
ORDINARY PEOPLE
FAITHFUL
GOD

God spoke in a watermelon patch

Barry Oliver

It was during the Depression that a young pastor by the name of Tom Bradley knocked on the door of a farmhouse, about 12 kilometres from Parkes in New South Wales. Tom was wearing the typical garb of the pastor during the depression years—a well-worn dark suit, whitish shirt and tattered tie. He carried his Bible under his arm.

My grandfather answered the knock at the door and was immediately gripped by a strange feeling in the pit of his stomach. He had seen just such a man in a dream a few nights earlier. "Please come in," he said.

Tom did not need a second invitation. Thus began a series of Bible studies that Tom conducted with my grandparents, Dave and Dora Oliver, over a period of several months.

Despite the dream, Dave was not particularly easy to persuade when it came to some of the more testing truths of the word of God. He found the Sabbath particularly challenging. The hesitation to accept the increasingly clear imperative of the Scriptures was all the more challenging because Dave had a large crop of watermelons almost ready for harvest. Every brain cell he possessed was telling him that if he accepted the Sabbath and attended church, his watermelon crop would be in serious jeopardy. Too many young lads in the district had their eye on the possibility of a tasty watermelon for Dave to be able to relax.

Eventually, however, the persuasive reassurance of Pastor Tom Bradley, and the promptings of the Holy Spirit were too much. Dave and Dora informed their family that they would be going to church on Sabbath. This was to be a radical step for the Oliver family. To this point church—any church—had not figured prominently in the experience of the children.

With some considerable misgivings by all the family, Sabbath morning arrived and preparations were made to go to church. While

Dora and the girls prepared and packed lunch, Ted—my dad—was instructed to go and catch the horse and prepare the dray so that the family could travel the 12 kilometres to town and church.

Meanwhile, Dave headed for the watermelon patch. If he was going to go to church he was going to have a prayer, entrusting his precious crop to God. So in hesitant language and with a trembling faith, he stood in his field of vines and committed them to God. And for good measure he counted the watermelons—456 melons!

Dave did not pay particularly close attention to the sermon that first Sabbath. He had watermelons on the brain. As soon as it was over, he hustled the family out of the church, onto the dray and down the road. They had to eat their lunch on the way home—all except Dave. He could not bring himself to eat.

On arrival at the farmhouse, Ted was again instructed to care for the horse, Dora and the girls carried the remains of lunch inside and Dave was off like a shot to the watermelon patch—counting. He counted 467.

The following Sabbath as the family prepared for the journey to church, Dave again could not resist the impulse to count his melons. Though his faith had received a substantial boost the previous week, he still counted his melons one-by-one before setting out for church. There were now 485. The family went to church.

Again, no sooner had the sermon concluded, than the children were ushered out of church and the old grey mare was hurried down the road toward home. Again grandfather went straight down to the watermelon patch to count his melons. There were 493!

It was enough. Dave dropped to his knees in gratitude. God had spoken in the watermelon patch.

From that day until his death some 35 years later, I do not know that my grandfather ever missed the opportunity to worship on Sabbath. He spent his life on the land, working with the soil. He had almost no education but he grew the best vegetables I have ever seen. And his faith was simple and secure. He passed on to his family a heritage of trust and faith in a God who is able to work in ways that meet us just where we are, so He can lead us just where He needs us to be.

If you want to live securely in the land, keep my laws and obey my regulations. Then the land will yield bumper crops, and you will eat your fill and live securely in it. Leviticus 25:18, 19.

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