

# ARM Prison Outreach International

## "Ministers' Minute" ---- Volume IV Number 7

### "Power in the House!"

Romans 1:13-16

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**Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 43rd email sermon in a series we are sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message is a message about the POWER of the GOSPEL to change lives. It uses illustrations from prison ministry and the work of ARM Prison Outreach. 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**

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### Power in the House!

Romans 1:13-16

Power in the House! Aren't you glad you had power in your house today! If you live in the country like us, it pumps your water, it heats your water; didn't that shower feel good! And wasn't it needed!

You had power for (heat/AC). You had power for cooking your breakfast... or cooling the milk for your cereal. Power to light your way... and maybe check your email! POWER IN THE HOUSE!

And we are glad for the power in the church house! Lights, heat/AC, sound system, VCR's, projectors, etc. Electricity is important – almost essential for us. But let's talk about REAL eternal power... God's power! Romans 1:16 power!

Rom 1:13-16 Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. 14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. 15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (KJV)

The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation! Amen? In the church house, people walking the aisle and confessing Christ, being immersed into Him. Changed lives. At your house as you read the Word to the kids and grandkids. And the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation at my house! And the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation at the courthouse.. at the schoolhouse... at the White House! And the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation at the JAILHOUSE!

Let's talk about POWER IN THE HOUSE!

## **1. THE SOURCE OF THE POWER IS GOD HIMSELF! V. 16**

Your electricity may come from a power grid miles and miles away. Your car may be fueled from gasoline refined from crude oil pumped out of the ground halfway around the globe. But the power that cleanses from sin and regenerates the soul is the power only God can produce.

1 Cor 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. KJV

This gospel is power because it tells of Christ Who is "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Let me illustrate the Gospel's "power in the house" – even in the jail house.

ARM sent 88,000 Bibles last year to prisons. We sent 42,898 Bible study courses free to inmates. AND LIVES ARE BEING CHANGED! Hear this word from a Chaplain at Cook County, IL, jail:

As the designated Chaplain for distribution of the many Bibles you have donated to the Cook County Jail, I want to thank you on behalf of the Cook County Correctional Chaplaincy Council and the inmates of the Cook County Jail in Chicago for your generous contributions. The inmates are grateful for the gift and we never have enough to satisfy the demand. Many have testified in our services about how these Bibles have changed their lives and of how God has not forgotten them even in making sure that His Word is available to them when they are in the crisis of incarceration.

Now let me share a letter from an inmate whose life has been changed by the power of the Gospel of Christ! This was written about 3 years ago. I've known him for over twelve years; I've been to eleven parole board hearings.

Prior to my incarceration I had the opportunity to experience and be exposed to a great deal, both legal and illegal, moral and immoral. Life was at times tough, sometimes exciting, but seldom boring. I learned a lot. Yet, there always seemed to be something missing--spiritually.

Don't get me wrong. I'd had plenty of exposure to religion my first 19 years. I grew up in a Christian church, "hung out" with a minister at the parsonage and belonged to a Christian clown group which visited sick and elderly in hospitals and nursing homes. Finding something still missing, I tasted and sometimes ventured into the other major religions of the world, even looking to the occult for answers. Who was I? Why was I here? And, what was my purpose in life. Still, in spite of the vast amounts of information I'd been exposed to, I could find no answers. So, I pretty much gave up on my search for any meaning in life.

I lived life day to day, hand to mouth, turning my back on all that I had learned and believed to be "right." Then, on June 28th, 1976, I hit bottom. I allowed myself to be talked into participating in the commission of an armed robbery. Everything was wrong from the beginning and a young man was attacked and left for dead.

My codefendants turned themselves in and similarly turned me in. I was arrested and put in jail. Word quickly spread through the jail that there was a contract on my head. I asked for protective custody but was denied as I couldn't name my intended attacker. Then, something happened.

Some might say it was purely out of boredom, but I believe that Holy Spirit moved. I borrowed a Bible from my cellmate and for the first time in my life, decided to try reading it from cover to cover to find out what it really said. I read through the night covering the first three or four books. About 4:00 a.m., I put the Bible up and lay down to sleep.

