

## **“No Time To Die”**

*by Melanie Henry – KCM*

Ben Priest loaded a syringe with heroin. Slipping the needle into a vein with practiced skill; he felt a familiar rush sweep over his body. How many times had he gone through these same motions? Thousands, no doubt. Yet Ben knew that this time would be different.

For this day, May 11, 1980, was the day he would die.

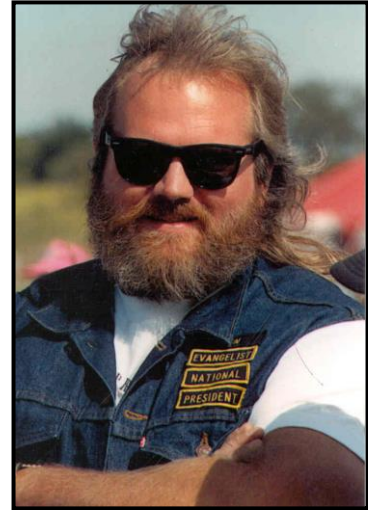
Ben wasn't taking any chances about that. He followed the heroin with cocaine. Then, for added assurance, he injected crystal. Sitting down, he waited to die. It wasn't really death that Ben wanted, just an escape from the pain of living. He'd been searching for that since the day his dad walked out of his life at 7 years old. He had started with alcohol at age 11, and then moved to drugs at 13. When drugs failed to satisfy, he joined a small club of outlaw bikers hoping it would give him the sense of security and family he longed for. It didn't. Instead, the emptiness in his heart led Ben to more drugs, more violence, and a stint in a dingy Louisiana jail.

He'd been released from the jail on a legal technicality, but he hadn't been released from the pain. As Ben leafed through the pages of his dismal past, he thought of his younger brother. Three years ago he'd become a Jesus freak. He was pastoring a church in Louisiana. How strange, he thought. Ben looked out the window at the Texas sky. He should be out cold by now. Instead, he was sitting here very much conscious and very much alive.

The truth was Ben never had been very good at dying. He thought of the time someone had firebombed a house he was in. He'd been too doped up to find his way out. He would have been incinerated if his grandfather hadn't arrived on the scene and dragged him to safety. All his clothes, everything except the neck of his t-shirt and one sleeve, had burned away. But, strangely there had been no burns on his body.

Then there was the time a drug deal went sour and he was chased down and run over by a Lincoln Continental. Add to that the times he had found himself looking down the wrong end of a gun and it was easy to see; death just couldn't catch Ben Priest. The shrill ringing of the telephone jolted Ben from his daydream. He listened intently while some woman named Gloria, a friend of his brother, told him he needed to go to church that morning. Church? More likely he'd be going to hell. "Look," he told the woman. "I wouldn't know where to go to church." "I suggest Lakewood Church there in Houston," she said. "The pastor's name is Osteen."

Ben hung up the phone and thought about the call. The drugs were taking their sweet time working, why not go? He had nothing to lose. Somehow Ben made it to the church. He walked into a sanctuary packed with standing room only. "You need a seat, brother?" an



usher asked. "Don't call me brother!" Ben snapped. The man led Ben to a seat near the front. Ben listened intently to the sermon. "Just give Jesus a sincere chance to change your life," Brother Osteen preached. Even Jesus couldn't help me now I'm too far gone, Ben thought. After the service, he went home and spent the afternoon pumping his system full of drugs. But still, his body refused to die.

That evening, Ben walked back into Lakewood Church. "You need a place to sit, brother?" the same man asked. "I told you not to call me brother!" Again, Ben listened to the sermon, knowing that for him, it was too late.

Afterward, he walked outside the church and stood on the shoulder of the road. He could feel the drugs taking their toll. The presence of death was unmistakable. This is it, Ben thought. Suddenly, he dropped to his knees and did something he never thought he would do. He prayed. "Jesus, I don't know if you're real like people say. But if you are, I give you my life." Instantly, a man appeared beside him. Ben was afraid to look in his face; somehow he knew, without being told, that the man was Jesus. "I saw Him reach over to touch me," Ben recalls. "His hand passed inside my chest and I felt something move. Suddenly, I felt...clean. I remembered all the times I'd tried to wash my guilt away. Now, in one instant it was gone. "Then he touched my head, and His hand passed into my mind. It felt like I'd awakened from a bad dream. All the confusion was gone. My thoughts cleared. I had peace. For the first time in years, I was in my right mind." Then suddenly, a surge of power exploded through Ben's body. He figured he was dying. Gasping for breath, he opened his mouth to speak his last words and to his amazement, what came out was a language he'd never heard. Seconds turned into minutes as the language continued to flow. It was wonderful! "Every time I breathed it felt like an electrical charge moved in and out of my lungs," Ben explains.

*Instead of dying, Ben Priest was becoming more alive by the moment.*

"I was happy, but uncertain about what was taking place. I went to a nearby convenience store and tried to ask the woman behind the counter if she knew what was happening to me. But when I spoke, that same strange language came out of my mouth, and the woman fell on the floor."

