

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" ---- Volume IV Number 4

"Celebrating the Death of a Christian"

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 40th email sermon in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message is different. I've used it at the funerals of those who clearly lived and served Jesus. But more than "just a funeral sermon" this message could be used as a challenge to live in such a way that one's death is a graduation to glory -- so that those who know us will say with the Psalmist: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." Psalm 116:15. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, or use components of it!

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

"Celebrating the Death of a Christian"

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4

Note: I have left this message in the form of a funeral sermon. The name of the deceased I have left in place is "Jim." If using this as a funeral message, one would substitute the name of the deceased Christian. If using it in some other setting, one might substitute "the Christian who dies" and adjust the verb tense accordingly. This message ends with a strong evangelistic appeal.

- 1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth.
- 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart.
- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.
- 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure.
(NIV)

"Celebrate." It's a strange word to use when marking anyone's death. But before you think it totally out of place, consider that first verse: *A good name is better than fine perfume and the day of death is better than the day of birth. It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting...*"

Pondering these verses, I thought, "Yes, there is something to celebrate at the passing of a Christian." There is something good about the death of a child of God. Indeed the scriptures say in Psalm 116:15: *"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."* We do not readily accept that .. for our perspective is indeed far different from God's.

BUT, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF OUR SORROW AND GRIEF...AND YOUR SORROW AND GRIEF ARE REAL, THERE IS CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION. THERE ARE REASONS TO REJOICE. What are those reasons? Let's look into our text. Eccl 7:1-4

1. We can celebrate a good name! Verse 1.

The Bible has a lot to say about a good name. Prov. 22:1 says: "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches; loving favor rather than silver and gold." The New Testament tells us that a church leader

must have a good reputation. The early church was told to look out among themselves and find leaders of good repute. Once a name is soiled, no money can purchase its cleansing. Once a reputation is lost, no amount of riches can buy it again.

Jim had a good name. Wherever you mentioned his name folks had good things to say. He had a good name and it is worth more than rubies. I'm not saying He was perfect, you know I wouldn't say that. But I am saying that we can celebrate the fact that this brother in Christ had a good name. Yes, we can celebrate a good name today... and here is something else:

2. We can celebrate The Day of Death. 1b

Celebrate the 'day of death?' You say, "How cynical can one be?" "How can that be something to celebrate?"

Here is how: Death is, for the blood-bought, born-again believer in Christ, a release of prison and an entrance into glory. I never attempt to preach someone into heaven and I don't intend to be doing that now. God knows all hearts and we can't. But here is the Bible truth about those in Christ:

2 Cor 5:1 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

1 Cor 15:54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jim was imprisoned by a body, an earthly tabernacle in Bible terminology, that was worn out and holding him back. Holding him back from church meetings, back from service, back from doing for his family as He had so often done. That restriction has been lifted, he has been freed, emancipated from the bondage of physical infirmity.

3. We can celebrate the house of mourning. v 2A

A house of mourning is not a pretty picture, normally. But consider it this way: WHERE THERE IS MOURNING THERE WAS LOVE, JOY, AND DEEP RELATIONSHIPS. If there had not been these good and wholesome things, no one would be mourning! Mourning indicates loss, and loss means something GOOD WAS HERE! INDEED, SOMETHING GOOD WAS HERE! I see a family mourning because a loving husband and father served for 94 plus years. I see a family mourning because a devoted Christian servant was a spiritual leader by his actions for all those years. Let me contrast it with the infamous king of Judah, Jehoram. It says in 2 Chr 21:20

"Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one's regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the

tombs of the kings."

Jim did not die "with no one's regret." In fact, we all regret this loss. It's when one dies and there is no regret and there is no mourning that there is no reason to celebrate. Today we can celebrate even as we mourn. Indeed, it is better to go to a house where the dead are loved and mourned than to go where feasting abounds and no regret is shown in the time of death. Celebrate a good name, celebrate the day of freedom from a body that imprisons, celebrate the mourning over a valuable loved one, and

4. Celebrate the wisdom to recognize the inevitable. 2b

The word says here that death is inevitable, unavoidable, and inescapable. The book of Hebrews says: "It is appointed unto man once to die, then the judgment." It's coming folks, the time we all leave this planet. It is coming and we don't know just when. Jim knew it and lived like he was bound for another world, "He lived like his treasure was laid up, somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckoned him from heaven's open door, and He couldn't feel at home in this world anymore." He was a pilgrim just passing thru.

No gold bars in his suitcase for heaven, He sent them on ahead. What would you do with a suitcase of paving stones where the streets are paved with gold?

We can celebrate the lives of those who live in such a way as to prepare for dying. To conduct themselves in this **world** as if it meant all the **world** in the next **world**... AND IT TRULY DOES....

"Death is the destiny of every man and the living" ... that's you and me... "should take this to heart."

Have you taken death to heart?

Have you faced your own mortality?

Have you prepared, thru Christ Jesus, for the world beyond this one? He is the only one who can get you ready. You really can't prepare yourself without Him, but you can co-operate with Him and be ready. Jesus wants you to be ready and talked about on numerous occasions.

"Lay not treasures up for yourselves on earth....."

"He who confesses me before men ..."

"Unless ye all repent, ye..."

"He that believeth and is baptized..."

"Remain thou faithful unto death...."

All those are scriptures where Jesus taught us to be ready.

And if we heed our Savior's admonitions to be ready for life and for death, if we truly submit to Christ Jesus and make Him Lord of our lives, we can, like Jim, view our own death NOT as an end, but as a departure for a better harbor.

"Gone from Our Sight, That's All"

As we stand on the edge of a beautiful harbor, a great sailing vessel lies just before us.

Her majesty and beauty is obvious to all as she unfurls her white sails to the morning breeze.

As we stand there admiring her, she begins to move slowly out of the harbor.

Her movements are graceful as she glides out on to the open sea.

Gradually she becomes smaller and smaller until she hangs like a speck on the horizon.

Then we see her no more.

Someone standing at our side then says, "There, she's gone."

To which I reply, "Gone? Gone where? Gone from our sight, that's all."

"For she is just as beautiful, majestic, and graceful as when she left our side.

Only now she is closer to the next harbor.

Others in that next harbor see her approaching.

They shout with joy, "Here she comes, sails full and cargo safe!"

Death is like that for the Christian.

"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow; because He Lives, all fear is gone!"

Thanks be to God for the Son Who died and rose again that we might have such a hope!

"Thanks be to God Who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, let us be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

For we know that our labors in the Lord are not in vain."

I Corinthians 15:57-58

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

Last year, 42,898 Bible courses were sent to prisoners -- 117 per day on average! In 2005, the daily rate is up to 131! SIXTY-NINE of those are NEW ENROLLEES -- one every 21 minutes!

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