

## **Tom Hutcherson**

March 27th, is eternally significant in my life. 12 years ago, today, God saved me. Not according to my deeds, but according to His mercy. He opened my eyes to my desperate need for Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. This still shocks me. That God would save me?! What a glorious mystery.

Having grown up in church since age 5 and involved in every ministry and choir/musical event until I was age 18, Jesus should have come pretty naturally, but this was not the case. Plus, in the church I grew up in, the Bible was not held high as authoritative and the Gospel and Jesus were not esteemed as glorious and necessary. The community aspect is what kept me connected. Definitely not Jesus.

Early on in my teenage years I started experimenting with drugs of various kinds and various intensities. Quickly progressing to: "you name and I've done it." It was recreational and fun for me. Basically a hobby. All while continuing to go to church. Thank God for girls. Although completely uninterested in the Gospel, the girls at church sure had my attention. Funny sometimes how God works. So I continued to go to church to interact with the nice young ladies, my friends and go on fun trips.

Spring time, my senior year in high school, we got a new youth pastor. He brought this wild, crazy, radical concept about us reading our Bibles. I, of course, immediately thought he was crazy. Who likes to read books?! And especially the Bible! From there, we were taught about what The Bible says about Jesus and who he is and what he did. And the light switch went on. I was blinded but now I could see. The Gospel became true. I put my hope and trust in Jesus Christ. It was glorious. Except that the fear of facing my drug-doing buddies and lifestyle was immediately setting in. God was good though. Helping to progressively weed out these friends from influencing my life and pull me away from the drug culture. Although it was not instantaneous, it was progressive. God was faithful, even through my repeated unfaithfulness. Glory to Him alone. Quitting my job also became a necessity because I had created a system to steal money from the company I worked for, each shift I worked. Basically stealing thousands of dollars from them. Not to mention that I did drugs with the staff, manager, and regional manager. There was no option here. I had to quit. God was faithful. My parents allowed me to go on mission trips instead of work all that summer. I cannot describe my gratefulness for that.

The influence of hip hop music over my life around this same time was immense. I grew up on it and was so intrigued when it came to quality rhymes over great beats. It spoke to me in a way that other music didn't. It was real, rugged, and raw. It was real life. When I was introduced to rappers like Lecrae, Trip Lee and Shai Linne, who produce sound theology over really great beats, it was love at first sight. They had a passion for taking the Gospel to people through their music. These guys knew their Bibles and it was inspiring. It was speaking to everything I had been learning about God, but through a rap song! It was fantastic. And I have been listening ever since.

You know how God sometimes uses some really potent scriptures to radically change you? Well, Romans 9 changed my life. I love how the glorious Holy Spirit uses God's word to change us. To conform us into Christ. It's a beautiful thing. The absolute sovereignty of God expressed throughout Holy Scripture and most assuredly in Romans 9 shook the foundations of my life and revealed God to be bigger, more loving, more holy, and more glorious. The holy and righteous wrath that Jesus bore for the penalty of my sins became more of a reality than ever. I was freshly amazed by the sweet sovereign grace of God.

Much spiritual growth in the past 6 years has been in the context of this Church. I knew one person here, Earl Lynge, and he faithfully invited me here knowing I was having some struggles with my former church. He invited, so I came, knowing no one and not knowing any of the songs. My experience was unexpected and unique. I experienced true community. I experienced community rooted in the Gospel. I felt like I was home. It was quite special and continues to be

for me each time I walk in. This church has had such a lasting effect on my life and surely, by the mercy of God, will continue to.

Two observations from the last 12 years: I am increasingly more aware of my sins and sinfulness and I am increasingly aware of my need for Jesus Christ. The more the years pass, the more I zoom in on Jesus. It's simply all about Jesus Christ. His perfectly righteous, holy life. His wrath absorbing, substitutionary death. His victorious resurrection. And ultimately, His triumphant return. Our hope is in Jesus. Alone. No other name. And no other way. Believers: Look to Jesus. Keep Looking to Jesus. Unbelievers: Look to Jesus. He died so that you may live. He suffered so that you may be blessed. Look to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-2 "Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings to us closely and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."