

NEWSLETTER



Christian Science Institutional Committee for New York State

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Man Lives by Divine Decree

(One of which is, The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand)

by James Early

A condensation of his talk to The New York State Institutional Committee Annual Open Meeting
November 8, 2020 2:30 pm via Zoom conference call.

The video recording of the meeting is available upon request.

James Early has conducted weekly Christian Science Bible workshops at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut, since October 2008. An inmate that we worked with in New York State is now in James Early's current Bible study class there.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE HEALING OF DEPRESSION

Conducting Bible study workshops in the prison has been an extremely rewarding activity. When I was asked by Paula Jensen-Moulton, former Committee on Publication for Connecticut to participate, I refused. I just couldn't see myself visiting people in prison. But the seed had been planted, is now flourishing, and bearing much fruit.

A woman appeared at one of my Bible studies at the Federal Correctional Institution [FCI] in Danbury, Connecticut. She was troubled and she had an attitude, but we greeted her with lots of love. She had grown up in a church where she was not allowed to ask questions and was expected to accept everything on faith. She had been told that to question was to doubt, and proved one to be unfaithful. She had lots of questions, and I loved her questions.

Her "attitude," seemed to stem from the feeling that no one valued her. She was frustrated with life in general and had a very negative view of herself. But she was thinking deeply about things, and this was

apparent because of the insightful theological issues she raised.

Because the other women in the group always thanked her for asking the things they were hesitant to ask or hadn't even thought about, she began to feel her ideas were important. Everyone in the group loved her questions and the discussions that followed. We all learned from her curiosity. She learned to think for herself and trust her spiritual sense. She came to feel valued and respected by the group and began to value herself as well. And most importantly, she began to see her worth in God's eyes.

Once she asked, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" I never actually told her the answers to this or any other question. I responded, "Well, if you believe God is wrathful, angry, and vindictive, you would answer that question one way. But if you believe God is all-loving, as well as merciful, you'd answer the question in a completely different way." Basically I allowed her to think for herself. I never told her, or anyone, what to think, but would point them all back to the Bible.

She was in the Bible study group for two years before being released. On the day before she left, she told me she had a new lease on life, felt really good about herself, had made peace with her family, was at peace with herself about her crime, was no longer suffering from depression, and was no longer taking any medication. She attributed it all to being in the Christian Science weekly Bible study group. It was a joy to see her transformation over those two years and deeply moving to hear of her victory over depression.

MEETING A CHALLENGE

At one point, there were only two women who came each week and they were to be released in a month or so. They had tried to get their friends to come but no one ever showed up. If these women were released without anyone new in the group, I would lose my time slot in the Prison Chapel.

After much prayer, it came to me to create a Bible workshop on the topic of “How to Pray Like Jesus.” The Chaplain was delighted and put up flyers. About 12 women came to that class, which I thought would be six weeks, but it turned into about three months. After that, I put together four more workshops: The Healing Power of Christ, Then and Now; All the Angels in the Bible; All the Women in the Bible; and The Holy Ghost: What it is and What it Does. By the time I had cycled through these topics, there was usually a whole new population in the prison and I could repeat these topics.

AVOIDING CHRISTIAN SCIENCE “LINGO”

People from all different religious backgrounds have attended my Bible studies. (I never try to convert them to Christian Science, but we talk about the Bible and I share my perspective as a Christian Scientist.) So, one lady asked, “Why are you here then? All the other religious groups coming to the prison were there to convert the women to their church.” I replied, “To help you know God better, so you can have a working, relationship with God. This surprised her and gave her a sense of peace. She loved the group as long as she attended.

I always begin a new class with finding out a little about everyone, especially where they are on their faith journey. Invariably, there are people from a wide range of theological backgrounds, which do not always agree.

Then I explain that I am a Christian Scientist and share a very brief version of Mary Baker Eddy’s healing in 1866, how she healed others, wrote Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, and then started a church to get back to the original Christianity of Jesus.

