

A MEMORABLE MIRACLE IN MY LIFE

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This testimony is about an incident that happened during the early years of my life in America. Today is Friday, January 3, 2013, but my memory is flashing back forty years to the month of December 1972. Even though I do not exactly remember all the specific details surrounding this miraculous incident, I will narrate it as completely as possible, providing some background information of my life during that period.

I was a twenty-three year old student pursuing a Master's degree in English literature at the main campus of Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, having received my Bachelor's Degree in the same field from Kerala University (Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta) in 1970. I had a part-time book-shelving job in the library, working fifteen hours per week. My monthly income was 70 dollars. After separating seven dollars (tithe) for the work of God, I was left with only 63 dollars to pay for my room rent, tuition fees, food, clothes, books, stationery supplies, and all other expenses.

Due to the scarcity of finances, during those months I managed with only a couple of pants and shirts. I pretty well remember now that I did not even have the fifty cents needed to buy a belt for my pants. My shoes were also completely worn out with holes in the soles. It was an Iranian student who cut my hair to help me save the barber's charge of two dollars, and in return I cut his hair too, without charging any labor fees. The campus dining halls were closed during holidays, especially for three weeks during Christmas break, and I survived those holidays eating plain bread, banana, and chips. There was no cooking facility in the dormitory. I had no money to eat in a restaurant.

When the fall semester started in August(1972), I had some savings in the bank earned from my full time summer job. However, by the middle of the semester, I had used up all my savings for different educational expenses. This was the most financially difficult period in my life.

For me, this financial stringency was something new. When I was in India attending college, my father, a well- to- do rubber dealer, regularly sent me a money order at the beginning of every month to cover all my educational expenses, including my hostel fees which covered the breakfast, two meals a day, and a 4 o'clock snack. He used to send a little extra money, which I used to buy extra snacks from the coffee shop near the college. As normal for most growing youngsters, I had such a big appetite and quick digestion during those teenage years that I could eat an elephant and still feel hungry in a couple of hours.

However, during my campus life in America, I did not have the money to buy any extra snacks, even though I studied up to midnight regularly. I ate supper at the university dining hall, which regularly closed at 6 pm. Studying late in the nights, I always got hungry around nine o'clock, my old appetite still in full force. Many students in the dormitory take

a break from their studies around nine o'clock and would get hamburgers, hot dogs, and other snacks with coffee from the vending machines. It was an eight-story dormitory which housed approximately five hundred students. The smell of coffee and hamburgers being warmed up in the microwave ovens fills the hallways. I would start salivating, my empty stomach growling, but I had no money to approach a vending machine. So I would step out to the hallway, fill my empty stomach with fresh tap water, and start back for another three hours of studying. (Now, I do not consider this a big deal when I think of others who cannot afford even a single decent meal a day. But my belly in those days did not grasp all such Gandhian philosophy on being content with what we have). Besides, studying hard consumed a lot of calories and energy. In addition, all the tensions and stress related to writing research and term papers and taking frequent exams for almost every course caused my body (and brain) to consume extra energy, the body demanding more food.

The fall semester continued like this—financially struggling, but still moving forward. The university closed for the Christmas holidays by the second week of December. To start back to school in January, I needed five hundred dollars in advance payment for tuition fees and boarding. An additional amount (close to 3,000 dollars) was needed later in the semester to pay for the remaining portion of tuition fees and other educational expenses.

Unfortunately, I did not even have fifty dollars. I didn't personally know any Keralites in the whole state of Arkansas other than my uncle (mother's first cousin) who was about 200 miles away. He was a philosophy professor, having only an average salary. Further, I did not want to depend on him financially, having already borrowed money from him for emergency needs in previous months. Also, my uncle did not have much money to spare, having to rent a bigger house to accommodate his wife and daughter, who had joined him in America just a few months back. Above all, my dignity did not allow me to approach anybody for finances repeatedly.

In those days, scholarships and loans were not available for foreign students at the university. If my memory is correct, there were six thousand students on that campus, about two dozen from Asian countries. The spring semester registration had already started in the first week of January, 1973, and I had no cash in hand. My education was put on hold—my hopes and ambitions almost crushed. I couldn't take off for a semester because, according to the immigration rules, foreigners on student visa would be deported if they were not registered every semester in an accredited institution. I thought of temporarily stopping my education for a few months in order to work full time and save some money for the following semester. However, the immigration rules allow full time work only in the summer months. If I broke this rule, that could become another reason for the cancellation of my visa and immediate deportation.

