

DEAR FRIENDS: I can't tell you how glad I am to be home. This is the first time in nine months that we have heard any of our hymns, or been permitted to sing them. Here tonight we find ourselves in a room with no place to sit down. This suggests that we are spiritual, in a way; because spirit beings do not have to sit down.

The Lord has blest us very wonderfully in the past nine months. That would seem strange to the world; but knowing that we belong to our Father, and that he causes all things to work together for our good, then we can truly say that the Lord has abundantly blest us, and we are thankful to him for all the experiences we have had. We find the Bethel Home practically abandoned--not exactly so; but we have no complaint. It is no use to complain, of course. Evidently the Lord has permitted this to happen for some good purpose. Let us forget the things behind, and reach forward to those things which are before.

How long we shall be with you I do not know; it is in the Lord's hands. Whether we are wholly free or temporarily free, I do not know, so far as this world's things are concerned; but I do know that we are free in Christ Jesus. Before I went away I had put a little card up in my dresser, and the text was, "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." I came back tonight and found that same text was sticking up in the glass.

Now, dear brethren, I will not attempt to tell you of all the experiences we have had in the past nine months. We have been isolated, of course, from you; but our hearts have been with you every moment, and we know we have had your prayers and the prayer of a righteous man availeth much. I have been more and more fully convinced in the past few days of the real reason why the Lord permitted us to go to prison. I am as certain today as I ever was that we are absolutely innocent of any violation of law. The Lord wanted us in that prison. You have joined with other dear friends throughout the country to give a most wonderful witness to the truth--a marvelous witness--calling attention and getting attention of others throughout the country who would never have paid any attention whatsoever. I had that in mind before we had been in prison a month: something to call the attention of the people to this condition.

When we went in prison, they asked me, "How long are you here for?"

"I am sentenced for twenty years."

The men didn't like the way I said it very well. He said, "Well, then you are here for twenty years."

I knew I wasn't going to stay twenty years, no matter whether guilty or innocent; because before that time the Lord's Kingdom will be in operation, and all will be free. So then, our duties were not the most pleasant in the world, and we are not going to tell you about them; but I was going to say something about this witness you have been giving. You have been witnessing the truth to governors, rulers and the great men of the land, and they would not have gotten it in any other way. Aren't you glad? Aren't you glad that we have had the opportunity of going to jail, and you have had the opportunity of telling the rulers of the land that there were eight men put in jail for the preaching of the Gospel? We are very happy the Judge said we were sincere.

I would like to tell you how much I love you, but I can't do that. It is absolutely impossible to tell you how much I love each one; and every one who has had a part in this wonderful witness in the past few weeks has received a blessing. Every one who has, through fear or for any other reason, held back has missed that blessing. I am convinced that this experience we have all gone through is merely to prepare us for more strenuous times. We rejoice if that is true. The message of truth must be carried to the little ones in the Lord who are bound up in Babylon; and what a great blessing it will be to carry that message!

J. F. Rutherford

I am going to take occasion, then, to tell you brethren a little about our experiences in trying to witness for the Lord's cause; but before I do this I will assure you that we are the most fortunate people in all this world. Never has a people lived on this earth so fortunate as we. The whole world is turned upside down. Many of their hearts are broken, and all of them must be broken before they are ready for the Lord's blessing. When they are broken, they will be ready for him. Now I suggest that every one be strong in the Lord; fear not; trust in him; and see to it that we go about in a spirit of kindness, calmness and sobriety, telling the people about the Lord's wonderful love, and the blessings coming to them after this trouble is over.

When we reached the prison, of course we had to be interrogated and asked our business. When I told the Deputy Warden what I had been doing, he said, "No preaching in here, understand!" I said, "No, Mr. Deputy, don't you fear about that at all. I will never tell a man anything unless he will ask me; and you can depend upon me to keep my word." In the prison we were required to attend chapel on Sunday morning. At that time I thought about the friends all throughout the country, and the feast you were having, and I said, "Oh, Lord, why have we got to thus be tortured by the Seed of the Serpent, blaspheming thy dear name?" After while I began to see why it was. The chaplain--a very good man; I think he does the best he knows how--urged every one to stay to Sunday School. We were not compelled to stay, however. We thought we had better take that time for a little personal fellowship. We eight formed a class, and amidst the babble all over the chapel--of course everybody talking at the same time--we tried to have a little lesson. Some curiosity speakers began to come, and still more came. They could not keep us from talking the truth there, because they invited us to stay. So we took turns about; one Sunday one would lead, and another Sunday another.