Ben looked down at her in puzzled surprise. He had no idea why she had fallen. He didn't realize that his encounter with Jesus had left him literally radiating with the power of God. Afraid that passersby might think he'd attacked the woman, Ben rushed out of the store and went to see his partner, a fellow drug dealer, but he was no help either. Like the lady in the store, he took one look at Ben and fell to the floor. Bewildered, Ben left and headed across town toward his mother's house. Maybe she could explain this peculiar business. After all, she'd been acting pretty strangely herself lately. More than once Ben had glanced out his window and seen her walking around his property with a Bible under one arm. She'd point at his house and declare, "Devil, you can't have my son!" Ben was still speaking in the unknown language when his mother opened the door. He hadn't spoken a word in English in two hours. He reached out to take his mother's hand...and she fell on the floor. "Boy, what's the matter with you?" roared Ben's stepfather. "Did you get messed up on drugs and knock your mother down?" He stormed across the room toward Ben, but 10 feet away from

him...he fell to the floor. Just then the phone rang. Ben answered it speaking in tongues. "Ben!" He heard his brother say, "You met the Lord!"

SO THAT'S WHAT THIS MEANS!

Ben went home that night a different man.

"My partner showed up at my home between 2 and 3 o'clock that morning," Ben remembers. "The moment he stepped through the door, I knew he wasn't my brother anymore. He brought a batch of drugs. I told him I'd gotten saved and didn't need it. I picked up the coffee table with all our drugs on it and dumped the whole thing outside." From then on, Ben turned his back on everything he'd ever known. "I lost it all when I met Jesus," he says. "I lost all my friends. I lost my possessions. I lost my finances." Ben also lost something else, a lifetime of pain and loneliness. In its place, he found Someone whose love for him surpassed his wildest dreams. And even more astounding, He found that love had been there all along. "I remember one time when I dropped by to visit my grandparents," Ben recalls. "My grandmother opened her buffet and pulled out a little sack. Inside were scraps and pieces of material. She laid them out on the table, and I realized it was the neck and sleeve of the t-shirt I'd worn the night of the fire." "Honey," she said, "Almighty God



intervened in your life to save you. He has things for you to do." Then she pulled out a tattered calendar. His grandparents had marked the days and nights that God had awakened them to pray for Ben. The dates told their own story. How he'd survived the fire. How he'd miraculously lifted a Lincoln Continental off his stomach and walked away. Each miraculous escape from death was preceded by prayer.

Ben tried to comprehend God's love. A love that pursued him year after year. A love that wouldn't quit. "It seemed strange to me," Ben admits. "Love definitely wasn't the code I had lived by up to that time, but I wanted to change. About two weeks after I was saved, Kenneth Copeland arrived at Lakewood Church to teach a seminar. His topic was the love walk. That teaching laid a foundation in my life."

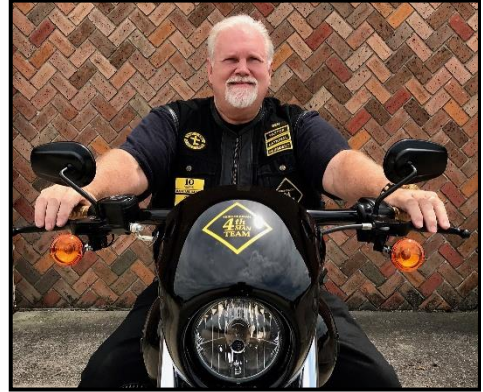
Ben was so excited about God's love, he told just about everyone he met. He kept a notebook, recording the names of each person who accepted Jesus as Lord. At the end of four months, his notebook held 1,000 names. Despite his evangelistic accomplishments, however, Ben still felt oddly out of place. He enrolled in Bible college and graduated, but He couldn't seem to find where he fit in the Body of Christ. *Exactly what was it God wanted him to do?*

About a year after he was saved, Ben learned the answer to that question. "A woman told me that God had spoken to her in a dream and told her to give me a motorcycle," he recalls. It was a 1950 Panhead, orange with a black pinstripe. A classic Harley-Davidson. "I poured a can of motor oil on that bike and anointed it for God. I dedicated it as a machine of war in

His army. In my search for the security of a family, I was part of a real family of brothers and sisters. The Bible called it the Tribe of Judah."

It has been more than 40 years now since Ben began Tribe of Judah Motorcycle Ministries. Over 40 years of preaching the gospel to the outlaw world and people in all walks of life.

During those years, some of the people Ben has preached to have wanted to hear the gospel. Others haven't. Laughing, Ben recalls one particularly rough character who demanded he keep Jesus in church, then backed up his demand shoving a shotgun in Ben's face. He even tried to pull the trigger, but he couldn't. Ben admits, he was a little disappointed. After all, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The thought of going to Heaven brought a thrill to Ben's heart. In the end, the joy on Ben's face brought the shotgun-toting sinner to his knees and he was born again. It seems Heaven will have to wait awhile on Ben Priest. He doesn't have time for dying these days. He and Jesus have too much living to do!



***Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature:  
old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.  
(2 Cor. 5:17 KJV)***