Once in a while someone wants to argue theology. One time in particular, a lady wanted to debate that Jesus is God and quoted lots of Scriptures. I quoted a few verses as well. That went nowhere fast. Some of the verses she used to prove that Jesus is God were the same ones that showed clearly that he isn’t. Other verses really didn’t say Jesus was God at all.

She said she would pray for me to accept this doctrine. I replied, “Do you want me to believe something because you tell me I should? Do you want me to pray that you accept what I believe? Let’s pray for God to reveal more of His truth to us.” To this she agreed. In these kinds of conversations, I sometimes feel free to say for the sake of discussion, “Well, I may be wrong, and if I am I pray that God will show me the truth.”

I have come to appreciate all those who call themselves Christians and am no longer intimidated by people who strongly disagree with the theology of Christian Science. I can usually find something we can agree on and focus on that. One of the biggest blessings has been learning to share Christian Science in plain English. God has put words in my mouth that would never need to be there if I were talking to fellow church members.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSPECTIVE

I make it clear that I’m not there to convert them to my church and that it’s okay if we don’t all agree on every little detail of faith. Disagreements are usually just looking at the same thing from different perspectives.

I will look at one of them and say, “If you and I are sitting across the table from each other and the salt and pepper are between us, to you the salt is on the right, but to me it’s on the left. Who is right?” Everyone laughs.

I ask them to imagine themselves with six iPhones taped to their body, one on the head, the shoulders, the waist, a knee, a foot, and the back. If they turn on the video function and walk down the street, even though the body did just one thing, each video would show that event from a different perspective, especially the one facing backwards.

I ask if they have ever looked at someone through a wall of glass bricks. The image seen through the bricks is completely distorted, but the person on the other side is not.

Next I ask, “But what if these were theological questions and we don’t realize we’re looking at the same thing from different perspectives or through a different lens?” They get the point. The perspective we see things from and the lens of our culture, education, and personal opinions we look through play a big factor in what we see.

I freely admit to them that sometimes people criticize Christian Science because of some of the things Mrs. Eddy says in *Science and Health*, for example, that sin, disease, and death are not real. How could she say that. I ask: “If sickness and sin are not real, why did Jesus need to come to heal and save us?” They all nod. But then I ask if there is any sin, disease, or death in the kingdom of heaven. Of course they say “No.” They are usually familiar with Chapter 21 of Revelation. I explain that in the kingdom of heaven, since these things don’t exist, they are actually “not real” there. That makes sense to them.

“And where did Jesus say the kingdom of heaven is?” At hand, within, they respond. Then I explain that to the degree we have the awareness of the presence of heaven as Jesus did, these things cease to be as real to us as they seem on the surface. If you look at things from earth’s perspective, there’s a big mix of good and evil. It all seems very real. But think about what’s go-

ing on right now in the kingdom of heaven. The reason Christian Science says that sin, disease, and death are unreal is because it looks at things from the perspective of what is true right now in heaven instead of what’s true on earth.” You can see the light bulbs going on.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AT HAND-- A TOOTHACHE HEALED

One fellow in particular, who had no prior connection with Christian Science before being in my Bible study group, took this idea to heart. He announced one Monday afternoon that something I had said a few weeks previously had helped him immensely. I wondered what it could have been. It was the idea that disease is not real in the kingdom of heaven and that this kingdom is at hand.

He went on to explain that a couple of weeks before he had had a throbbing toothache. It had gone on for a couple of days. He had just been about to go to the prison dentist when he remembered the discussion of what is real and what is unreal in heaven. Right in the middle of the pain, he declared that heaven is at hand, that he lived in the kingdom of heaven, that there were no toothaches in heaven, therefore this toothache was not real. The pain went away instantly. He also shared a healing of a back problem, which had plagued him sporadically for years, when he prayed in the same way.

I continue to be in awe of how receptive people are to the ideas of Christian Science when presented in a language they understand. In talking about the ideas in *Science and Health*, the language of the Bible is a bridge to help people understand the concepts Mrs. Eddy so carefully articulates in the textbook.