Well, you know the STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES: they didn't want them in the prison library. I had the privilege of being transferred to the library and I found three sets of Millennial Dawn. So as we talked a little truth, some would say, "My, that's good; got anything to read?" I would take him the First Volume and get him started. In a little while we had a least seven prisoners, and two or three guards, reading the books.

The Sunday School class kept increasing. One old man in that prison, seventy-two years old, a banker, said to me,--everybody down there called me Judge, for short--he said, "Judge, I am seventy-two years old, and I had to get in this prison to find out something about the Bible. I have been asking preachers for fifty-seven years, and never got any questions answered." I sat in the library one afternoon, and he asked me questions for three solid hours. He said, "That is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard. I have had all of my questions answered satisfactorily." When we left, Brother MacMillan presented him with a full set of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, including THE FINISHED MYSTERY; I gave him a Bible, and so he is well equipped. There is that dear old soul ready for restitution.

The class kept increasing. There were a number of Jews, and we had an opportunity to tell them about the Jewish hopes. We had an opportunity to take the Old Testament promises, and to tell the Jews, and Gentiles, too, what was coming. Last Sunday was the last Sunday we had there. Two or three of the deputies came around, and the deputy warden took a seat right by me. One of the guards came and said, "Couldn't you come to this side, so we can hear better?" The deputy sat down there also, and I thought, "Well, this is my last time now, and I am going to tell them all about the plan. I can do it in a few minutes as briefly as possible, and then give an opportunity to ask questions." Our little class had grown from eight to FIFTY. Mark you, there were only 145 in all the Sunday School. There were six other classes. We had 90 and they had the balance. I don't say this now because I happen to be involved, but the deputy warden went to Brother Juett when we went to leave the other day, when we eight were out in the corridor waiting for the officers to come and take us out, the warden, and the deputy warden, and a number of the guards came and shook hands with us and told us, Goodbye. The deputy warden stepped over to Brother Juett and said, "I heard Rutherford last Sunday: the most wonderful thing I have ever heard, to know that the Lord has such a great plan as that." So we left them in there; and all of them said, "Judge, we hope you won't have to come back."

There was one very brilliant young man in our Sunday School class, and he always came, every Sunday, and sat right next to the leader. He would meet us in the yard and talk to us, and time and again he said, "Oh, I am so sorry to see these men go, and when you go I don't know what we will do for a class; but I am going to try and lead it myself." The other night (the last night we were there) he sent a note down to me. To give you an idea of what kind of a young man he is, I am going to ask Brother Wise to read that. I call your attention to this, dear friends, because it gives you an idea that there are some good young men, and some good old men, in prison, and I believe there are more, in proportion to the number there. I would rather take my chances, a thousand to one, with those men, than I would with the preachers.

(The letter from the young man read about as follows:)

My dear Judge Rutherford:

To you and every one with you I send this parting message. Somehow, when I am near you or with you I cannot express myself. I seem such an atom, hardly worthy of that wonderful friendship of yours. I want you to know you have left me with a desire to be a better, bigger man, if such can emerge from a carcass so soiled and so worn as mine. You have taught me the meaning of the word love as used between men; you have taught me there are things in this world far more precious than rubies. And if he who is Supreme desires that I never see you again, I will be satisfied, knowing I have at least had the first glimmerings of a beautiful knowledge of the friendship of you wonderful men, and the opportunity to complete myself, if only I can and will remain strong. I am weak; very weak. No one knows this better than I. But I will try, and I will fight with myself, if necessary, to achieve its full fruits, from this seed you have planted, that I may help not only myself, but those about me. This may all seem odd, coming from one such as I, but deep, way down in my heart, I mean it, every word. Perhaps some day I shall come to you and say, "Judge, I'm a man;" and then you will know that all you have done has not been in vain. I may slip: life is a funny proposition; and if I do, I will pick up the remains and start anew. May I thank every one of you, again and again, and wish you Godspeed, and his blessing and guidance in this most wonderful future.

Devotedly,

MAC.

