

ARM Prison Outreach International

"Ministers' Minute" Volume Number 8

Greetings in Christ! This "MM" is the 8th email message of 2008 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. This issue of MM is a soul winning message by Evangelist Reggie Thomas on the theme of Calvary and its significance. It was first sent in August of 2002, but we've added hundreds of subscribers since then. We pray it is of help and encouragement to you! Thanks for your prayers and support of ARM's ministry.

The Place Called Calvary

In Luke 23:33 we read: And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

The Preacher's Holy Land Trip

The preacher of a tremendously wealthy church came almost to the point of a nervous breakdown. He had worked terrifically hard. The calls on him were many, there had been an epidemic of illness in the city. Many of the members were in the hospital, some of them were dying. The preacher had been on the go day and night. He had served this congregation for more than 12 years, and the people loved him to a fault. They were concerned about him. Some of the leaders realized if they didn't do something to help him, he might die. It seemed like a vacation was an absolute necessity, but when it was mentioned, the preacher re- fused. So there was a special called meeting of the Board. After a consultation with the doctor, they found out that an extended vacation was necessary. In another special called board meeting, they decided to recommend to the church that an offering be received to send the preacher to the Holy Land. I suppose every preacher has a desire in his heart to someday be able to go to Israel and walk where Jesus walked. The preacher was very pleased to find out I what was decided. The day for the offering arrived, and since the congregation was very large and the members were wealthy, enough money was received to send both he and his wife with first class accommodations to the Holy Land. One of the best deacons in the church owned a camera shop and he gave the preacher a Bell and Howell 16mm camera, together with thousands of feet of film, so he could record everything that he saw on the trip. It was really a generous gift that this man made, and it brought him real joy because he loved his preacher very much. The trip was made, and in a few short months, the preacher came home with his wife and was able to resume his ministry. He was refreshed, invigorated, bold and brave, just like he had always been. Then one Sunday morning he announced that the following Wednesday night there was to be an all-church supper in the fellowship hall. Following the supper, he would show his movie films of the trip he made on the journey to the Holy Land. Wednesday night came, and the Fellowship Hall was jammed packed and was filled way beyond capacity. Nearly all the members turned out along with friends from the community. After the sumptuous meal, the auditorium was darkened and the motion picture began to unreel scenes. First it showed the preacher and his wife standing on the parsonage steps waving good-bye to everybody. Next, it showed them in New York City among the sky scrapers, and then they were on the ship, plowing across the Atlantic Ocean. Next, it showed them on the streets of London and then they were going across the British Channel into Europe on down to Paris, on down to the Mediterranean. At last there were the scenes from the Holy Lands. Scenes of Palestine, Joppa, Haifa, Mt Carmel, the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth, on down to the Dead Sea, and back up to Bethlehem. Finally the streets of Jerusalem. All of a sudden in the darkened auditorium, a man's hoarse voice called out these passionate words, "And now preacher, show us Calvary." I believe that consciously or unconsciously that is the cry of the whole world. Everywhere people are saying, "show us Calvary."

No Place Like Calvary

In every state of the Union there are historical places. In the great state of Illinois there are places you love to take your visiting friends. In our lives, there are those places that tug at the heart's strings. The place where we were born, the place where we courted and obtained our life's partner, the place where our children were born, and for everyone of us there is that silent city of the dead; the cemetery where we've laid our loved ones to rest. All of these are precious places that we like to revisit in life's memory lane, but there is no place that compares with Calvary.