I didn't even think of approaching my local church at Jonesboro for financial assistance. I regularly attended Sunday worship at the Church of God, a Pentecostal

denomination with headquarters in Cleveland, Tennessee.(I was born and brought up in the same denomination in India, the local church in our village having started by my father in our house in 1952 when I was only three years old). The church I attended in Jonesboro was a small church with less than fifty members, ninety percent belonging to the lower middle class based on their income level. The pastor himself had only a moderate salary from the church, and his wife was a student at the university with only a part-time job on campus. I had no human sources to turn to.

I was on my knees from the second week of December to the first week of January, praying and crying out to God, seeking divine intervention, so I could continue my education. I also spent the Christmas holidays writing Christian articles and preparing a few chapters of my first Malayalam book, ZASTRAVUM BIBILUM(SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE), refuting arguments advanced by the atheistic organizations of Kerala. Fortunately, foreign students were allowed to stay in the dormitory during Christmas holidays.

In spite of my earnest prayers day and night, I did not feel that God was moving on my behalf. I had never felt dejected and hopeless like that before. Classes were just about to begin in one week. I did not register for classes because I did not even have a fraction of the amount needed to enroll in any course.

One morning, someone from the dormitory Director's office came to my room on the seventh floor. He informed me that the Director had received a call from the Office of the Registrar asking me to contact the office immediately. I did not have a phone in my room because I could not afford it. As far as I remember, I was the only student without phone service in the room. The telephone connection was there in the room, but it was not hooked up, as I did not have the money to pay the initial charges and monthly service payments.

Without delay, I went to the Registrar's office. The lady in charge of the Registrar's office handed to me a sheet of paper with a name and a telephone number. This was what she told me, as I now recollect from my memory : "This morning, Rev. Curt Tull, Senior Pastor of the Church of the Disciples of Christ in the city, called this office. He requested me to find an Asian or Indian professor or student on this campus who could speak for a seminar arranged for the Men's Club in his church."

Indeed, at that time, there was an Indian professor at the university who was a well known scholar and symposium speaker. He was born and brought up in India but moved to Karachi and then to the United States. It was a large campus with scattered buildings in a hilly 1300- acre landscape, and I have seen this professor only twice during my entire three semesters of study there. Every foreign student and professor was busy day and night pursuing each person's goal in life. Science students stayed day and night in the labs; others in the library or in their rooms studying. The library was open until midnight. There was no spare time for socializing. As far as I can remember, there were also a few Asian professors and a handful of Asian and North Indian students in the computer division and science areas.

Many foreign students lived outside the campus in private lodges or one-bed room apartments with kitchen facilities, so there was no communication between on campus residents and others. I had not heard of any international students club at the university.

The office lady explained further: “ I searched through the list of foreigners from Asia (and India) on this campus, and it was your name (Samkuty Chacko) that caught my attention first. Are you willing to go to speak at the Men's Club in the church?”

I agreed, then thanked her for mentioning my name to the pastor.

I called the pastor. He came to the campus to meet me personally. He explained that for several months, the Men's Club had been studying the major religions and missionary works in all continents and major nations of the world. They already covered the continent of Africa with a guest speaker from that area. The first Saturday night of January was designated for Asia, particularly the nation of India. The Pastor was searching for an Asian or Indian professor or student, who could do a presentation on major religions of Asia and the impact of Christian missionary work in that continent.

I said that I had never done any seminar-type presentations before, but that I would prepare a speech to the best of my abilities. He responded, “Sam Chacko, do not worry about preparing too much; just share a few things that you already know about the religions of Asia, especially India. We want to know about Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions in your nation and your continent.” I was more than willing, though a little nervous about the challenging responsibility.

He came in his car that Saturday evening to take me to the seminar. I spoke on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, and the impact of foreign missions in India and Asia. I also led a question-answer session at the end, and then ate supper with the club members. They asked more questions about Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam in the Asian continent than Christianity. They were particularly curious to know about Buddhism. They were also very interested to know about the schools and hospitals that missionaries had built in Asia, including India. They were a group of men who were more interested in gaining knowledge about other cultures than about what missionaries did to convert people to Christianity. After the seminar, I received an honorarium of twenty-five or fifty dollars. I do not remember the exact amount.

The pastor took me back to my dormitory around 9 pm. As I was getting out of the car, he offered the following parting words: “Sam Chacko, I know that you are alone here far from your home land. You have no parents or relatives here. You have no car either. But consider us as your friends and relatives. If you need any help from us or need a ride, feel free to contact me.” Then he handed me his address card. Actually, during the conclusion of the seminar also, the pastor openly said that I should consider them as my friends available to help, if necessary.