Now, dear brethren, I called your attention to that letter for this reason: there is nothing in the world with which I had experience that so thoroughly humbles men, breaks their hearts, as to put them in prison, without any hope, many years before them, not knowing whether they are going to live or die, knowing that they must observe certain rules, and if they fail to keep those rules they go into the dungeon, and everything, in a measure, to discourage them, unless they had something to which to look forward. Then I saw many of these men take kindly to the message of hope that was held out to them in our feeble way. They looked upon us as honest men. The meanest thing in a prison is one prisoner who is disloyal to another. One was heard to say to another, "Those Russellites are all right; they wouldn't turn up a man for anything." They had confidence in us, and that is the reason they would listen. This great trouble that is on the earth is breaking the hearts of the people, and when the trouble grows, their hearts will be so thoroughly humbled that every one in the land who has the message of the Lord in his heart, in his mind, and upon his lips, will have the chance to go forth and comfort some sad hearts. We have a wonderful illustration. We know there is much trouble ahead; but greater are the wonderful things before us. If we are faithful unto the end it means that we are going to have some part in the restitution work, and the reconstruction of all mankind.

I was thinking tonight as I stood down there and ate chicken and looked up and down the rows of smiling faces, everybody so happy, everybody looking so glad and rejoicing, I thought, 'It is worth staying in jail for nine months to have this experience.' Now, dear friends, if this is a joy to us, what a wonderful joy is set before us when we see the Lord, the Lord Jesus,

and comfort those that mourn. We will be glad of all the experiences we have ever had. I thank you again and again that you have been so faithful and so loyal to the Lord. Your fight has not been to get your brethren out of prison. That was merely a side issue; a secondary thing. The Lord has been moving to please him. Your business and my business is to witness to the TRUTH, and whatever position the Lord puts us in, that is what we want to do. So the fight you have been making has been for the purpose of witnessing for the Truth, and those who have done it have received a wonderful blessing. The Lord bless you all.

BROTHER VAN AMBURGH

I want to greet you all as fellow prisoners; because, although we, so far as the body is concerned, have been in prison, yet I think that every member of the church has been in prison with us. I think that many of the prisoners outside the walls have really suffered more than the few inside. Now the Judge has told you a little about himself, so I will simply say that every one in the walls knew him as the Judge; they knew me as 'Dad.' Back and forth, among the prisoners, we had our nicknames. At first our experiences were very trying, because it seemed almost like taking us out of heaven and putting us into the very dungeon. But we thought like this: It is the Lord's work, and we gave ourselves to him, and it is for him to say. It was very dark for a long time, because we could not get any word out, and not much in.

I have had, I could not tell you just how many, particular answers to prayer. I will just tell you one instance. We were privileged to write one letter a week, and on only one sheet of paper. I formed a habit of making the individual letters as small as I could, so as to get as much as possible on a sheet. Sister Van Amburgh and I thought pretty much of each other. Her birthday came along, and I forgot to mention it in my letter. Now it is a very little thing, and some of you may laugh. I took it to the Lord, and I thought about it. I was in the hospital at that time. I said, "I wonder how I can fix it." It was a reprehensible act, and one which was punishable by immediate dismissal, for the guard to take any message whatever out from any prisoner. The doctor came around every morning, and I thought, "I wonder if I can get the doctor to send a little message over the phone when he goes out." I wrote out the address and phone number, and the message of greeting, on Wednesday. The Deputy Warden hardly ever came to the hospital. I saw the assistant doctor about it, and he said, "Well, I don't know. That would be rather a serious matter, but I will ask the chief physician and let you know." We got our mail about 5 o'clock, and that afternoon I got a letter from Sister Van Amburgh. She said she had talked to the deputy about some mottoes that I wanted to get into the institution. When the deputy came in, I said, "Oh, you are just the man I want to see. I have a lovely letter here from my wife, and she tells me how nicely you treated her the other day." I read him what she wrote. It seemed to please him. I was so interested in the letter that when he passed out I didn't think of my note. I went after him and said, "Would it be possible for you to phone a message for my wife?" "Surely," he said, "give me that note." Now to my mind, that was simply the method that the Lord used to say, "I have my hand over you, and I am looking out for you, even in the little details like that."

Another time I was feeling somewhat depressed, and pretty poor physically. The assistant doctor came up, put his hand over my shoulder and laid a beautiful rosebud in front of me and walked off. The Lord's hand was revealed in these little ways.

