today and forever." Hebrews 13:8 That, we must not forget to remember!

Mark Thomas

Remembering my Dad



My dad didn't like

things crooked or out of plumb
to have to throw fish back
men wearing hats inside the house
men with long hair
crying babies or sniffing
people praying that God would be with them
beards
air conditioning blowing on him
playing cards, or rock music, especially drums
bad grammar or slang
bad manners
speaking with your mouth full
not using a butter knife
crumbs in the jam
elbows on the table
it when for 3 hours I tried to learn to whistle in the car
people mumbling
bad driving or motorcycles or even small planes
to spend money on himself, especially clothes

My dad loved

to fish and fish and fish and fish some more
to eat liquorice allsorts, chocolate cover brazil nuts, marzipan, tongue, shrimps and crabs
to drink ginger ale
to spend money on other people
to have fun – to wrestle and laugh
to tell jokes – often the same ones over and over again
to laugh at his own jokes
to tease and tickle
to drive fast and brake hard,...and accelerate and pause
nicknames
to pray
to preach – sometimes he preached when he prayed!

My dad really loved his wife
My dad really loved his boys and our wives
My dad loved his grandchildren
My dad loved his mules
My dad loved his extended family, which includes you,
But most of all,
My dad loves His Lord Jesus Christ!

Andy Thomas

How it all began

‘Handsome and Happy’ was my assessment of the young English evangelist to whom my widowed Mother gave accommodation in our humble home in Belfast, Northern Ireland in 1938. London born Ian Thomas was scheduled to be the speaker at a 3 week evangelistic mission in a small, local non-denominational church hall. It had been arranged earlier for Ian to be hosted by our friends Mr and Mrs Guthrie, but unexpectedly Dr Bingham, founder of the Sudan Interior Mission arrived in Belfast, and having been welcomed on former occasions to the Guthrie home with the offer to stay with them at any future time, the Guthries could no longer accommodate Ian Thomas, so it was my Mother, ever hospitable, who gladly accepted the request to receive this younger man to our home. Thank you, Dr Bingham!

Despite the fact that at the time of Ian Thomas’s visit I was enrolled in a final year of special schooling across town, in the hope of entering University, I found myself able to attend almost all his evening meetings in the hall, but especially the early morning prayer sessions, following which Ian began, much to my surprise, to escort me to a local bus stop where there would be transport to college.

At the age of about 7 in the context of a loving Christian home, I had definitely and simply accepted the Lord Jesus as my personal Saviour and Lord. I loved Him deeply and cherished the greatest ambition, to become a missionary. However the Christian life seemed like hard work, and it meant discipline, sometimes ridicule and certainly very serious business for which I felt incapable, let alone the hope to attain to missionary status. The evangelist Ian and his teaching were serious business too, but the Christ who indwelt him obviously gave him great joy - personal and real. This was the first hint to me of the kind of relationship with my Lord for which I longed.

The meetings came to an end, but not before this happy, handsome evangelist had become a family friend, had helped me with homework and promised to write after his return to England, saying he would send me an address list of boys and girls to whom he regularly mailed Scripture Union notes and maybe I could kindly add his list to the one of mine, which he had discovered was for exactly the same purpose and also for newly converted boys and girls. A good excuse for correspondence between us!

Letters came and letters went. Later there were 2 more visits for ministry in Belfast, so that we met again, and then World War II was declared in September 1939. Ian, having trained as an officer in the OTC at school and later commissioned, was recalled to his regiment, the Royal Fusiliers, and as a 2nd Lieutenant was sent, early in the war, to face the fighting in Belgium and France, but returning later and safely “in a hurry” as he often said, at the evacuation of Dunkirk in May, 1940 back to England.

Many more letters came from Ian, now to the hospital where I had begun nurse’s training, but one very special letter which I

read many times and about which I prayed and whose contents I long considered, invited me, if God so willed, to marry him! Obviously the answer was, finally, a “yes”!

We married in November 1941 and two years later Ian, now a Company Commander arrived with his battalion in North Africa, after which he was assigned to Greece and later to Italy, where, by now promoted to Major, he was involved in the 3rd, final and successful battle for Monte Cassino.

Before Ian’s demobilization from military service and on his last home leave, we discussed together his possible future ministry. The suggestion he proposed was that we should find a large house suitable for accommodating “lots of young people” in a holiday setting and atmosphere, and to teach

them how to find and come to know Jesus Christ personally as their indwelling, life giving Saviour and Lord. Following that home leave and on his return to Germany to be stationed in the Army of Occupation, Ian was made aware of just such a spacious house. It was Capernwray Hall, Carnforth, Lancashire, near England’s Lake District which was to be sold at auction on September 11th 1946. Unable either to view the building for himself or to have further leave from duty to attend the auction, Ian requested that with the help, if needed, of a business friend and using his army savings as a deposit I should visit the large house and then bid at the coming auction!

Not daring to disobey, but certainly anticipating that our small bid would be insufficient, Douglas Stocken, our business friend and I sat in the front row of a remarkably large room-full of bidders. Included with our ‘large house’ of 26 rooms we found there were in addition, 90 acres of land, 3 cottages and a family church! The whole estate also comprised 12 farms for which many people attending the auction had come to make their bids. The auction opened with the bidding for ‘our’ mansion and soon reached the figure which was Ian’s war savings. I was more than ready to go home, but Douglas, having bid as far as he dare, whispered “what shall I do”? I found myself replying “go a little further” - and he did! That was the very last bid!

