

Testimony

Jerry Mcauley's Own Story

Jerry McAuley was founder of the Water Street Mission in New York. At the age of nineteen he had been sentenced to Sing Sing Penitentiary for sixteen years and six months. Following his conversion to Christ, after serving five years of his sentence, the Spirit of God wrought a remarkable revival within the prison. Missionaries from the city engaged in it and every opportunity was given by the penitentiary management. Jerry was the center of this activity. Subsequently he was pardoned by Governor John A. Dix, eight years of his sentence being remitted.

Following is the account of the conversion of Jerry McAuley in his own words.

I was nineteen when brought before the criminal court on a charge of highway robbery. Sure I was not guilty! But having no friends to take up my case and being unable to prove my innocence, I was sentenced to fifteen years hard labor in a penitentiary.

This was the saddest hour of my life. All seemed to be against me. Yet there was One whose eye looked in grace and pity upon me. God, against whom I had sinned all my life, had compassion upon me and stretched out His hand in love and mercy to save me. To bring me behind prison walls was indeed His own remarkable way to save my soul.

Five years of my sentence had passed when one Lord's day, on arriving at the chapel, a great surprise awaited me. Alongside the prison chaplain stood a man whom I had known too well in years past. He was one of my former pals— "The Terrible Gardner," we called him.

How that man had changed! He addressed the prisoners after a few remarks by the chaplain. Every word sank deep into my heart. What power could have changed this once lawless terror so remarkably? When he concluded he came right down among us and told us, with tears streaming, how he through the grace of God had learned that he was a vile, lost and guilty sinner; but he had found the Lord Jesus as his Savior, and given his heart to Him.

While relating this Gardner had looked so happy that one just knew that all he said was true. I felt more miserable and forsaken than ever. When that man prayed for us we all wept, deeply touched by the power of his testimony.

In concluding he read several portions from the Bible— that old Book for which I had never cared. But now a merciful God was speaking words of love and compassion to me— to me, a poor castaway— through His own blessed Word.

Returning to my cell, still thinking about what I had heard, my eyes wandered around the desolate room. Suddenly I discovered, in an opening which served as a ventilator, an object which had heretofore escaped my attention. I took it down; and what a surprise! It was a Bible.

It was covered with a thick layer of dust, but otherwise well preserved, complete and readable. It was certainly the goodness of God to have kept this Book. Had I found it before this memorable day, I would undoubtedly have torn it to pieces.

How grateful I was to have it for my own! I longed to look up the verses which had been read to us by Gardner. But where to find them?

I began to read at the very beginning of Genesis. My interest increased with every word. Not for the most fascinating romance would I have exchanged my new-found treasure. I read on until I had to go to bed. My interest did not slacken in the following days, but I read on and on until I came finally to the narration of the life and sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This touched me so that on one evening, while marveling at the remarkable change in my old friend Gardner, and while pacing up and down my little room, a real hunger for a new life took hold of me.

Could such a change for me be possible? A voice seemed to suggest:

"Pray! Pray the prayer of the publican: 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner.'" I tried to pray this; but in vain. My sins stood terrorizing and condemning me.

Suddenly the word "whosoever" came to my mind— that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish," I had read.

"That means you," whispered the voice again. "But I am so ungodly," I protested, "too bad to be forgiven."

Thus the battle in my soul continued, raging for weeks. At times I was almost despairing; for what could a poor sinner do when between him and a holy God there was nothing but a life of black and awful sins? I prayed and prayed. My desire to be accepted of God was deep and sincere.

One night I determined not to stop praying until I had found peace. I might have to stay on my knees until morning; but, behold! at midnight, my prayers were answered. The sense of my great need seemed to have reached a climax, when suddenly, as it were, a hand was laid on my head and the words came to me: "My son, thy sins are forgiven thee!"

I do not know if I actually heard this voice speaking, but most certainly these words were received into my soul. It was Jesus, the blessed Savior, who had thus spoken to me by the Holy Spirit.

Now I knew and believed that He had died for my sins on the cross. This fact took hold of me with such power that I sprang to my feet. A flood of heavenly light seemed to fill my being. I did not know at first whether I was still in this world or in the heavenly. Clapping my hands together, I shouted.

"Thanks be to God! Blessed be His name!" One of the watchmen passed by my door and asked what I wanted.

"I have found Christ!" I called out to him. "My sins are forgiven! Thanks be to God!"

Of course the man could not comprehend my joy. He told me to be quiet, and threatened to report me next morning for disturbing the peace. But even this could not dampen my joy; my happiness was too great and too deep. Oh, what a night was this! Never shall I forget when the Lord Himself spoke peace to my soul. Jesus alone can save!

"For other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:1.

That Christ should leave His place on high,
And come for sinful man to die...
You think it strange? So once did I,
Before I knew my Savior.

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