The thing that struck us was the broken hearts down there. I would like to have you know to some extent how much those poor men thought of Brother Rutherford. They called him the Judge, and they meant it. I want to tell you what an inspiration he is and has been to us. I want to tell you, he is really a man of God, and he just braced every one of us, and truly the Lord is using him in a wonderful way. And I want to tell you how your prayers helped us; to think how many of the friends were praying for us, and were down there with us. The Lord has blest us, and is blessing us, and now has some future work for us. If any of the rest of you go to prison, the Lord will take care of you in prison just as well as he will anywhere else. The Lord bless you.

Before we reached Brooklyn, we agreed amongst ourselves that we would have nothing to say about our prison experiences. So I will follow the example that has been set me by the others.

The thing that impresses me most in connection with the experiences of the past nine months is the depth, and sweetness and genuineness of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, as amongst his brethren. I want to tell you, dear brothers and sisters, what you already know: that there isn't a single bit of yellow in any of those brethren that went down to Atlanta;--not a bit. They have faced everything that they had to face with a smile, and that has brought its own reward, as it always did in the past and always will in the future. There are no people on earth that can face the worst that civilization, so-called, has to offer, with as good a spirit, or gain so many favors, or receive so many blessings in connection with their experiences, as the people in the present truth; because our hearts are fortified for these things. We have been looking forward to the time when it should be our privilege, in some public way, to fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ, for his body's sake, which is the church. If any of you have read this book that has been so widely advertised recently (I refer to THE FINISHED MYSTERY), you know it was no surprise to any of the brethren--although absolutely innocent of the things they were charged with--it was no surprise to any of them that an experience such as we have had has come to them. Nor can we be sure that those experiences are finished. But in any event, we can look forward with joy, because we know that we belong to the Lord. That has been our recourse in everything. When we have had one disappointment after another about getting our liberties, even temporarily, the thing we have fallen back on all the time is, 'Well, what difference does it make? The Lord is on the job. We belong to the Lord. This is his business. Let him take care of us as he sees fit.'

There is one brother in this room who did an exceptionally interesting thing in the way of brotherly love. I thought I would mention it here. He was not one of the eight. It is just as well that a little glory goes to some of the others, who are just as honorable in the Lord's sight, just as worthy of these special favors, privileges and blessings we have enjoyed. This brother wrote to our attorney, just after sentence had been passed upon us, and inquired if there was not some way that he could break into jail and take the place of one of us. He wanted to take my place in the prison. What do you think of a brother that would propose to undertake a twenty-year sentence? That is brotherly love.

Had you been in Atlanta the last nine months, I think you would see the full illustration of the truth, because "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." At the hour when some exercise was allowed, we would always find the Lord's brethren together, by two's, or three's, and sometimes by six's, traveling together. While we were down there, I remember one thing transpired that showed how willing these brethren were to suffer for what they believed to be right. Some brother (I shall call him a brother, although it seems difficult to think of a brother who would do a thing like this) from Brooklyn, sent a typewritten communication to each one of us eight brethren, intimating that we were in prison because of THE FINISHED MYSTERY, which every one seems to admit was the ostensible reason we were put there. He called upon us and everybody else to repudiate the Seventh Volume of STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES, and he said if we would do this we could get our liberties. Not one of us replied. It was not worthy of a reply. We stand for the Lord and for his truth, and EVERY BIT of his Word. God had some purpose in writing the book of Revelation. What that purpose is seems to get clearer to me now. It was his purpose specially to advertise the truth far and wide, to the remotest corners of the earth. Nearly everybody in the country now wonders what is contained in that book.

One of the interesting features down there was the remarkable fondness that the Italians all over the place got to have for us. Now this you would hardly look for; but when they saw the love we all manifested toward Brother DeCecca, you know it just warmed their hearts, and I think that amongst our very best friends in that place were the scores of Italians found there. You couldn't find an Italian there but what thinks well of us. In fact, you wouldn't find a prisoner there but what thinks well of us.