After reaching my room, I did not go to bed, but knelt by my chair, and as usual started praying that God would supply my needs, so that I could register and start back to school immediately. During the prayer, I felt strongly in my heart that Pastor Curt Tull was sent to me by God like the raven was directed to the hungry prophet Elijah with a piece of bread in its beak, as recorded in the Bible. So I felt I should accept "the bread" and ask him for some financial help. Something told me deep in my heart that the lady in charge of the Registrar's office was also an agent of God. She spotted my name in the list before any other Asian or Indian names. Some may see it as a mere accident or pure coincidence, but I felt that it was a divine intervention.

Churches normally use only Christian speakers for Sunday services, but they use Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, or members of other religions for seminars and panels conducted by religious clubs. As a matter of fact, Pastor Tull's church was an open-minded church, and they would have preferred a non-Christian speaker. Many such churches want to hear people from different religions, so they could enlarge their knowledge of world religions. They also prefer to hear from non-Christians who look at Christianity from the perspective of an outsider. Pastor Tull could have called another college, junior college, company or hospital in the same city or in a nearby city or village and located an Asian or Indian professor, medical doctor or engineer who was more qualified than me to speak on Asian or Indian religions or on the subject of missionary impact on the Asian continent. There were Indian physicians and engineers in the region. Rev. Tull could have picked their names and numbers from the telephone book. The university Registrar could have picked a Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist student or professor from the list of Asian nationals at the campus. The university has a couple of branch campuses in the area where the registrar could have located Indian or Asian instructors. There were many Buddhist students from Japan and Thailand at the main campus. Indeed, I believe it was divine providence that led her eyes to my name, as you will see below from what happened in the following days.

Late that Saturday night after my seminar presentation, I started writing a detailed letter to Pastor Tull explaining how I was in a standstill with my educational plans. I completed the letter early next morning. Monday morning, I prayed touching the letter tightly, raising the letter in my hand toward heaven, my eyes full of tears. Then I mailed it, asking the Holy Spirit to go with the letter.

Actually, my life that week was at the end of a one-way street. It was the first time that I had ever approached anyone for a financial need other than my family. In three days, the pastor responded to my letter by phone: "I have good news for you, Sam Chacko. I telephoned the church committee members, and they unanimously agreed to pay all your educational expenses in advance at the university office this week, including your boarding and food."

Pastor Tull continued: "Go ahead Sam, and register for classes today. I already talked to the Registrar and made arrangements. Not only that, my church will pay your entire educational expenses until you complete your Master's degree. "

Most of the members in Tull's church were well-to-do people, several of them being bankers, businessmen, company managers, engineers, doctors, and other highly paid professionals, as well as widows who inherited wealth from their deceased husbands.

After talking to him on the public phone at the corner of my dormitory hallway, I went back to my room. I couldn't stop crying.

This miracle happened forty years ago in January 1973. As I conclude this testimony now, wiping tears in my eyes, the following Bible verse is reverberating deeply in my heart: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and you shall glorify me." (Psalms 50: 15).

Pastor Tull invited me to attend his church regularly, but I never attended the services there, except one time when I was asked to speak again when Tull was away on vacation. The doctrines of his denomination were much different from my Pentecostal faith. Mainly, his church, as far as I knew then, did not believe in the visible Second Coming of Christ. There were also other doctrinal differences. I remember the Sunday sermon I preached in his church in 1973. I had three points in my sermon. The third point was based on the visible personal Second Coming of Christ. They were tolerant enough not to cancel their financial assistance to me, in spite of the fact that I spoke openly about what I believe. They were a group of very kind people. I continued to attend the Church of God in Jonesboro pastored by Reverend T.L. Henderson.

I completed my M.A. degree at Arkansas State University in July 1973. Pastor Tull's church supported me financially until I moved 510 miles away to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette to pursue a Ph. D. degree. (The former name of the University of Louisiana was University of Southwestern Louisiana). I was admitted to the university with a teaching assistantship, where I taught two classes each day and earned enough money to further my education and research for the next four years. I also got a tuition waiver scholarship at the new university, so never again did I have to pay any fees for my education.

"Great is thy faithfulness. Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed, Thy hands hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, O God Unto me."

