

# Mr. Kenneth E. Baggett Funeral

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**Crossroads Ministries**

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About a year ago, I was introduced to Ken Baggett through a mutual friend. This individual called me and asked if I would be willing to sit down and have lunch and hear a friend of his story, a story of battling through and battling what you and I know as cancer.

I arrived at the restaurant of the country club which, by the way, the country club is a place that Ken and I would spend a lot of time together, and when I arrived after somewhat semi-formal introductions, Ken began. He began to share his journey, his story. He began to talk about the cancer. As he began to talk, his emotions began to increase. I could tell that frustration was building. He repeated over and over about because of his background in finance and the fact that he was a numbers guy, that it was about the numbers. He gave me a history of the disease. He gave me the exact amount of times. He talked about the different levels and the prescriptions. It was just a series, a medical explanation saturated with numbers of percentages and amounts and such.

As I mentioned, his countenance increasing became, shall I say, a little bit hostile. His words became a little bit more curt. I could tell that it wasn't just an explanation of what he was walking through, there was frustration, there was anger, there was angst behind the diagnosis. When I began to respond and press in a little bit, so to speak, he made it very clear that he was mad. He was mad at his situation. He was mad at life, but in particular he was really really mad at God, and because, as he said, that he was a numbers man, he was mad because he believed that life and ultimately God had cheated him out of 11 years, 11 years of spending time with his wife Missy, 11 years spending time with his kids and his grandkids, 11 years enjoying golf and his occupation and his friendships and all things Auburn related when it came to sports. Those were 11 years that he believed he was owed. Those were 11 years that he would never get to live. Those were 11 years that he wasn't gonna get to experience.

After lunch came to a close, I offered him my cellphone number. I said, "You can call me anytime about anything. You can text me. If you'll reach out, I'll be there." I'll be quite honest, when we parted ways that day, we had known each other for all of maybe 60 minutes, I didn't know if he'd ever call. I didn't know if I'd ever hear from him again. I knew we had a mutual friend who had taken great interest in his condition, his journey, and his situation. But he did call and he didn't just call once, he called many times.

Allow me to fast-forward about a year to the last true phone call. I don't mean the phone call when he was in a medical facility when we, you know, had those last good-byes, I don't mean the phone call where I went up and prayed with him at his home. I mean the last phone call where we met and we talked and we really hashed things out. It was about a year after that first meeting but, of course, as he and I often would, it would involve good food. We would go down to one of his favorite places, Pannie-George's. Knowing I was a car guy, he threw me the keys to his newly acquired, very quick and super-charged vehicle and said, "Why don't you drive." We made it to the restaurant and he teased people that I was taking the old man out for lunch. By that time, as many of you know, he was traveling by way of a walker. Walking was very tedious, it was laborious, it was a struggle. Upon making it to our seat, he didn't even eat much. By that time his body was so riddled with the disease that appetite was limited, but his countenance was completely different. I still remember the look on his face that day when we had lunch. It was a completely different person than I had met a year ago. The disease had progressed but the anger was not there. His body could barely function but there was no more being mad at God, there was no more being mad at life, in fact, it was much the opposite. His countenance, his words, our conversation was a conversation of joy, it was a conversation of abundance, it was a conversation of gratitude toward God and others of what had happened in his life.

You know, when I think of Ken and the first time I met him versus the last time I met him, or had lunch with him, I tend to gravitate toward the book of Galatians 5. It begins in verse 19 by talking about the works of the flesh. I'm not here to talk about the works of the flesh. It begins to list all of the things that happen in our life that are not of God, but in the midst of that it talks about wrath and strife and emulations and kind of describes who Ken was the first time I met him. He was an angry, mad man at life and at God. But then in verse 22 it says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." You know, that last passage describes the Ken I had lunch with at Pannie-George's that day, all he could talk about was his love for his family and his friends, he talked about the joy even of his last days of life. He was at peace. He was at peace with his diagnosis. He was at peace with God. He was at peace with his family and he was at peace with dying. He experienced all kinds of long-suffering and he was gentle, rather than being curt and crass, he had a gentle spirit, goodness, polite to all those who he encountered and gracious and humble.

You may be sitting here today asking what happened? Why is it as disease began to ravage his body, why is it that as he began to go through all the treatments, traveling to and fro, why did his countenance increase? Why did his spirits get lifted? Why did gentleness rise to the surface rather than anger? Allow me to go back to the second time Ken and I sat down. I had given him my number, I didn't know if he would call me, but he did. He asked if there was a time that we could just sit down and talk. He came into my office and we sat and over the course of the next 60-90 minutes we, of course, talked as we always did about golf and such and stories of Augusta and other places that we've played and dreamed of playing, but there was that point where the conversation turned and he talked about where he was with the disease and his frustration with God and life

and such, and as we talked and as he continued to express his frustrations, I continued to share the truth of the Gospel, the truth of God's word. I talked about the facts that the Bible lay up, that we've all sinned, we've all messed up, the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that if we would understand that for God's love of the world he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life. I began to explain and he began to affirm, after all, his brother had been a pastor for many years, though he was struggling in the flesh he was also struggling in spirit.

There are two take-aways from that first real one-on-one conversation in my office. The first one is somewhat humorous. He shared with me that he had a golf instructor and a financial advisor and a wealth advisor and a this advisor and a that advisor, he asked me, he said, "Would you be willing to be my spiritual advisor?" As a pastor, I've been asked to do and to be a lot of things, I don't think anybody had ever worded it quite that way but I graciously obliged.