A. H. Macmillan

Dear friends, now you have heard from Convict #8633 and #8634. Now you will hear from #8639. Brother Rutherford was the first, and I was the last;-- 8633 and 8639. Brother Van Amburgh was telling some of the wonderful experiences he had, showing the Lord's leadings while in prison. I am sure we could all tell ours if we could all remember. The night we entered there, there were eight of us--seven in our party, and one other convict. Brother DeCecca was not there then. The other prisoner's number was 8640, and he came next to me as we were lined up on the wall to go to our cells. I looked him over and looked myself over and said, "Goodness, have I got to go and live with that specimen of depravity?" I waited patiently to see what would happen. They called them off, so many this way and so many that way, and I found myself laid up with this scoundrel. As we were about to go to the cell, the guard called out, "8638 goes with you!" That was Brother Woodworth. We walked up to our cell, and when we got in we threw our arms around one another and have been together ever since.

He is not a prisoner any more; but he is inside the walls. So from early morning to nine o'clock at night, Brother Woodworth can go any place he wants, except outside the walls. But here is the striking thing about it. The person that can get that position down there thinks it is next to getting out. When Brother Woodworth made a request of the Deputy Warden to let him leave his freedom with the other three clerks and go back into that small cell, 8 by 10, and be locked up in the evening, they said, "There is something wrong with Woodworth's head." I said, "No, it is all in his heart." So that little experience was a remarkable thing, when you think of it. I was assigned to go with that fellow, and if I had gone with him I would have been dead by this time.

Brother Rutherford was telling about the Sunday School class. I am not going to let him get away with all the honors of that. Brother Van Amburgh and I were away when that was organized. There were some Jews down there, and they said, "We would like to have one of you men come over." I went over for four or six successive Sundays, and I noticed the Deputy Warden came over and listened. I told them about the teachings of the Old Testament, and showed how the Jews could not be blest until the Messiah was shown. Then, I said, as you have been blest by him, you will wake up some fine morning and learn that you are two thousand years late. I saw it would be folly for me to keep those Jews alone in that class, so I said, I guess I told them about all they were interested to hear from me, and if they want to hear any more they will come to our class.

The deputy told me a story afterward. He said a man came to him two days before, when he learned we were going away. The man came in and said, "Deputy, I would like to have the job down there that those two Israelites are going to give up." The deputy did not know whom he meant. "Those two Israelites who came with the big Judge." "Those are not Israelites; those are Russellites." I said, "Deputy, he had it right; we are Israelites indeed." So we had a wonderful time. Those Jews that were in the class began to be interested.

There was a work started amongst those men that is remarkable. I was walking up the other day, and a young fellow came running along and said, "Just a moment, Mac, I want to walk up with you. I always like to walk with you fellows, because you always have a pleasant smile and a happy word." I wondered why this was. Not because we are better than the rest. There were many good, noble men in there; but still they were not able to create an influence that seemed to be specially helpful. The other day an old, hardened sinner, a man that kept bar rooms and sold dope, etc., became very friendly to us and stepped into the cell one day. He sat down talking to me. He said, "I want to tell you that you men have done a wonderful amount of work here, and everybody you came in contact with was benefited and influenced by your influence." I thought, Now why is this? I found out it was not because we were any better, but because we have a better view of life and life's troubles, difficulties, joys and sorrows. If you meet a man there for five minutes, they say, "Partner, how long have you got?" We always had a happy, hopeful word for them, and that is what got their attention; because of the broad, hopeful and cheerful view that we were able to take of our own incarceration. The day we left, many prisoners hastened away when they said Goodbye, because there was a big lump coming up. Taking a retrospective view of it, it was wonderful; and I suppose a year from now we will think more of that experience, and a hundred years from now, I tell you it will seem real good.

BROTHER FISHER

Now I feel like Brother DeCecca, that the past nine months, in many respects was the most precious experience of my whole life; and I am glad I went to the penitentiary. I know when we stepped into the front hall that night, it was late at night, and dark, and a big man came to us and he said, "Stand up!"

We stood up. He said, "Your number is 8637, and never forget that you are a prisoner;" and we never did. It wouldn't pay. But when we got our numbers, we said to each other, "We are numbered with the transgressors, and we are glad to be numbered with the transgressors." I am glad my number is 8637. You can go to college and high school, and learn to be a doctor, or something else, but there are some things you can't learn without going to the penitentiary; and they are good things, too. Friends, you will never find a place where men love one another the way they do there. You wouldn't believe it, would you?