

# CAN I BE SURE - I'VE LEFT IT SO LATE?



**Bernard Palmer**, a retired surgeon in Hertfordshire, tells the story of a patient who reminds us that it is never too late to find Christ.



SCAN FOR MORE

*Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. (John 5:24)*

**B**rian had just been told he had secondary cancer in his liver, causing him to become jaundiced. He and his wife realised that the outlook was not good. I was his surgeon, and after talking about possible treatment options, I asked Brian, 'Do you have a faith that helps you at a time like this, or aren't you sure about such things?'

He turned to his wife and asked, 'Do we, dear?'

As there didn't appear to be much interest in spiritual things, I simply said, 'For me, knowing that there is a God who loves us and cares for us is the only thing that makes sense of problems like this', and changed the subject.

The following week, however, I met Brian as he sat in the waiting room for a blood test. He said, 'You know what you said last week - it is strange, but my next-door neighbour, who is a Christian, asked us if we would like to go to church. What do you think?'

'I think that is lovely, but honestly, Brian, I wonder if sitting through some hymns, prayers, and a sermon is what you most need at the moment. I would guess what you most need to know is "How can I get right with God?"'

There was a two-second pause before Brian looked up and asked, 'How do I get right with God?' We arranged to meet up the following morning at his home, and there we went over the basics of the Christian faith. One thing really bothered him - how could God accept him when he had spent most of his life without any interest in God whatsoever?

We looked at several key verses again, noting how their emphasis is 'to all' or to 'whoever'. There is no age limit or discussion about past mistakes! We looked at:

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)*

The offer to be adopted as children of God is open to everyone who turns to Christ for forgiveness.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)*

This willingness of God to accept anybody who genuinely turns to God keeps being repeated:

*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in God's one and only Son. (John 3:18)*

As the verse at the start of this page reminds us, our natural status is that we stand outside of God's kingdom. But that whoever turns to Christ is accepted by God. Jesus keeps repeating this vital message.

We then turned to the parable Jesus told that most answers the question, can a person really be accepted by God if they turn to him so late in life? In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Jesus is specifically telling us that his kingdom will contain some who have spent all their lives working for him, whereas some will be accepted at the last hour. Yet all receive the same full day's pay. We also looked at the story of the repentant thief on the cross. A man couldn't leave it much later than he did to acknowledge his personal faith that Jesus is the Saviour of the world,

*Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. (Luke 23:42)*

Jesus gave him the most reassuring answer anyone could want to hear in such a desperate situation,

*I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise. (Luke 23:43)*

Brian said that he wanted to spend some time thinking all this through but that he would like to come to our church the following Sunday. The sermon that Sunday just happened to be on the same parable from Matthew 20! After the service, I went to talk with Brian and his wife, Barbara, as they sat in the pew. His opening words were thrilling, 'I've some good news to share with you - my wife has become a Christian too!' Brian survived, remarkably, for another six months, and both he and Barbara came to really love their Saviour and became fully involved in the life of God's people for the rest of their lives. ◦