Then second, he shared this, he said, "Jeff, everything that you've shared today, I've got it all in my head, I don't have any of it in my heart." Now I want you to think about how Ken worded that. Remember he's a numbers guy. That's what he deals with for a living and what he was saying to me was he got everything I shared about the Gospel, he got everything I shared about Jesus, he had 100% of that in his head but he didn't have any in his heart.

As his "spiritual advisor" over the course of the next 6-7 months as he journeyed across the country for treatments, we would text, we would talk occasionally, particularly at church, we would see each other for a brief moment here or there, but it would be a while before we would sit down again. The second time we sat, he had read a couple books that I'd given him regarding those who are believers in Jesus Christ walking through the struggles of disease and sickness and such. He'd been following along with the Bible reading plan that we had as a church. He had come to Bible studies. He had been going to Sunday school. He'd been attending our services.

The next time we sat down, rather than me explaining everything to get his response, we dialogued and he began to press in and extrapolate and say, "Explain this a little more, and do this, and what about this," and he began to just much as someone who, I guess I could say, would audit a corporation's books, he was auditing the Scriptures, he was auditing the Gospels, he was auditing himself.

That day as we departed again we agreed we'd get together at some point, oftentimes it was at the golf course, but he made another statement, he said, "Jeff, I want you to know," and he pointed to his head, he said, "I'm 60," and then he pointed to his heart, "40." Over the course of a year he'd gone from 100/0 to 60/40. I don't know how many times we had gone out together to play 9 holes of golf because of his physical limitations, that was about all he could do at that point, I don't know how many brief hallway conversations or text messages we'd exchanged, but there needed to be a third

conversation, there needed to be a time where we sat down and followed-up. We had gone from 100/0 to 60/40, I needed to know where he was.

The time was, shall I say, ripe when we made a point to play 9 holes of golf. He told me in advance he didn't know if he could even finish 9 holes but he wanted to ride, and I knew what that meant. Our third conversation wouldn't be in my office, it would be in a golf cart. He played a little over half of the holes, if that matters to you, and we talked and we dialogued, and as we were rolling up the cart path of the 9<sup>th</sup> hole there at the country club, he had already ceased to play and I was about to get out and hit my approach shot, he turned to me with that smile that only he could make and he kind of tapped me on the knee and he said, "Jeff, I want you to know something." I said, "What's that, Ken?" He said, "I want you to know I'm," and he pointed to his head again, "0," and his heart, "100."

How is it that Ken went from an angry mad-at-the-world man claiming that God had cheated him out of 11 years to a man literally days before his death expressing love and graciousness toward any and all? It doesn't happen because you receive cancer treatment. It doesn't happen because you come to your senses, so to speak. It happens because that first thing that I laid out and explained to him in my office is what he embraced and believed. Ken came to an understanding in that final year that he had sinned, he had messed up. To be honest with you, it wasn't hard for me to sell him on that, anybody with any sense of maturity and wisdom realizes we're not perfect. It was that part of faith, a believing that Jesus Christ alone had accomplished all that he needed for forgiveness and salvation on the cross. Being a man of hard work and good work ethic, he fell into the same trap as many of us, that somehow you've got to do or work or accomplish a certain task to be accepted by God. Here he was a decade plus shy of what the statistics say he should have had as far as life expectancy, he was mad. But now he had faith and he just simply believed and he went from it all being in his head to all being in his heart.

You know, today many of you saw the Ken of a year ago and you knew the Ken of just a few days ago. Many of you have noticed, many of you have observed. Maybe you're like Ken, you know, maybe you're that person that everything's calculated out, everything's on your spreadsheet of life, everything's mapped out, it's got a flow chart to it, and maybe today you're wishing that Ken's story would be your story, maybe you're that person today saying, "I'm 100% in my head and nothing in my heart," maybe you're a person saying, "I'm 60 in my head, 40 in my heart," but if today there is not 100% faith in Jesus Christ in your heart, can I tell you that's what made the difference in Ken's life and that's what can make the difference in your life.

And so today upon the request of Missy, I've been asked to make available to you that which I didn't just make available to Ken personally and privately but that which we make available each and every time we gather together here as a church, it's the opportunity to have 100% in the heart, it's the opportunity to have that passage we read, that you can finally have the joy, the peace, the long-suffering, the love that you so desire. So I'm going to ask you to do what I ask our people to do every week, what Ken did at some point in the last year, maybe today will be the day you do so as well. I'm

going to ask you to bow your head and close your eyes. Nobody's going to be looking at anybody. I'm not even going to be looking at you. And I'm going to invite you to have a conversation with God. I know technically we call it prayer but this is one of those prayers where you don't have to say it out loud, in fact, you don't have to repeat what somebody else has said or make sure you say the exact right words because the Bible says in Romans 10, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," and maybe today you're like Ken was a year ago, mad and angry and frustrated with the way the world was going, and maybe today you'll be like Ken was in that golf cart and saying, "It's okay, it's 100% in my heart." Maybe this would be your conversation. "God, today I just want to confess I'm the problem. I'm the one who has messed up. According to the Bible, I'm the one who has sinned but I believe that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem. God, I believe I can't do it on my own, I can't believe I can ever start doing enough good or stop doing enough bad. God, I believe it's because of Jesus Christ alone that I can be forgiven of my sins. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to be born on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to live a perfect life on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to take the price and the penalty of my sin on his cross. And God, I believe that when he rose from the grave three days later, he made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved."

As we continue in a time of prayer, if you're that person today, much like Ken did in the past year who for the very first time allowed it to be 100% in the heart, confessed your faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible says in Luke 15, whoever does so, all the heavens rejoice and all the angels rejoice, and we'd love the privilege of rejoicing with you.