I. Why is it that Calvary is such a wondrous place? First of all, because it is a place of pain.

- A. Real physical pain. How many of you have ever run a sliver of wood into your finger between the nail down into the quick? I am sure that an accident like that has happened to you on more than one occasion, and you have experienced real physical pain at such times. How many of you have jammed one of your fingers in the door of an automobile. That has happened to me several times, in fact one time I jammed my finger so bad that I lost the nail and I thought I was going to lose the whole end of the finger. I'll never forget the pain I suffered because of that accident. How many of you have ever had a nail driven through your hand? When I was 17 years old, I did not have a nail driven through my hand, but I had a knife driven through my right hand and it is scarred on both sides and I cannot fully open the hand and lost all the feelings on one side of my finger. Those are the reminders I have till this day and I shall never forget the pain. How many of you have been whipped? With a cruel whip that would bind into your back until your flesh became like bloody stripes of human flesh? If any of these things have ever happened to you, then you understand just a little bit of the physical pain that Jesus Christ endured there at a place called Calvary.
- B. There was not only the physical pain of Calvary, but also the pain of loneliness. As Jesus Christ hung there on the cross, He realized all of His friends had deserted Him, His disciples had forsaken Him, and even the four women and one man who stayed there so long at the side of the cross, left Him at His command when He sent them home. So when Jesus came to the end, He was truly all alone. No one was by His side to wipe the death sweat from His brow. No one was present to apply healing ointment to His many wounds. No one was even there to shoo away the Blue Bottle Syrian Flies that came to torment Him. The loneliness of Calvary was heart rending.
- C. There was also the pain of misunderstanding. For it seems like no one in the whole world understood why Jesus had come. His mother and step father did not even understand. His half brothers and half sisters certainly did not understand, they thought He was demented. His enemies did not understand, they thought He was competition for their King. And His friends did not understand, even they expected Him to ascend an earthly throne and that they would be given important positions and thus they would cash in from being His followers. Everywhere people misunderstood.
- D. But greater than the pain of all this was the pain of God's wrath. For the scripture teaches us that, "He who knew no sin became sin for us." I tell you the truth, my little mind can hardly conceive of that truth, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had never thought an evil thought, who had never done an evil deed, never spoke an evil word, became sin for me and for you. Again, the Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord had laid on him the iniquity of us all." Can you imagine it? Christ taking upon Himself all of your sins and all of my sins and all of the sins of every person in the whole world, becoming sin for us. Yes the Bible says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us. For it is written that cursed is everyone who is hanged upon the tree." What depth of anguish then did the Son of God suffer as He became sin for me and for you? God who cannot countenance sin on any occasion turned His back from this awful sight. And thus the anguished cry from the lips of Jesus, "My God, My God why hast thou forsaken Me?" Occasionally, I have been asked by different individuals, if I believe that there is real burning, blazing Hell. I do believe it because of the pain Jesus suffered at Calvary, the anguish of Calvary will rise up to witness against any person who is so heartless and cruel to reject such a precious Savior Jesus Christ. There can be nothing but blazing torture awaiting such a soul. But is this all that we could say about Calvary? That it was just a place of pain? If that's all we can say then there is no Gospel.

II. I am glad that there is more. For we can say that Calvary is a place of pardon.

(A) You remember there were two others crucified with Jesus. One on the right hand and one on the left. It seems that towards the end, one of these dying thieves gained some spiritual insight into the real nature of the Son of God, because he offered a prayer to Jesus, "Lord, when thou comest to thy kingdom, remember me." You will recall that Jesus at once answered the prayer of that dying thief, when He promised him, "Today thou shall be with me in Paradise." If nothing else had happened at Calvary except the pardon that Jesus gave to that dying thief, it would give me a little bit of hope. I would think that if Christ would pardon a sinner like him maybe He would pardon a sinner like myself.

(B) I'm glad that there was not only a pardon for that dying thief, but there was also a pardon of the murderers of Jesus. Now you remember that Jesus prayed while He was on the cross, He prayed for the ones responsible for His crucifixion, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Do you believe that God answered the prayer that came from the dying Jesus? Do you think that God forgave the murderers of Jesus? I believe that He did, I believe it for two reasons. First of all I believe it because Jesus said, "My Father always heareth my prayer." How could Jesus say so confidently that God always heard Him when He prays. Because Jesus had always lived perfectly according to His Father's will. I believe it for another reason, I believe it because the Bible records the answers to prayer. The answer

was given 53 days, later, on the day of Pentecost, when Christ established His church. It was that day when the Gospel was preached for the first time. At the conclusion of that first Gospel sermon, the murderers of Jesus heard this accusation found in Acts 2:36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, who ye hath crucified, both Lord and Christ." So the murderers of Jesus were there on the day of Pentecost. Fifty-three days after Jesus had said that prayer, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." How did the murderers of Jesus react when they heard this accusation, "You have crucified Him"? The 37th verse says, "When they heard this, they were pricked in their heart and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' " Then in Acts 2:38, Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And in verse 41, "Then they that gladly received His word were baptized and that same day there was added to them about 3,000 souls." The question is this, did God answer the prayer of Jesus? Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The Bible answer is yes. God did forgive them, Acts 2:41 says so. They gladly received the word and were baptized in the same day, 3000 of them. Why were they baptized? Acts 2:38 says they were baptized for the remission of their sins. What did Jesus pray for them? He prayed their sins may be remitted, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." God did answer the prayer of Jesus 53 days after He prayed it, when 3000 of His murderers repented and were baptized and their sins were remitted; just like Jesus had prayed they would be. So there was a pardon for the dying thief at the place called Calvary and there was pardon for the murderers of Jesus at the place called Calvary.

(C) Thank God there was a pardon at the place called Calvary for you and me. Notice in the 39th verse of Acts chapter 2, "For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off even as many as the Lord our God shall call." That promise is ours, just like it was promised to the murderers of Jesus Christ. If we will repent and be baptized into Christ, we will have our sins forgiven just like they had their sin forgiven.

