

Several Baptized as Ex-LGBT People Declare Christ's Freedom Over Sin, Shame

"This is not conversion therapy."

Luis Javier Ruiz, who used to live as a gay man before he met Jesus, said that phrase several times throughout the Freedom March event in Orlando, Florida, on Saturday, Sept. 14.

Ruiz helped lead the Orlando event, which showcased testimonies of people who left the LGBT lifestyle and found freedom in Christ. About 300 to 400 people attended the event and several were baptized, says Jeffrey McCall, who founded the Freedom March after Jesus delivered him from drugs and a transgender lifestyle.

"This is not a gay-to-straight thing," Ruiz said from the stage. "It's a lost-to-saved thing."

Ruiz and Angel Colon are both survivors of the mass shooting at a gay nightclub called Pulse in Orlando several years ago. On June 21, 2016, Omar Mateen entered the gay nightclub and opened fire, killing 49 people and injuring many more. After the tragic shooting, both Ruiz and Colon surrendered their lives to the Lord and abandoned the homosexual lifestyle.

Colon told the audience that, in a way, he and Ruiz were bonded forever to the rest of the survivors of that shooting, along with the victims' families. In respect for the deceased, Colon led the crowd in a moment of silence.

In between times of worship, person after person took the stage to share their story—sexual abuse, pornography, gender confusion, drugs, alcohol, sex addiction or prostitution. But each story had a common thread: shame.

It was shame that compelled Cecil Jackman to hide his same-sex attraction for years in the 1990s. He went to church regularly and served in ministry every way he could. Meanwhile, he hid his addiction to gay pornography. Those desires, he says, stemmed from an encounter with his babysitter when he was 4 years old.

“I was raped by my babysitter in the bathtub,” he tells the crowd. “The other girls got to go outside and play. Not me—because I was the only boy.”

Classmates and even a teacher telling Jackman he was gay only confirmed his fears. He started going to gay clubs, but each time he went, the Holy Spirit asked him, “What are you doing here?”

The Spirit’s conviction grew to the point that Jackman had to cry out to the Lord for mercy.

“I found out God didn’t hate me,” he says. “He’s a good God.”

Now, Jackman says, he is the happy father of two children with his wife of 17 years—living proof that change through Jesus Christ is possible

Combating Opposition With Love

McCall tells Charisma News that they faced more opposition for this march than any march they’ve had. Ruiz agrees, saying much of the opposition came from people who didn’t understand their story. Many pro-LGBT people attributed the Freedom March with conversion therapy and electric-shock therapy, but Ruiz says nothing could be further from the truth.

“A lot of people were like ‘Oh, you guys are these hateful people who are just going to be bashing our lifestyle,’ and it’s nothing like that. So when we were able to share our hearts with some activists and some people, they were like, ‘Wow, we were so wrong about you guys.’”

When asked why this march stirred up more opposition than past ones, McCall said he believes the Lord wanted to birth something through the Orlando march.

“I think there was a spiritual release that happened at this march [more] than ever before, and I think the enemy felt that in the spirit and he opposed it, but the Lord won,” he says. “The Lord birthed something in this Freedom March, like a breaking in the spirit, like a taking of ground. He went before us and this one was very key to plowing some hard ground spiritually. I really feel like the Lord used this one to till through something and I just feel there’s a harvest coming from this one like never before.

“I think the Lord used Orlando, of all places—where the Pulse nightclub shooting happened—He used Orlando for a tilling of what He’s going to do nationally in this country.”

As a prophetic step of faith in this tilling, Freedom March leaders baptized people several times during the event.

Gabriel Coba, one of the people baptized that day, tells Charisma News that he gave his heart to Christ a year and a half ago.

“I had been living a homosexual lifestyle for many, many years, since I was a little boy,” Coba says. “That’s when I knew I had same-sex attraction, and that’s when I knew it had a lot to do with my parents divorcing and breaking up and everything.”

Coba says he decided to follow the Lord as a little boy, but his heart wasn’t in the right place at the time: “I didn’t know how to have a relationship with God. ... But today, when they were doing baptisms, I had to do it because my heart is [now] in the right place, and I want to live for Christ.”
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