A few minutes before 6:00 a.m., I was abruptly awakened from my sleep by someone on my back who, I thought, was hitting me. I fought him off and knocked him out. As I cleared the sleep from my eyes, I noted that he held a shank--a prison-made knife -- in his hand. Then, the pain hit me and I noted that I was spraying blood all over the cell. I had been stabbed 27 times and my throat had been slashed, severing the major veins and arteries on both sides of my neck.

Help soon arrived and I was taken to the hospital. By the time I arrived, I was so bled-out, anesthesia wouldn't even take effect. I lay there conscious as they began their treatment and surgery. Later that day, I awoke in intensive care--ironically, just two rooms down from the victim of my crime. The doctor stood at the foot of the bed looking down at me. I remember his words; "There is no way that I know of on this earth that you should be laying there looking at me." After three weeks of hospitalization, I was returned to jail to await trial. Two months later, the victim of my offense died. Any chance of the truth coming out and an acquittal was forever lost. I was convicted of armed robbery and felony murder and sentenced to a term of 75 to 150 years.

But I found I had a bigger problem than my sentence. I had a question that needed an answer. My injuries had been much worse than those of the one it was alleged I had attacked. Why had God taken him but kept me alive? I needed an answer. In prison, I went to church service. There was preaching and singing and talk of redemption through the precious blood of Christ, but I'd heard it all before -- and still there were no answers.

I discovered that an outside Church affiliated with the prison offered free Bible correspondence courses (very similar to ARM's current courses). I took one home and began studying. I started finding answers to my questions. It became addictive and I continued. Answers begat further questions which begat more answers. For the first time I began understanding what everyone had been preaching. Everything had a new light and I couldn't seem to get enough. Within a couple of months, I accepted Christ as my personal Savior and asked to be baptized. ( I was immersed in a prison hospital bathtub.)

My whole life changed as a result of that decision. I went on to complete more than 160 Bible correspondence courses over the years. And every aspect of my life changed. Where once had stood a spiritually dead, homeless, high school dropout with no employable skills to amount to anything, I'll now stand my educational, disciplinary and work record against any inmate in the Illinois prison system.

That inmate has now been out of prison for almost one year. He served 28 years and 4 months! He is active in church, gainfully employed, and currently the vice-president of a ministry that is mentoring and counseling those recently paroled! God changes lives thru His Word, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Source of the Power in the House!

## **2. THE SERVANTS OF THIS POWER INCLUDE ALL CHRISTIANS! V. 14-15**

14 I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.  
15 So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

Paul calls himself a SERVANT of Jesus Christ in Romans 1:1. A Servant of the Lord and a Servant of the power. The Source is clearly the Creator God. We are His servants, the agents or ministers of reconciliation!

2 Cor 5:17-21 Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (NAS)

This is the wonderful work to which all Christians have been called: THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION. Whether you are a preacher, elder, deacon, SS teacher, or prison chaplain - - OR A PRISONER -- you are a part of a team of believers who are sharing the POWER of the Gospel with those who have yet to have experienced its transformation and cleansing!

The local church is the base of operations in this redeeming work. The congregation lives the Christian life and spreads the Gospel in its neighborhood and community. Souls are saved, converts confess Christ and are baptized into Him. It's the POWER IN THE HOUSE – the church house. And as the church sends out and supports missionaries to Africa and Asia, so it sends out and supports evangelists who go behind prison walls to TAKE THE POWER TO THE HOUSE.. THE JAIL HOUSE! ARM is an ARM of the church to take the POWER of God to the jailhouse.

The power is seen in the transformation and lives ARE being changed. We have placed almost 1200 baptistries in prisons nationwide. Converts by the thousands are being immersed into Christ. Chaplain Pete in Okmulgee, OK stood and told us he had led 18 to Christ in the last two weeks and was looking forward to baptizing them when the ARM baptistry arrived. It arrived soon thereafter and they were baptized! Four-hundred-fifty souls were baptized in one year in Abilene, Texas -- 594 in Fayetteville, ARK in two years. Servants of the power are taking the Gospel to a hungry throng of over 2.1 million prisoners in the USA.

