

My name is Matt Cizek. The title of my testimony would be, "The Kingdom of God is Near." On Thursday afternoon of last week, myself along with many other members of DuPage UBF left to go to the Summer Bible Conference in Peoria. The occupants of my car were myself, Adam, David Lee, Hector Guerra, and Kevin Jesmer. We enjoyed a nice ride in- with one exception. While exiting I-355 North, David, in front of us, made 2 very sharp left turns on consecutive exit ramps. In a span of about 4 seconds, my car went from being jerked to the right, then to the left- this happening twice- to having to speed up to get on to the entrance ramp, to having about 2 seconds to look behind us, to coasting. It was like watching run away bumper cars. Kevin and I shared a good laugh, with him saying, "Your car's in good shape." I was glad.

Not long after arriving, I got to listen to Joshua Jeon's message, entitled, "The Kingdom of God is Near." He talked about finding salvation and staying on the right path. He also mentioned his personal struggles before finding faith. My personal favorite part was the Life Testimonies. While all were great, the one I identified most with was that of Matt Groters of Northeastern Illinois University. We have both struggled largely with the same kind of sin, and his devotion to the violin, unhealthy, was alike to my association with habits and hobbies- including football, body image, and the Internet. I learned that with God's help and patience, I could hope for better days to come as well. I would also like to say that I was personally inspired by the humility of UBF General Director John Jun. After David had introduced me to Mother Barry, he introduced me to Mr. Jun, who bowed to me. It was not that a Korean man bowed to me that was impressive to me, for I knew that was part of their culture. It was that this man, who was equivalent to the CEO of a Fortune 500 company when it comes to missionary work, had the courtesy to bow to me, a man who joined the organization no more than 3 months earlier. I didn't have to meet his secretary, and in America and Britain, bowing is reserved for people of higher power, such as parliament. I was appreciative.

On Day 2, Friday, we had our first morning devotion and Group Bible Study. Devotion was good and I enjoyed having the privilege to meet John Lee of Lincoln Park in my study group. He was a very wise and faithful man. In between, I had one of the best breakfasts I'd had in a long time. The messages of the day were given by David Hull and Darren Gruett. David Hull's was on the power of forgiveness while Darren Gruett's was on the vision of God's Kingdom. I enjoyed them both very much, although to be honest I was a bit inattentive during Mr. Gruett's message, as I was focusing on the performance I would give the next day. The House Church testimonies of the night were a personal favorite. I enjoyed the story of Anthony & Rose Llereza, how they began life together and mutually came to know Christ! After Friday night's event and after all of the supporting cast had gone to bed, Elaina and I worked with her husband Roehl, going over musical cues for the next day's performance. I learned a lot through Elaina about working hard for God.

Then came Saturday morning. I left Group Bible Study early to practice and was feeling excited. I continued to shift back from excited to nervous before I went on stage. Finally, it was our turn to perform, and I stationed myself Upstage Left as prepared. When the cue to speak came on, I started delivering lines, but after the 1st sentence, I thought I heard my microphone lose volume. So I started yelling a bit, trying to reach the back row. After the performance, I earned a lot of thank you's and even a few sayings of, "You have a very powerful voice." I was thankful, but also found it ironic that the, "very powerful voice" part kind of came about accidentally. Shep Jeremy Hajek then gave a lecture on the power of Confessing and Following Jesus the King, related to Mark 8:27-9:1. Through this, I learned about how to be a more faithful servant. I also began to think about all the times I had tried to come to Jesus, made a few first

steps, and then fallen back again. I began to understand that it was because I had decided that I could do it alone at first, and then ask for Jesus' help. I also did not want to follow Jesus, but rather wanted to follow my own path and have him support me. So I decided to do things differently. I decided that day that I wanted to change not just to feel better about myself, but to serve. I proclaimed it, saying, "I want to serve Jesus!" In the past week, therefore, I have advanced in my Bible study and been active in separate group discussions that take place on Tuesday night and elsewhere.

I already knew I was in for my best night so far. Having accomplished the skit successfully, I decided to sit back, relax, and merely pay attention to what was going on in front of me. I rejoiced with the sounds of the choir, where songs were sung with heavenly devotion, and loved the orchestra, so good as to make me think of the great Boston Pops. The ethnic dances were elaborate and I was personally inspired by Missionary Maria Joy Peace. Not only was she a missionary in Turkey spreading God's word among great forces of opposition, but on that Saturday alone, she had found time to be a supporting actress in a dramatic skit, give a World Mission Report, and participate in the ethnic Turkish dance. On top of that, when I met her at the Holiday Inn during testimony writing time, she said she was on her way to exercise, thus finding more time to do work.

Her father, John Peace, spoke clearly about the Return of the King, accompanied by a video. He talked of the signs of Jesus' coming, and all the things that would happen and touched on how different things were today than in any other time. It made me think of what I needed to do as a Christian in order to help many and in order to help the future. The promise and blessing of all those who wanted to serve Christ, by Mother Barry, reminded me of my promise to Christ that I had made on a chilly night this past winter. On the 2 year anniversary of a very destructive day of my life which sent me down a long and treacherous path, I promised that if God could get me through the torment I was going through, I would be his loyal servant forever.

The next day Nathan Lafromboise spoke about his vision of God, and the conference was wrapped up with Chuck Voght telling us to Preach the Kingdom to All Creation. He also spoke of having resurrection faith, something that would sustain us in hard times. Having failed to connect on an interpersonal level with God many times in the past, this information was valuable to me. I have not since forgotten it and do not plan to in the near future.

The drive home was nice and I arrived at my house at approximately 6pm after driving Hector to his home in LaGrange. But before I end this testimony, I'd like to mention one great example of what it means to follow Christ. When the lunch box was given out, Hector decided to grab for himself the chicken salad. But as we were walking back to the hotel, a homeless man with nothing but a small bag walked by. I myself though nothing of it, but Hector stopped immediately and told me he had something that needed to be taken care of. He turned around, came about the homeless man, and gave him his salad. I was around Hector all but maybe 5 minutes of the next several hours, and to the best of my knowledge, he didn't eat a thing until he got home that night. How about that?

I was in a bit of religious turmoil before the Summer Bible Conference. I had just left a church that I felt was a bad fit for me, and wasn't sure what I wanted to do as far as my walk with God was concerned. I'd like to think that I've found my answer and will continue to be guided by Jesus Christ. One word: The Kingdom of God is Near!