Water And Blood

I want you to notice with me how carefully the Bible explains God's plan of salvation and how water and blood are joined together. In John 19:34, the Bible says, "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water." All through the Bible, God has joined blood and water in His scheme of redemption. In the Old Testament dispensation, when the people gave animal sacrifices, they mixed blood and water and the ashes of a heifer, and these were used as rites of purification. As the sacrifices were given, their sins were rolled forward for one more year. " It looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was to be slain upon the cross once for all. Thus, when Jesus Christ died as the Lamb of God as our sin's sacrifice, the scriptures perfectly record the fact that blood and water poured out of His heart. Jesus Christ gave us, in His own words, His plan whereby we can receive remission of our sins. It was His own command that we be baptized in water. In Matthew 28:19, in Mark 16:16, Jesus made it very clear that if we wanted to be saved, among other things, we were to be baptized. Baptism is not a command of the church, it is a command of Jesus Christ. In Mark 16: 16, He promised that, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Some people say, "Well, do you mean to say that water will wash away our sins?" Certainly not! I have never preached that. Some people have falsely accused the Christian Church and the Church of Christ of believing that and it is a false accusation. The Church of Christ or the Christian Church has never preached or believed such a doctrine as that. We know that the water does not wash away sin, but we do know that when we have faith enough to obey Jesus and be baptized in the water that it is there that we meet His blood. And His blood washes away our sins. I want you to notice how the Bible makes this so clear. I want you to compare the teaching that we find in Matthew 26:28 with the scripture Acts 2:38 that we brought out. Notice in Matthew 26:28 Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Now compare that with Acts 2:38, "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.'" Is it the water that washes our sins away? No, it is the blood of Jesus Christ. But, how do we contact the blood? By obedience to Christ in the waters of Christian baptism. Note again how clearly the scriptures explain this, for as we turn to I John 5 beginning with verse 5, 'Who is he that overcometh the world, he that believeth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.' It is by the divine commandment of Jesus that we are to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and these three are one. When we are baptized in the water, the blood of Jesus forgives our sins and we receive the spirit. And the spirit and the water and the blood are also one. Far dearer than all that the world can impart was the message that came to my heart. How that Jesus alone for my sin did atone and Calvary covers it all. The Stripes that He bore and the thorns He wore, told His mercy and love for ever more. And my heart bowed in shame as I called on His name and Calvary covers it all. Calvary

covers it, my past with its sin and stain, my sin and despair, Jesus took on Him there and Calvary covers it all.

III. So Calvary was a place of pain, Calvary was a place of pardon, and thank God Calvary was a place of promise.

Will you think with me for a moment of the exceeding great and precious promises that are ours, because of Calvary?

(A) First, the promise that our sins can be forgiven. Now, we have been talking about pardon, but let's think further about the meaning of that word, let's talk about forgiveness. What does it mean to be pardoned by God or to be forgiven by God or to have remission of sins, as the scripture puts it in Acts 2:38? Forgiveness by God, what does that mean?

A Dream

I read a story one time about a Christian who dreamed he had died and he was carried to the next world. As he was borne along, an angel came and noticed that he was terribly sad and so the angel questioned him, "Soul, why so pensive and so sad?" The soul of the Christian responded, "I am worried about my sins, I am sad because I do not know what I will say to God when I stand before Him and He asks me about all the sins that I have committed." And the angel smiled and said, "Why Christian have you forgotten that God has buried your sins, now rejoice you are saved, your sins are all buried by God." But in a little while the angel returned and found the soul of the Christian still very sad and the angel questioned again, "Soul, why are you so pensive and so sad when all of your sins have been buried." This time the soul of the Christian responded, "Where did God bury my sins." Now he was worried about those sins being dug up, resurrected, brought back, he would still have to give account for them. This time the angel smiled and said, "Didn't you know that God has forgotten where He buried them." Did you ever stop to think that we have a forgetful God? That's one of God's attributes and that's why He is so much greater than we are as human beings. When God forgives us, He forgets our sins. As human beings, we are not that good. We can forgive, but it seems like we can never forget, and that's the way it so often happens when you wrong somebody and you go to them and say, "I'm sorry. Will you forgive me?" They say, "O.K., but I'll never forget it." Sometimes we often wonder how much forgiveness there is when there is an answer like that. Maybe you have said the same thing yourself. I have often said, "I'm glad God has not commanded us to forget, because, I guess, we can never do it." Now we can forgive and we must forgive, if we do not forgive those who have wronged us, God will not forgive. But to forget, as human beings, we find it impossible. I have had people to wrong me and I want to forget and cannot, but God can do the impossible. What is impossible with men is possible with God. He has promised, "Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more." That is the first promise we have because of Calvary.