I want to encourage you to keep on being 'servants of the power.' Right here in your church you can witness the transforming power of the Gospel of Christ. Share the word in all you do. Reach out to that relative or friend or neighbor. The power of the Gospel is not diminished. Where receptive hearts receive its seed, a beautiful flower will grow!

Do those souls around you look beyond redemption? Don't sell God's power short! As God said to Moses in Num. 11:22-23, "Is My arm too short?" In other words, is God unable to do what He promised?

Num. 11:22 (Moses speaking) "Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" 23 The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you." (NIV)

So you live in a rough neighborhood. America's prisons are pretty rough neighborhoods and yet thousands are naming the name of Christ and being cleansed of their sins in Christian baptism. Let me encourage you to be loyal as SERVANTS OF THE POWER as I share this true story from Bro. Joe Garman concerning his prison seminar in upstate New York:

What do a boxer, a homosexual, and a "lifer" have in common? These three men stood shoulder-to-shoulder confessing Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior at one of my most recent in-prison Bible seminars in upstate New York.

The boxer had worked at a professional training camp before succumbing to a life-long drug addiction that landed him, along with 2,959 other men, in the Clinton Correctional Facility, New York's largest and oldest maximum security state prison. "You do not know me, my past or my sins, but this 'See Through the Scriptures' seminar has opened my eyes to God and I want to be saved," he said, as he reached out to receive my hand.

The homosexual was blatantly defensive of his "gay" life-style, arguing with the other prisoners just prior to the beginning of each session. He would say, "I love Christ just as much as you do" ... "You are no better than me" ... "You have no right to condemn my sexual preference" ... "Judge not that ye be not judged."

At the close of the seminar this same inmate raised his hand and asked permission to speak to the prison Church. In humiliation he stood and said, "I apologize for any harm I have caused this Christian fellowship. You don't know how long I have wanted out of homosexuality. If anyone sees me conducting myself in this manner in the future I want you to confront me." Then he stepped to the front of the room, and knelt down ... and as we laid hands on him and prayed for him, he wept tears of repentance,

The lifer was a 75-year-old black man who first entered prison on his 18th birthday. He too broke down in tears, which is something a lifer rarely does in public. After he made his good confession of faith he turned to the prison Church and said, "I've been running from God for 57 years, and I'm not going to run anymore."

The prisoners gave him a standing ovation, and in the midst of the applause someone shouted, "We ARE our brother's keeper." But the old man was not finished, He continued, "Prison treatment programs were not able to soften my hardened heart. Anger management classes could not do it. Fights and threats of punishment had no effect on me. I was a violent person who did not care if I lived or died. I used to laugh at 'Bible thumpers'. But today I have received The Gift of Life. I'm not sure how to express my gratitude to God for all He has done for me, but I thank Him sincerely."

The nine-day Bible conference concluded with the baptisms of eight prisoners. Immediately after his baptism, one of the young men turned and embraced me. Then he laid his head against mine and began weeping. His tears fell like raindrops on the back of my neck. Only God knows what all was behind the many tears shed by so many men at this blessed in-prison Bible seminar.

I would later report to my board of directors, "I do not believe that I, the Chaplain, or even the inmates will ever fully realize what transpired in that seminar. It was beyond understanding. All I know is that I had lost control of the seminar and that I have never experienced anything like it in my 29 years of prison ministry. The Spirit of the Lord transformed that prison classroom into holy ground. A genuine movement of God took place inside those prison walls.

**YES, THERE IS POWER IN THE HOUSE. THE CHURCH HOUSE, YOUR HOUSE, MY HOUSE, THE COURTHOUSE, THE WHITE HOUSE, AND THE JAILHOUSE!**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (KJV)

**PRAYER -- INVITATION**