THE JOY OF SERVING

There is a special joy in serving as a religious volunteer in the Danbury FCI. Lives have been transformed and faith in God restored as individuals learn more about His love for them. I have seen immense spiritual growth and many healings among the attendees because Christian Science has given them a deeper understanding of the Bible’s message of hope and salvation.

GRATITUDE, FORGIVENESS, FREEDOM

Inmates often express their gratitude for being in prison because it gives them a time to actually deal with their problems. They tell me, "Being in this Bible study has restored my faith in God." The depth of our conversations lift to a degree the burden of being incarcerated. In fact, I am often told, "For the hour we're in this group, I forget I'm in prison."

Many of these healings have to do with inmates forgiving those who have harmed them, and learning to forgive themselves as well. Friendships and strained family relations have been restored as we have explored the example and teachings of Jesus. They appreciate learning how other Bible characters responded to situations similar to their own. Often, it's a matter of finding freedom from the burden of thinking they are no longer worthy of God's love, because of mistakes they made or crimes they committed

THE DIVINE DECREE

I can't think of anything more powerful than Jesus's divine decree that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The man who was healed of a toothache took that to heart and it healed him. Jesus saw it everywhere. Mrs. Eddy says the exact same thing in *Science and Health*:

"Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man, who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Savior saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick. Thus Jesus taught that the kingdom of God is intact, universal, and that man is pure and holy." (SH 476:32-5)

Even during the pandemic, we can minister to those in this prison. We have the tools to help people. Let me re-emphasize this point: People are so incredibly ready for Christian Science.

I encourage you to imbibe this divine decree that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and within us. And by

the way, when Jesus said the kingdom of God is within you, the "you" is second person plural. He was talking to more than one person. Jesus is saying the kingdom is within us collectively, not just individually. This collective sense magnifies the presence of God's kingdom in our hearts and brings out a sense of unity.

Let's all take just a moment to think of someone who needs to be freed from "prison." Silently proclaim the divine decree: The kingdom of heaven is at hand. We can hear and proclaim the divine decree that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and expect to see evidence of it here and now and set the captives free.

I think we have barely just begun to scratch the surface of what this profound truth implies.

I will leave you with Jesus's words from Matthew 25:

"... I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matthew 25:35-40)

God bless you all.

James Early

James Early gives talks and conducts workshops on the Bible to churches and groups, produces a podcast, [The Bible Speaks to You](#), and is the webmaster for [csnyc.com](#).

The Executive Administrator's Report

The work of the Christian Science Institutional Committee for New York State has continued, though in different forms, since the appearance of the Pandemic. Our prayers have been effective in helping to calm and encourage those with whom we correspond. Our periodicals have been an enormous help in accomplishing this. We donate 70 subscriptions to *The Christian Science Monitor*, 18 to *The Christian Science Sentinel*, and 16 to the to the *Christian Science Full Text Bible Lessons* to facilities across the state.

The past year has presented unprecedented challenges for us all, but also wonderful opportunities to try new ways of doing things. Our decision to go ahead with a virtual Annual Open Meeting has broadened our thinking in having all our future meetings on the Internet. We could always do a combination of live and Internet meetings when we wish, but in doing a virtual meeting, everyone who wishes to attend from wherever they are in the world, will be able to do so. It is much less expensive to do a virtual meeting. There are no travel expenses and no expenses regarding a venue to hold the meeting. A virtual meeting appears to be the way of the future.

Due to problems with our telephone service at the Committee office, we changed from Verizon to Spectrum. There is a problem with the wiring that Verizon is unable to repair. We were able to keep our original telephone number.

The men who have been released in the past year have been doing well, in that they are surviving the many challenges they face. All have received financial help from the Principle Foundation and are very grateful for their help.

One man, who is living in the South now, was having financial difficulties, beyond what the Principle Foundation could provide, and through prayer was led to start a business on his own. He is building and refinishing desks for people of all ages who are setting up work spaces at home. He has a steady job in addition to the desk business and is hoping the new business will be something newly released inmates will be able to do also. He is looking forward to helping those inmates who sincerely want to change their lives.