There is a saying “a little goes a long way”. That ‘little further’ of September 11th, 1946 has, in the wisdom and goodness of God, stretched a very very long way, even to 25 Torchbearer Centres worldwide, to outreach in various other countries and to many thousands of people, young and



old whose lives have been blessed and sometimes changed for ever while attending Christian holiday conferences in attractive locations or enrolling in Bible Schools where they have responded to the original call "to find and come to know Jesus Christ personally as their indwelling, life giving Saviour and Lord"

The clear voice of that Bible teacher and evangelist, Major Ian Thomas, my husband of almost 66 years, whose whole life was poured out so that God's divine purposes in the purchase of Capernwray Hall in 1946 might be gloriously fulfilled, is now silenced. The Lord Jesus came to a hospital bed here in Colorado where we have been living, on August 1st 2007 and took

Ian, at over 92 years of age, to God's divinely prepared, bigger beyond belief and far far better 'large house' in Heaven, while members of our family, able to be there at the time, sang, as best we could under the circumstances, some familiar great old hymns, around his bed.

Gratefully we continue to see Jesus, shining His light through Torchbearers, many of whose lives have been touched in some way, down through the years, by the life and ministry of the "Major". It was also his very great joy to see all 4 of his sons fully involved on staff with Torchbearers.

"To God be the Glory"

Joan Thomas

Tributes to the Major

Words seem very shallow in seeking to express what the Lord did in my life through Major Thomas. Indeed, only a revelation by Christ Himself would be sufficient in communicating what the Lord gave me through His precious servant. For it was through the life and ministry of Major Thomas that Christ showed me Himself, as my Life.

I met Major Thomas the first time as an 18 year-old bible school student at Bodenseehof in 1979 when he came for a week of lectures at the end of fall term. Both Major and Mrs. Thomas came that year and I was very impressed with their reverent, yet warm, demeanor among the students. I was standing in the snack bar one evening and Major came bounding in, walked straight up to me and gave me a firm handshake and a friendly, "Hello!". It took me aback at the time that a man of his age and stature would genuinely want to even speak with me. (He was only 64 at the time, which doesn't seem that old to me anymore!) I had no clue what the Major was talking about that week, but in the kindness of God the Spirit Himself made it clear to me that whatever it was he was speaking about, it was the truth and He made me hungry for more.

During the next 5 years I learned the language of the message God had entrusted to Major, "Christ in you, the hope of glory". But that was not enough. It is possible to have the language without the life; I was very frustrated. It was in his guest room that evening in 1985, in St. Paul, Minnesota, that I exposed my desperation to Major Thomas. It was after a short prayer together that I discovered the truth of what I had heard in Bible School years before, by merely thanking Jesus that He lived in me and holding Him responsible for what He said. What a discovery that was! It's been a discovery I've been learning and re-learning ever since.

The reality of Christ's indwelling Life has been the one thing in my Christian life that has made Christianity make sense. It is His Life alone that has proven sufficient to save me from all I am, and ever will be, apart from Him. Christ alone is the reason for any blessing I have enjoyed in my life and ministry to this day. I'm so very thankful for Major Thomas, but I'm even more thankful that he left me with Jesus, who is my Life.

Peter Reid - Principal of Bodenseehof Bible School, Germany

Growing up the son of a pastor of a small house-church in southern Spain in the 1970's, I had heard of many bible teachers. However, there was one preacher (my father referred to him as a Christian "Giant") who was unique. My father had obtained a series of cassette tapes (not sure if they were official or boot-legged copies) from a Major Ian W. Thomas, and as a large family (six children) we listened to these tapes around our kitchen table during breakfast for several years. I had never heard such a powerful and eloquent speaker in my life! After several weeks we had all almost memorized these tapes, especially my father, who would have a "pseudo-conversation" with Major Thomas; when Major Thomas would ask a question, my father would answer it before Major could respond! As a boy of around 11 years in age, I thought it was pretty entertaining! However, the clear message of Christ in you - gas in the car, electricity in the light, hand in the glove, etc.



was powerfully proclaimed! About ten years later, after I had moved back to the U.S. to continue my studies, I saw an interesting sign on a local church "Revival Week - Major Ian W. Thomas". I could not believe my eyes! The opportunity to meet in person the preacher I had listened for years! I not only attended the meetings but also took along some of my friends - one of them, Phil Newman, gave his life to Christ and is faithfully still walking with the Lord! To my surprise - and delight - the message was the same that I had heard as a child! I was thrilled to meet Major Thomas in person, purchase "The Saving Life of Christ" and have him autograph it for me. Many years passed until, due to my father's health, our family home in Spain was not being used and it was offered to Torchbearers to continue the work in Spain that had started in Mar Cristalino, located about 2 hours north. Major Thomas came to Spain several times and met with me and my father to make plans and arrangements for using Rio Vida. Despite many setbacks and limitations, thanks to many volunteers as well as to the vision and tenacious support of Major Thomas, Torchbearers Rio Vida became a reality in 1998. Major Thomas was our first official guest speaker in our conference hall that summer. I had the privilege of translating for him into Spanish; the name of the conference: Rediscovering Christ. I praise the Lord for giving me the opportunity to know Major Thomas as a "giant", as a "boss", and as a friend.

Paul Platillero - Former Director of Rio Vida, Spain