After completion of my education in 1978, I visited India, got married, and then I moved to Mississippi and taught there college-level for seven years. Then I moved back to Louisiana. I have been serving as a university professor of literature for the last twenty-four years in Baton Rouge. Whatever secular education God granted me, I am sincerely using my knowledge and training to glorify God through my literary works, having published several

books. My Christian historical novel PALAM THETTIYA THEEVANDI(DERAILED, 260 pages)has reached 100,000 copies in December 2012 , most copies distributed freely. Many prodigals are deeply touched by this book and have accepted Christ as their Lord and Savior after they go through the last chapter of this book. Through the book ministry, I freely distributed close to 66,000 copies of my most recent Malayalam book BHAYAPPEDENDA (FEAR NOT, 88 pages) within the last three years. This book is a collection of thirteen testimonies of people from all walks of life and religions who found deliverance from various bondages through Jesus Christ. I collected these testimonies personally through telephone interviews. This book has produced tremendous response from people of different religions. The ministry has also distributed, to this date, close to 70, 000 copies of my booklet MANUSHYERE MADHYASTHAR AAKARUTHE (NO, NO, TO HUMAN MEDIATORS, 24 pages). This booklet warns the dangers of praying through human mediators, pointing out Jesus Christ as the only heaven- approved mediator between God and man. My tract against atheists titled SWORGAVUM NARAKAVUM ILLENKIL (WHAT IF THERE IS NO HEAVEN OR HELL, 4 pages) has reached 120,000 copies. Praise the Lord!

Most of my printed books in India are donated to youth groups, local churches, or book shops. Some copies are sold by book stores, and the complete sales proceeds go to the ministry of each book store. I never collect any money or royalty from them, because most Christian publishers in India are struggling just to survive. All printing and distribution costs(99 %) in the last six years were taken from the salaries that my wife (Pushpa) and I earned. Even though I plan to solicit help from others in the future for my book ministry, 99 percent of the expenses of the book ministry in the last six years were met by our personal income. The Lord has also helped me to buy and distribute 30,000 New Testaments in the last three years.

We were able to save the money to do these projects, because my wife and I live a very modest life avoiding all unnecessary expenses including pleasure-trips and casual tours. We live in an average-priced 38-year old house with low-priced furniture , drive least expensive cars, avoid eating out in restaurants, wear only moderately priced clothes forsaking jewelry and other unnecessary items. We enjoy working together, praying together, reading together, jogging together in the neighborhood, but avoid money-costing fun activities, cruises, and unnecessary celebrations. In fact, we get the most fun when we win a soul or encourage someone to move closer to God. We never celebrate our birthdays, thus saving money, but we remember to thank God every new day for the opportunity to see one more day. On a regular working day as a teacher, I never wear suits thus saving money spent for clothes. Saving money for spreading the gospel is an everyday on-going goal in my life. When I visit India, for hygienic and security reasons only, I stay in good motels and eat in neat restaurants, but avoid all unnecessary expenses and luxuries. I never visited Taj Mahal and never will. I know how to relax and have fun without spending much money and without

traveling to the other end of the world. I can be in my own home, city, and state and still have fun. Visiting unknown fancy places and spending my hard-earned money for such activities are not part of my dreams.

Whatever knowledge I gain through study, meditation, and prayer, I try to share the same to the maximum number of people using the money I save. I always keep one or two English Christian books or tracts in my car, so I can give them free to someone I meet, whenever I am inspired to do so. I admit, even my two children sometimes do not agree with the lifestyle we live.

Sometimes people wonder why I have not made a trip to the Niagara Falls. A majority of Keralites have visited the site. Many from my state spend about a thousand dollars (56,000 rupees) just to see the place. I do not blame them or make them feel guilty. However, I would rather spend that money for a spiritual cause. I would not spend 400 dollars for a flight to attend a funeral of an acquaintance where there are hundreds of other believers available to comfort the family. A few years ago, I took a flight to attend the funeral of a Keralite leader in America. Sixty people arrived there on different flights from America and Canada, most of them not even relatives. That is about 24,000 dollars worth of plane tickets-----rupees thirteen lakhs. Enough to build seven houses for the poor or five small churches in villages. About one thousand Keralite families live in that city who were readily available to comfort the sorrowing family. On that day, I decided never to spend money for a funeral of an acquaintance if there are enough people locally to comfort the family.

