

# **ARM Prison Outreach International**

## **"Ministers' Minute" Volume II Number 5**

### **Pentecost is Coming!**

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Editor's Note: This sermon is the 5th 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 1st Chapter of Acts and the great preparation that preceded Pentecost. The June sermon will come out earlier than usual and would be appropriate for June 8, Pentecost Sunday. May God bless your labors! -- **Rod Farthing, Regional Development Director**

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### **Preparing for Pentecost**

#### **OPEN:**

Fred Evers loves to tell the story of his mother and the iron. When a child, the family would go on those all-American automobile vacations to the great mountain ranges of the west. It seemed that every time they left home, they would drive for about 75 miles and his mother would exclaim, "Oh no, I think I left the iron on!" So dad would mumble and fume (as dads do) and drive back to the house to find the iron ALWAYS UNPLUGGED! Fred says that when he was about 13, they left to go to Yellowstone Park and sure enough, after about 75 miles, Mom burst forth with her concern that the iron was left on. Whereupon, Dad suddenly stopped the car and silently got out and walked to the rear of the car. Where was he going? He walked to the back of the car, opened the trunk, then walked to Mom's side of the car. Thru the open window, he gently placed the iron in Mom's lap and took his place back behind the wheel. Fred says that they never left on a trip after that but what the iron was in the trunk! They were ready for vacation when the iron was in the trunk. Preparation is important, isn't it!

Our theme today is "Preparing for Pentecost." Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday. The birthday of the church occurred 50 days after Passover 2000 years ago. We want not only to celebrate the birthday of the Church of Jesus Christ, we want to learn from the events of her grand opening! So, today we will look at Acts 1, next week we will look at Acts 2. Let's look at 1:6 and following:

Acts 1:6-14

6 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city.

13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

14. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (NIV)

**Are we prepared for God's Holy Spirit to bless us with victories? Let's look at how the 120 in Acts 1 and 2 prepared for the birthday of the church:**

### **1. Preparation thru the Priority of Togetherness**

Acts 1:6 So when they met **together**. 14 They all joined **together** constantly .....

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all **together** in one place.

Why should believers come together? Some Christians, discouraged with church gatherings in general, have elected to isolate themselves from all other believers. To them, the heartache is just not worth the effort. Most serious disciples can identify with that feeling. However, we must not allow such thinking to dominate our hearts and minds.

There have been other times when there was a general deterioration in the spiritual fabric of society. The prophet Malachi lived in such a time. God's people were not honoring Him, the priests had desecrated the Divine service, and things offered to God were polluted (Mal 1:6-8). The people were profaning His name, and the spiritual leaders were causing the people to stumble (1:11-12; 2:7-8). In their religious service the people had wearied the Lord, and had even stooped so low as to rob Him (2:17; 3:8-10). What a tragic time it was --a grievous time to live.

Yet, in the very midst of profane religion, "they that feared the LORD spake often one to another" (3:16). They did not allow the surrounding corruption to rob them of the benefits coming from being together. The Lord was not indifferent to their action. The Lord "listened and heard them." A "book of remembrance" was even written before Him concerning these people. The Living God affirmed, "They shall be Mine . . . On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him" (3:16-17).

This record sheds light on a word of exhortation given to those in Christ Jesus. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb 10:25). This is more than a law --a commandment to attend church, so to speak. Already, as the verse indicates, some had stopped meeting together. Being absent from an assembly is described as their "manner," or way of life. Such conduct is to be avoided by those in Christ Jesus. How different from the "custom" of our Lord, Who was always in the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16).

One of the benefits of coming together is found in speaking with one another. We do not come together as spectators, or to be entertained by religious performers. As with the faithful in Malachi's day, believers are admonished to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works . . . exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:24-26). The truth of the matter is that we need one another. God has placed each of us in the body "as it has pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18).

Our Lord's good pleasure includes mutual edification, with one believer bringing strength and benefit to another. This confirms a condition introduced by Solomon: "As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend" (Prov 27:17). In Christ, however, much more than our countenance is sharpened, although that surely does take place. When we meet together in the Spirit, our faith is deepened, our hope renewed, and our joy increased. When we come together believing and expectantly, our understanding is broadened, our loads lightened, and our vision clarified.

Why meet together? Indeed, why NOT meet together? Why should we not avail ourselves of such an occasion?

