



Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

Joe Beatson is 69 years old. He's been drinking hard liquor at an alarming rate for 49 of those years. For the last several years he's been consuming at least a fifth a day—and that's a lot of drinking.

Physically, it was killing him. Spiritually, he was already dead.

Joe owns and runs a meat market and grocery store in Eau Gallie. Last year he re-hired an old drinking buddy, Bill Gordinier, as his meat cutter. Bill was just coming off a drunk when he came back to work and accepted Joe's usual offer for a drink to "calm his nerves." But that was the last drink Bill took.

Something was happening in Bill's life. Day after day he reported for work sober. He consistently turned down Joe's offer for a drink from the bottle they kept in the meat cooler. Joe found out Bill was going to church—regular. He sneered at him, ridiculed him, derided him but could not deny the change that had taken place in Bill's life.

Then word came that Bill had been ordained a deacon in his little church and was working with a group of young boys teaching them about Jesus. "Bill, you're a damn' fool to spend your time messing around that church," Joe said. But Bill just smiled and told Joe he was praying for him.

Others were praying too. A lot of folks. Mrs. Irvin, a little Negro woman who lives behind Joe's market and has a little prayer chapel called "Mother's Prayer Garden" was praying. The people at Bill's church were praying. A lot of Joe's customers were praying. Joe just drank harder until it seemed he would die.

Then, with Bill making the arrangements, Joe finally agreed to be admitted to Hebron Center, an alcoholic rehabilitation center in North Carolina. For eight weeks Joe was submitted to the Apostle Paul's philosophy, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18). And Joe returned to Florida filled not with distilled spirits, but filled with a new wine—the Holy Spirit.

Old Mrs. Irvin came in the store one day and said, "Praise the Lord, Joe, we've been praying for you." And old, tough, hard-as-nails Joe Beatson cried and said, "I know it."

Joe testified at Bill's church last week (only it's Joe's church, too, now). "Not only did I find sobriety, but I found salvation. Jesus Christ is alive in my heart."

One of his old drinking cronies came into the market one day to make fun and instead had to listen to a half-hour sermon. He shook his head and said, "I'll say this, Joe, whatever it is you've found, it's real." Joe answered with a grin, "I'll tell you, buddy, it's not what I've found that's real, it's Who found me that makes the difference."

There may be a lot of fools stumbling around who say God is dead, but I doubt if they'll cite Joe Beatson as an example. And if you've got an alcoholic problem it just might be worth a trip to Eau Gallie to visit the Atlantic Food Service just across the tracks on 5th Avenue. I imagine you'll come away with more than a package of spare ribs—that is, if Joe Beatson or Bill Gordinier is in.