Keralites are throwing away money without a care. I am sorry I do not understand how a spirit-filled newly-wed couple can throw away seven thousand dollars to spend their honeymoon in the Mediterranean islands when their own cousins in India cannot afford to drink a glass of milk a week. Many of our people are eating and drinking like in Noah's days--birthday parties, child dedication parties, teenagers' baptism parties, graduation parties for every grade, diploma parties, degree parties, thanksgiving parties for job promotions, retirement parties, 50th birthday, 60th birthday, 70th birthday, silver jubilee, golden jubilee, diamond jubilee, green card dinners, week-after-funeral dinners, pre-Kerala-trip dinners, post-Kerala-trip dinners, and then ever so many wedding anniversaries. In many local churches, days and nights are filled with programs one after another. The church has no time left to seek the face of the Lord and no money left to invest in soul-winning. An unreasonable degree of fellowship and closeness have caused an unacceptable number church divisions and organizational splits. There are too many 400-guests, 500-guests and 1000-guests weddings in our community, the type of weddings that even the Kennedy and Rockefeller families will not dare. Pastors are invited from overseas-- only to conduct weddings, costing thousands of dollars in air tickets. Many senior pastors have lost their good conscience and sound judgment; they do not discourage these lavishness, but accept such

invitations with the greatest thrill being flattered by their self importance. I believe the day is coming when some of our young people and senior believers will voluntarily sacrifice personal pleasures and use what they save for winning the lost and helping the needy. Many, I believe, will sacrifice their dream weddings, faraway dream honeymoons, post-retirement trips to exotic spots and pilgrim lands, but learn to relax and enjoy life locally, thus saving money for their own future use and for the improvement of the community around them. Most of these lavishness are for self gratification which only the rich can afford. The word "tarrying" has lost its place in the Keralite dictionary, replaced by the word "traveling." I believe that the God I serve reserves his best blessings to those who stay locally, spending their money for the right causes.

I know I digressed from my main topic here and there , but let me come back to my testimony before I conclude.

During my last three visits to India (to see my sick mother) in 2007, 2009 and 2010, I rented a minivan and visited personally about sixteen hundred homes in a few villages distributing freely copies of the Malayalam New Testament and other gospel books. They were homes that belong to people of different religions and denominations. I had to take Calcium and Glucosamine Chondroitin pills for several weeks upon my return to America in order to alleviate my knee- and- joints pain caused by climbing steps to hundreds of houses as well as to repair and rebuild the tissues, muscles, and cartilages damaged by overworking my hip and feet. My father passed away in 1992 and my mother passed away last June, so my future trips to India would be only for evangelization purpose.

During my student life at Arkansas State University, I experienced a little bit of what it feels like when someone is hungry in the night, which I never had learned at my home in India. I also had a taste of what it means to be poor. Such difficult experiences helped me to have a softer heart toward the poor and the hungry, which instilled in me a desire to do small-scale charity work on a regular basis. Every month, when I get my monthly salary cheque, I remember the poor and the needy and do what I can for them with my limited income.

I am not boasting. I am humbly sharing this testimony to glorify God, as well as to inspire the readers to be active in the service of the Kingdom of God by winning the lost and helping the needy. I know that when I share the gospel through the printed pages and win a sinner to the Lord, I am actually helping a lost person, an alcoholic ,a prostitute, or a thief to change his/her lifestyle, which in itself is a social service. I do not promote any particular denomination through the book ministry. In fact, I recommend the readers of my books and tracts to attend the nearest evangelical (full-gospel) church in their home town or village.

Beginning August of 2012, I started soliciting donations , if anybody is inspired to help me in printing more books ,pamphlets, or tracts. I will be grateful for any assistance small or big. We regularly distribute a free gift- packet in which two books, a booklet, a tract,

and a New Testament in Malayalam language are enclosed. We never give anything without enclosing the complete New Testament. I have the map of Kerala state in my prayer room. I regularly pray touching each town and village on the map humbly asking God to help me distribute gospel literature in the whole state of Kerala as soon as possible. We already covered approximately 93 villages/towns in Kerala within the last three years, distributing anywhere between hundred to three hundred book-packets in each village/town. Donation cheques can be written to HIGHLIGHT LITERATURE AND READING CLUB. Annual detailed accounts of all income and expenses will be mailed to donors during August of every year, listing the name and the amount of each donor. We do not accept anonymous donations or cash donations. Also we do not accept donations from those who want to hide their names in the account sheets. Our policy is to list every donor with the complete name and place.

Evangelists travel across the country and the globe spreading the ideas that God has ignited in their hearts. I am a Literature Evangelist, and I let my books and pamphlets travel across the globe (mainly in India), spreading the ideas of moral value that I am inspired to share. I am thankful to those who pray for this ministry [03 January 2013].

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