The Lord promised special benefits to those who were "together." The Psalmist affirmed God would "command" a blessing on such a gathering (Psa 133:1-3). Jesus said He would personally be present where "two or three are gathered together" in His name (Matt 18:20). When Peter was imprisoned, believers

were found "gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). The believers at Troas "gathered together" in an "upper chamber" (Acts 20:7-8). Paul spoke of the Corinthians being "gathered together" "with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 5:4).

Such holy conclaves are anything but a mere formality--although they are often so viewed by nominal Christians. The gathering of saints, however, should not be viewed as a formality, obligation, or a neighborhood get-together.

We should not come out of a sense of obligation, but in recognition of the grace of God --and there is a big difference in those perceptions. To be sure, slothful believers are admonished, "forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb 10:25). Those who duly consider the tender mercies of God will NOT be guilty of avoiding the meetings that are for mutual edification, encouragement, and teaching! They know God's grace has made them what they are in Christ.

Whatever view you may entertain about structures and times of meeting for the people of God, it is good to ponder being reverent when entering into His presence. "I will bow in reverence for Thee," David acknowledged. Some of us have noted a strange absence of this mind-set among professed believers. There appears to be too much casualness, and too little consciousness of a gracious God.

Some boast they are always in the presence of God, and do not need to meet with the Forever Family of God. Further, is it wrong to "meet with the Father and with God's people in a certain place?" Jesus, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18), "often resorted" to Gethsemane for prayer. It was so common for Him to do so that even Judas "knew the place" (John 18:1-2). Are those who need not a special place to meet God and His people stronger than Christ? I think not. Those who imagine they have advanced so far they have no need for special places and the people of God are not wise. Even Jesus "desired" to eat His last Passover **with** His disciples (Luke 22:15). Jesus knew the importance of being together!

The more we are faithful to the assembly for the purpose of provoking one another to love and good works, the more prepared we are to serve in the Kingdom!

## **2. Preparation thru the Priority of the Future**

1:6 b They asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"  
1:11 "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the

same way you have seen him go into heaven."

If we look only to the present, we would have no consciousness of heaven, no motivation to fight for eternity, and no stamina to overcome the sufferings of this life. While the disciples were admittedly too interested in the earthly power of Christ's kingdom in this episode, they were at least focused on the future. As Pilgrims in the world, we are living in temporary quarters and working hardest on the world yet to come! We are laying up treasures in heaven, for we are just a-passing thru. Or are we? Could it be that the only future that some Christians think about is the next car payment or the next vacation? We need to be future focused on eternity!

In speaking of the heroes of the faith in Heb 11, we read in vs.13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (KJV)

1 Pet 2:11-12 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; 12 Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. (KJV)

If we are going to be prepared to do eternal good, we must be "future focused." That is, we must see that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. Rom 8:18-19 (NAS)

It is possible to be so "heavenly minded" that we are of "No earthly good." But it is also possible to be so conscious of things present, earthly things, that we lose sight that the world will some day come to an end and there is A BETTER WORLD COMING!

### **3. Preparation thru the Priority of Prayer**

1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

**Christ's own example was an example of prayer. Consider these scriptures:**

Mark 1:35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

Matt 14:23 And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the

evening was come, he was there alone.

Luke 9:18 And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples came to him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?

Luke 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.

Matt 26:36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Matt 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

## **Those who stay in close touch with God in prayer are being constantly prepared for great victories in the kingdom!**

The poet was blind. The Lord wonderfully blessed her with an ability to write poems and lyrics for songs. William Doane had sent her a melody for which she was to compose a new poem. She worked and thought but came up with nothing. Puzzled by her own inability to come up with the verses, she paused to turn her mind onto something else. Suddenly it occurred to her that she had neglected her time of prayer that day. She immediately assumed her prayer posture and spent time communing with Christ. Then she rose from her knees, her heart and mind refreshed, and the words tumbled forth: (385) "Jesus keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain. Free to all, a healing stream, flows from Calvary's mountain. In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever, Till my raptured soul shall find, rest beyond the river." Fanny Crosby, author of some 8000 gospel hymns and poems had demonstrated the key to being prepared for use by the Lord. She had taken time to pray.

**Are you ready to be used of the Lord? Will there be victories for us because we are prepared thru togetherness, a view for the future, and prayer?**

**Rod Farthing,  
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"Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B**