

Funeral Ronnie Bishop – September 10, 2005

## **Preface**

Our prayers are with the family as we understand you have lost your loved one. May God bring you comfort and peace in the coming days as you value your memories and relationship with Ronnie.

## **Introduction**

Though death brings Ronnie Bishop much gain, it brings us much loss. We grieve because we will miss the fun, warm and inspirational companionship of Ronnie.

Ronnie has become someone who I can truly call “a friend.” I looked so forward to him returning from Houston. I wish now I would have traveled to Houston to see him.

I know for the family this loss is enormous. Even though he has been sick for some time, I understand that nothing could prepare you for his death.

I would like to share a few thoughts with you today. Some are intended to bring you comfort and perhaps even little joy. Others are intended to prompt you to reflect for this is a time of reflection as much as a time of grief.

## **1. Ronnie Enjoyed Humor**

From his nicknames for his kids to joking with the guys on the farm, Ronnie found plenty in life to laugh about.

Ronnie didn't even mind if the joke was on him. I recall going by the hospital to see him one morning. Like most of us do, he was at his wits end with that hospital gown. Finally he said, “Preacher will you help me tie this thing up so I am not showing my butt to everybody.”

On another occasion, I was trying to be real pastoral with Ronnie. He had recovered well from the intestinal surgery and I said to him, “Ronnie, you know the Lord has more things he wants you to do.”

Glenda and I were shocked when Ronnie's response was, “Well, he'll just have to get in line.”

As it turned out, he thought I said, “You know Boyd has more things he wants you to do.”

We had a good laugh on Ronnie and he was right in there with us. As strong as his work ethic was, he always delighted in something funny.

## **2. Ronnie Was A Fighter**

I can't properly pronounce “myelodysplasia syndrome”. I certainly can't spell it. I seriously doubt Ronnie could either.

There is one thing for sure, Ronnie faced it head on and fought it with all he had. I admire Ronnie that. I admire the way he fought this rare disease.

With hundreds of blood transfusions and numerous stays in the hospital, I never saw any indication Ronnie was ready to give up. I am sure he had his down moments but he always seem to rise up ready to fight another day.

The day before Ronnie and Glenda left for Houston, I was sitting in his living room watching Bonanza with him. I asked him if he was ok with going out to M.D. Anderson. His answer was, “I have to preacher. I'll keep fighting this thing as long as I can.”

Everyone wishes Ronnie could have been home when he passed away. I understand that feeling and I deeply regret not getting to see him before he passed away.

However, Ronnie breathed his last breathe in Houston, Texas because Ronnie was a fighter right to the end. May we all have such courage and will.

## **3. Ronnie Loved His Family**

Ronnie Bishop valued life and the simple things in life. He loved his community, hunting, fishing and Alabama football.

Ronnie never sought fame and fortune. He never sought trophies and accolades. There is a reason for that. His family was his pride and joy. He didn't need the recognition of men. He was content with the love of his family.

Ronnie took great pride in being a part of a large extended family. Each child right down to the nieces and nephews brought great joy in Ronnie's life.

Ronnie especially loved his wife and children. He saw his children as a gift from God and he told me that on more than one occasion. He also saw his children as a responsibility that he did not take lightly.

Ronnie worked hard to provide for his family. No job was too difficult for him to tackle if it meant providing for his family.

I remember one occasion when I was about to leave Ronnie's hospital room. I expressed to him that I was praying for him. I will never forget his response. He said, "I'll be ok preacher, just pray for my kids."

Ronnie loved you with all of his heart. I am confident he was praying for you. Though he is not hear to say "be careful" or to caution you about life's dangers, rest assured he is watching every move you make and he is with you.

Be careful and make him proud.

#### **4. Ronnie Was A Believer**

I want you to know the most important thing about Ronnie. Ronnie was a believer who accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

As a pastor, my greatest fear is to have to conduct the funeral of someone when I don't really know if they are a believer. The Bible is clear. There is only one way to have eternal life and that is to believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

*"<sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" Romans 6:23 NAS*

*"<sup>13</sup>Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved" Romans 10:13 NAS*

On two different occasions, I discussed this in great detail with Ronnie. I recall him saying to me, "Oh yes, I have accepted Christ and I know where I am going. You don't have to worry about that." He went on to say, "I could not keep going if it were not for Him."

I want you to image a door standing right here. This door represents death. You and I are standing on the grieving side of this door. But, Ronnie is on the other side of the door. And the other side is completely different. It is the joyful side of death where there is no pain or disease. Ronnie is with his Savior and other loved ones including his brother-in-law Jerry. They are on the other side of that door rejoicing for eternity.

Today, I ask you to do two things. First, make sure you have accepted the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Make sure that when you walk through death's door, you will one day be in the heaven God prepares for us.

Secondly, I want you to take great comfort in knowing that Ronnie is eternal heaven with no more pain or disease.

#### **Conclusion**

The last day I was with Ronnie, we talked and prayed together. I knew then it was a matter of time before I would be speaking his funeral.

Before I left his home, he said the neatest thing to me. He said, "Preacher, did you see my frog." He went and got this foil balloon thing that someone had given him. I believe it said "get well soon" or something on it.

Sure enough, it was a frog though you had to work at seeing the frog in the busy pattern and odd shape. But Ronnie really liked the frog balloon and I understood why.

Ronnie was at a point that he was at peace. He was seeing life in a more simple way, a way God wants all of us to see life.

*"<sup>7</sup>And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philipians 4:7 NAS*

Ronnie Bishop was already experiencing God's peace. Now, he experiences it fully. We'll see you soon Ronnie.

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### Graveside

This is where your faith must grow stronger. Friends and love ones may support you. However, your ultimate comfort must come from God. It is God who created man. It is God who created the perilous world of disease and danger in which we live. It is God who can comfort you and it is God who Ronnie now knows better than any of us.

Jesus said: *“In my Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have old you; for I go to prepare a place for you.” John 14:2*

*“O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?” ...<sup>57</sup>but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1Cor. 15:55, 57*

- There is no soul here today
- Only a worn out body
- There is no ending here today
- Like Paul, Ronnie says,
- Oh death, where is your victory?
- Oh death, where is your sting?
- With Christ, death can hiss but death cannot harm.
- Like Paul, Ronnie says Behold I die, yet I live!

Prayer:

Oh God if it were not for your grace, if it were not for your amazing love through Christ Jesus, we would be a pitiful people. We would have no ability to deal with our losses. Death would be our enemy to fear every waking moment. But in your wisdom and love, you provided victory for your children through your son Jesus Christ. Plant that understanding in the heart of all here today. Thank you for your grace through Jesus Christ. Thank you for the life of Ronnie Bishop. Enjoy his presence in eternity.

Amen.