(B) Secondly, we are promised help in living the Christian life. The fellowship of God, the fellowship of Jesus, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Himself promised, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end." God has promised, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Have you ever known what it is to be lonely? I have many times. In my travels, I have often been all alone traveling through the night and nobody in the whole world really knew where I was. But, even in that hour of loneliness I was never really alone, because God was with me and Jesus was with me and the Holy Spirit was with me.

No One Attended the Funeral

One time when I was preaching at Catlin, Illinois, I was called upon for a funeral service. The man that died was 91 years old. The only two people to come for the funeral were the undertaker and myself. It seems that the old man outlived his wife, all of his children, all of his relatives, all of his friends, and because of very bad health, had spent the past several years in a nursing home. Nobody even knew him. Apparently nobody cared. I thought "how sad", but then I thought, "Well, if he is a Christian, he was not alone." That is really a beautiful promise to know that we'll never be alone. God is with us. He will never forsake us.

(C) Then we have another promise because of Calvary. We are promised a home in heaven where we can be with our God, our Savior, with our Christians friends and in great joy forever and ever and ever. This home can be best described by the words of Jesus Christ found in John 14. "Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

My House Burns

It was December the 11th, 1970, the final night of our revival meeting at Latonia, Kentucky. I was really looking forward to

that last sermon because afterwards, I got to go home to spend the Christmas Holidays with my family. When we finished eating, it was very late and I drove over to the house where I was staying with an elderly couple. I quietly entered, hoping I would not awaken them, and I planned to pack up everything and be ready to leave bright and early in the morning and drive straight through to my home in Miami, Oklahoma. It was mid-night as I was busy packing when the phone rang. I grabbed it on the first ring, hoping it would not awaken my host and hostess. My wife's voice came from the other end of the line. Whenever the telephone rings at midnight, it's usually bad news, because her first words were these, "Are you standing up?" I said, "Yes, why?" She said, "You better sit down." So I did and I said, "Honey, what's wrong?" She said, "Our house is burning." I would never be able to tell you how awful I felt and I had no idea how awful she felt. I don't even know what I said from that point on in the conversation. I know it was terrible driving all those miles home, wondering how things would be. I knew just about what it would be like, because I've seen other people burned out and I would help people at times like that.

We Were Blest

When I arrived home, it was just about as bad as I thought it would be. I went into a terrible state of depression for the next few days. There was so much to do and we were very fortunate in many ways. We found a small apartment where we could move our family and continue to live a half-way normal life. The third day after the fire, I was over at the house just rummaging around through the ashes, trying to make a list for the insurance agency and trying to salvage what we could, trying to talk to all the people that came. Any of you that have been through it know exactly what it's like. I was depressed at the end of the day, I was so tired and discouraged, I went over to the apartment and plopped down in the old chair we had in the living room. My five children were all lying down on the floor in front of the TV. I let my head slump over on my chest and I really felt sorry for myself. My little boy, Timmy, who was 10 years old at the time, noticed how distressed and discouraged I was. So, he climbed up into my lap and I didn't pay any attention to him. After a few minutes, he put his arms around me and started hugging me. I still didn't pay any attention to him. And then he said, "Daddy, wouldn't it be great if you were a millionaire, then you could buy us a new house, clothes, new furniture, we wouldn't have any worries; would we?" He thought that was going to cheer me up. I just said, "Yeah, that would be great, Timmy," and I pushed him off on to the floor and I went on feeling sorry for myself.

We Are Millionaires

In a few minutes, I suddenly realized how wrong my attitude was and how wrong I treated Timmy and so I straightened myself up and put a smile on my face. I said, "Children listen to me." They all looked at me wondering what was going to happen. I said, "I want to tell you something, did you know that we are millionaires?" Well, my little girl, Teresa, jumped up and clapped her hands with joy and said, "Oh, Boy!" And Timmy jumped up and was wide eyed and said, "Are we really?" But, my three older sons just looked at me like I was crazy, they didn't say anything. I said, "WE really are millionaires. We have a God in Heaven who loves us very much and we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for us upon the cross and even now He is preparing for us a home in Heaven and no fire will ever burn it. We are multi-millionaires."

Come Claim Your Treasure!

I don't know whether it made an impression upon the children or not, but it surely made an impression on me. I have never forgotten it and I know that it is the truth. If we have Jesus Christ as our Savior, then we are multi-millionaires. All the treasures of Heaven are ours. If you are not a Christian, I know that Jesus Christ loves you, His love is so great that He died for you upon the cross and I'm asking you tonight to accept Him as your Savior. Won't you come to Calvary, just like they did back yonder, not to crucify, but to confess His wonderful name. Won't you come to Calvary, not to spit upon Him in derision as they did, but to be buried with Him into Christian baptism. Won't you come to Calvary, not to mock Him, but to become part of His church, to crown Him King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Oh, tonight the call is given, Jesus loves you, God loves you, Heaven is prepared for you, if you just accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and obey Him. Would you do it?

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

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