

Jose Luiz Finds Freedom

1 John 2:14

I have written to you, fathers, Because you have known Him who is from the beginning... young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, And you have overcome the wicked one.

Let me tell you the story of a twelve year old boy, one of our first converts to Christ in Brazil. Jose grew up in a spiritist home. His parents were nominal Catholics but they also, like most people in Brazil, practiced various forms of witchcraft to protect their loved ones. Jose even as a young boy hated the spiritist practices of offering sacrifices of grain or a strangled chicken left at an intersection to turn away evil. He hated it. He knew it was wrong to try to appease evil with evil. He had experienced many night terrors because of it.

In the darkness of their wooden shack in a poor village he lay panic stricken, clutching his ragged night clothes, trembling, sweating, and cringing from the unseen evil he sensed haunting his room. His eyes scoured the night searching for some ray of hope in his chamber of fear. His eyes scanned hopelessly the pictures of saints and fictitious spiritist guides which were to protect him. Even their faces seemed to turn into horrid ghouls grinning and taunting him. His hands trembled and fumbled for the charm bracelets of witchcraft in which so many trusted, but in his little hands they appeared to be chains tightening about him and shackling him to his fears. He screamed, throwing the fetishes across the room and burying his head deep in his pillow he sobbed, "Is there no one who can save me from this hell?"

His parents tried to help. His fears kept him awake so many nights they worried that his health would soon break down. They took him to doctors, to psychologists, to therapists, but they seemed as puzzled as the boy to find a cure for his chronic fear. Year after year his fears multiplied and his nights became dreaded battlegrounds.

"It must be spiritual," his parents reasoned. "Perhaps an evil spirit has a hold on him. He will need to receive other good spirits to fight it off." They forcibly dragged him to the spiritist practitioners for help. First they prescribed several incantations and more bracelets, then a sacrifice of grain and candles to be left on a street corner at midnight to ward off the evil spirits. Still his fears remained. A blood sacrifice would be necessary to more powerfully appease the spirits. A chicken must be offered and left in the streets for the spirits to devour. Yet his fears remained. His parents had spent all they had to pay for such incantations, but seemingly to no avail. A final effort must be made at any cost. He must

surrender his will to the will of the spirits and receive spirit guides to enable him to overcome this evil. He must be baptized in blood!

The costly sacrifice of a goat was made. He was locked in a shed in the back of the spiritist center where blood was poured over his head until it soaked his entire body. Then he was forced to remain sitting on the ground for three days, locked in a dark room, waiting for the spirit guides to enter. When he left the room, the spirit guides had manifested themselves and Jose left with an even greater fear of spiritism than he had of the dark. His fear of the dark continued. Sleepless nights were the norm. A light had to be left burning all night for him to get any sleep.

As he grew older, so did his hatred for the spiritist rites, for deep within he knew that they were cohorts with his fears. Then one day he heard of Jesus. Not the Jesus the priests spoke of, and not the Jesus the spiritists acknowledged, but the Jesus of the Bible, the loving, healing, living Jesus who brought peace.

It happened by accident. He was recovering from two broken legs he had received in a terrible bus accident. His parents had dragged him to those horrible spiritist centers offering sacrifices in hopes of healing him. He abhorred it all and tried to get away from home as much as possible. That is when it happened. He was hobbling on his crutches one Sunday afternoon, sulking in his misery when he saw other children running past him with smiles on their faces. "Where are you going?" he shouted. "The missionary is here! The missionary is here! At the school, come on," they shouted. So he did, just out of curiosity, of course. It was curious indeed. The missionary used puppets, taught songs and Bible verses, and told stories with his funny accent.

He could not help but laugh. But something else struck him profoundly. It was that Wordless Book that told of God's love, our sin, Jesus' death on a cruel cross, and how we could have a clean heart and peace with God. It was as if someone had turned on a bright light and he could see there was hope for his fears. He would come back. He must hear more!

He did return. Every Sunday he went to the school to hear the missionary. He found it in his thoughts all week long. Soon he was going to the missionary's little church too. This was great. It was what he always longed for. Finally, Jose realized that going to church was not enough to calm his fears. Jesus wanted to come into his life and live with him. One night, when the missionary gave the invitation, he prayed and asked Jesus to be his Savior. There was no dramatic happening, but just a new peace and joy knowing that Jesus was now the conqueror of all his fears.

Immediately Jose was interested in studying the Bible. He took home and soon finished all the studies we could give him. He began the Theological Education by Extension program and did very well. When challenged to do a memory contest he memorized 80 verses in two months! He brought his friends and family to church too to hear of Jesus.

Yet, as time went by we could tell that there was a problem. Jose could never pray out loud. At first we thought it was timidity, but even the most timid in the group could voice a simple prayer, but not Jose. When we'd give a time for prayer at a youth meeting, though everyone else would pray, he would remain silent. Once I thought I could trap him into praying. He was taking up the offering and when he came to the pulpit with it, I publicly called on him to ask God's blessing on it. The silence of the moment spoke loudly of his problem. I waited, but he stood squirming, agonizing, yet not a word did he even mumble. I had to ask someone else to pray.

The situation finally came to a head one day. Jose was in the church listening to Christian music as he often did. I was outside dealing with a spiritist man, a man possessed by demons. When I walked back into the sanctuary, the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask Jose if he had been involved in spiritism. (Up to this time I knew little of his life story.) He looked up at me shocked and said, "Why do you ask?" I related that I had just spoken to a spiritist and the Holy Spirit prompted me to ask. He walked over to the cassette tape player and turned it off. I knew then I had touched on a sore spot, he never willingly turned off the music. He said, "Pastor, let's talk. It's a long story."

He proceeded to describe to me his childhood fears and his involvement in spiritism with all the terrifying details. I began to understand his inability to pray. I had been reading about spiritism and demon possession and had discovered the true meaning of "baixar no chao", the blood baptism ceremony. It was a total surrender of one's life and mind and soul to the occult. It was a selling of one's soul to the devil! This, of course, brings about captivity to Satan and occult oppression or possession, depending on the individual case. Jose, even though a Christian, was chained to the past by that blood sacrifice in which his parents sold his soul. The devil was refusing to let go, and gradually tightening the chains of his usurped ownership.

I shared with him the meaning of blood sacrifices, what happened to him in the spiritual realm when he surrendered to the occult. Then with scripture I shared how wonderfully Christ has set us free by his blood and broken all the covenants left standing, that we by the exercise of our faith in Jesus and by the word of our testimony, must break those bonds of Satan's claims and rebuke him, his efforts, his allegiance, and his parent's allegiance once and for all.

That afternoon, standing at the front of a little wooden plank floored chapel, leaning over the pulpit, Jose said, "I want to pray now." With tears rolling down his face he confessed Jesus as the only Lord of his life and in prayer broke every covenant with Satan. He was finally free – totally and visibly free, to serve Jesus. The changes weren't immediate but Jose began to blossom. He could pray!