

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" Volume II Number 4

Do you need an idea for an Easter Weekend message?

Editor's Note: This sermon is the 4th email message of 2003 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message focuses on the great 14th Chapter of John and the great victory that Jesus shares through His resurrection. May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Regional Development Director

Conquering Death's Power John 14:1-6

"Slept with his fathers" "Gathered to his people" "Passed away" "Went Home" "Expired" "Decedent" "Deceased"

What are we speaking about? Death. We have so many "euphemisms" or replacement phrases for the adjective "dead." We avoid the "D" word.

Jesus came to "render the devil powerless" and "deliver us who were subject to slavery through the fear of death."

Heb 2:14-15

14 Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; 15 and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (NAS)

Our text describes how Jesus conquers the TRIPLETS OF DEATH! Fear, Finality, Futility.

John 14:1-6

1 "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

4 "And you know the way where I am going."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

(NAS)

I. FEAR is conquered! v. 1

No troubled hearts! Scared to death? Maybe. But the fear of dying -- whether the process or the result -- is overcome by our Sacrificial Savior Who died in our place!

How many are paralyzed by fear? Like the 10 unbelieving spies in Numbers 13, 14, we forfeit joy, success, and productivity because we are afraid! Twenty-nine times in the Old Testament and 15 times in the New Testament, God says, "Fear not!" Many other times He tells us to take courage, take heart, and have confidence! Thru Christ we can!

And thru Christ we MUST! For God's church to be the salt and light He meant for us to be, we must conquer fear. We need to have the attitude of boy whose team was losing 18-0

A man stood to watch a ball game between two young teams. As he walked toward the bleachers, he asked one of the players, "What's the score?" The young fellow replied, "We're behind 18 to nothing." "Well," the man said, "I must say you don't look discouraged." "Discouraged," the player said with a puzzled look, "Why should we be discouraged? We haven't had our turn to bat yet."

The army of Israel faced a giant, but a young man named David thought, "I haven't had my turn," and he won! The twelve disciples saw 5,000 hungry people and said, "Send the crowds away, so they can buy some food." But Jesus thought, "I haven't had my turn yet!" The angry mob had Pilate seal the tomb where Jesus was buried, but God knew, "I haven't had my turn yet!"

The church is ready to "go to bat" and, like others who have placed their trust in God, we will win! Remember these words of Jesus; "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).

II. Finality is conquered! v. 2-3

The termination has become a transition. The dead end has been made a corridor to eternity. The grave has been made a graduation!

One source of our fear is the finality, the irrevocability, of physical death.

When I was a boy, I loved playing sports with my big brother. Being seven years younger, I was always the underdog. The decided underdog. Try as he would to allow me to be competitive, I was always losing. I would chastise him soundly if Larry let up to allow me to come close in score. So he played at his level and I fell far behind. Whether it was ping pong or wiffle ball, I was the loser. And a bad one, at that. So I would get so far behind I would throw an juvenile tantrum. At that point, Larry would justifiably say, "If you can't play right, I am quitting." Boy, then I'd really throw a crying fit. **FOR AS MUCH I HATED TO LOSE, I HAD A FAR GREATER DISTASTE FOR THE GAME BEING OVER!**

And that is the way it is with us, is it not? We don't like losing in the game of life, but the LAST thing we want is the game to be over. In fact, even with sickness and pain, we have a STRONG desire to keep on living. The finality of death is a great enemy. Praise God, Christ Jesus conquers the finality of death.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

III. Futility is conquered! v.5

How can we know the way? As Solomon said in Eccl 2:10, 11:

And all that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. (NAS)

Our human attempts to make sense of life are as futile as an elephant putting a daisy on her hat to draw attention away from her fat ankles! Futility! But thru Christ, life HAS meaning!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way: "If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the opposite direction!"

In Sidney, Australia, a desperate prisoner finally succeeded in escaping jail. He scampered up into the underpinnings of a delivery truck that had stopped briefly in the prison warehouse. He

held on desperately as the truck drove out of the prison, and a few moments later, when the truck stopped, the prisoner dropped down to the ground and rolled outward to freedom --only to find himself in the courtyard of another prison five miles from the first!

Jesus ends the futility! HE IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE! Listen to the hope we share with the Apostle Paul:

2 Tim 4:6-8

6 For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (KJV)

A remarkable incident occurred recently at a wedding in England. A young man, William Montagu Dyke, of large wealth and high social position, who had been blinded by an accident when he was ten years old, and who won university honors in spite of his blindness, had courted and won a beautiful bride, although he had never looked upon her face. A little while before his marriage he submitted himself to a course of treatment for his eyes by experts. The climax came on the day of his wedding. The day came, and the presents, and the guests. There were cabinet ministers and generals and bishops and learned men and a large number of fashionable men and women. William Montagu Dyke, dressed for his wedding, his eyes still shrouded in linen, was driven to the church by his father, and the eye doctor met them in the foyer. The bride, Miss Cave, entered the building on the arm of her white-haired father, the admiral, who was all decked out in the blue and gold lace. So moved was she that she could hardly speak. Was her beloved at last to see her face--the face that others admired, but which he knew only through his delicate fingertips? As she neared the altar, while the soft strains of the Wedding March floated through the church, her eyes fell on a strange group. Sir William Hart Dyke stood there with his son. Before the latter was the eye doctor in the act of cutting away the last bandage. William Montagu Dyke took a step forward, with the spasmodic uncertainty of one who can not believe that he is awake. A beam of rose-colored light from a pane in the church window fell across his face, but he did not seem to see it. Did he see anything? Yes! Recovering in an instant his steadiness of countenance, and with a dignity and joy never before seen in his face, he went forward to meet his bride. They looked into each other's eyes, and one would have thought that his eyes would never wander from her face.

"At last!" she said. "At last!" he echoed solemnly, bowing his head.

That was a scene of great dramatic power and no doubt of great joy to both the bridegroom and his bride. It is a suggestion of what will happen in heaven when the Christian, who has been walking through this world of trial by faith, shall awake in the likeness of his Savior, and see Him no longer through a glass darkly, but, as Paul says, "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Fear is finished! Finality is forgotten! Futility is forever gone! Praise God for the Son Who died in our place and rose victoriously!

Rod Farthing,

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"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B