David Bryant, who served 43 years for a crime he did not commit, has finally been awarded a settlement for his years of imprisonment. He accepted the offer, which is considerably less than others have received,

because he didn't want to delay the founding of The David Bryant Foundation. David hopes to help and encourage those who are enduring the false imprisonment that he endured, as well as those who have paid their debt to society and have been released.

He keeps in fairly close touch to let us know how important we have been in his life. David worked with Centurion Ministries in Princeton, New Jersey, who fought for his release for many years. He credits us, too, and has said, "I would never have gotten through it without the help of the Christian Science Institutional Committee." During the last thirteen years of his imprisonment he received subscriptions to the Christian Science periodicals and regular visits from members of the Central Zone of this Committee. His firm faith in God never wavered and he always knew that the truth would make him free. Often he inspired us. He will surely be a help to those former inmates we refer to his foundation.

A man with whom we corresponded for ten years while he was in prison is now free. He was told by a worker, on the morning of his release, that God would always provide an angel to help him whenever he needed help. He has found this to be true. He received subscriptions to the Christian Science periodicals while on the inside and has been a frequent visitor to the Reading Room since his release. He has accepted part time work while looking for a more permanent job and is sincerely trying to be kind and compassionate in his dealings with others.

In *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy writes (p. 150:4):

"To-day the healing power of Truth is widely demonstrated as an immanent, eternal Science, instead of a phenomenal exhibition. Its appearing is the coming anew of the gospel of "on earth peace, good-will toward men." This coming, as was promised by the Master, is for its establishment as a permanent dispensation among men; but the mission of Christian Science now, as in the time of its earlier demonstration, is not primarily one of physical healing. Now, as then, signs and wonders are wrought in the metaphysical healing of physical disease; but these signs are only to demonstrate its divine origin, — to attest the reality of the higher mission of the Christ-power to take away the sins of the world."

Are we doing this? Yes, we are.

MID-HUDSON ZONE REPORT:
Do inmates stay with Christian Science after they are released?
by Charles Levitt, Chairman

People often ask the question: Do inmates of Correctional Facilities stay with the study and practice of Christian Science after they are released? The answer is YES, but not all. However, once we have an understanding of man and our relationship to Him as a child of God, this Truth stays with us and at times of need, we are always helped. Some time ago I was corresponding with an inmate at a correctional facility who wrote:

“Thank you for sending me the copy of [*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, by Mary Baker Eddy]. It was a pleasant surprise and I am so appreciative. I didn’t expect it but it was truly a gift from God. I’ve read the book and savored it. There is so much I cannot comprehend the first time through, so I’m starting on the second read and seeing different things. I’ve noticed a change in myself already. I have had a serious food addiction all my life and before my incarceration. I went up to nearly 360 pounds, however, I have lost 120 pounds. I never lost the cravings until I began reading *Science and Health*, and since then the emptiness inside of me has diminished. I am a nicer person, and I am working on getting better control of my moods, which I notice don’t swing as radically nor for as long in duration as my emotional upsets used to be.”

I found out that this man was released from prison and since then he has gone on to be a Christian minister and recently wrote a book on his healing experiences while incarcerated and afterward.

Another gentleman I knew for a number of years while he was incarcerated, took to the study and practice of Christian Science quite naturally, as he turned more and more to God for help as outlined in Christian Science practice. His understanding and love for Christ grew as he met, through the study of the Bible and Mrs. Eddy’s writings, the many challenges he had to face. He was released from the correctional facility awhile ago, became a member of the Mother Church and more recently completed Class Instruction.

A newly released man, who had received The Christian Science Bible Lessons, Monitor, and Sentinel during his time of incarceration, has been learning more of how the teachings of Christian Science can guide and improve our lives. He says he has some disagreements with us, but basically loves what we have to offer. He has seen how God has been guiding and protecting him from the moment he was freed from the correctional facility where he had been housed. He was told that divine Love would meet his every human need, and is seeing that unfold daily in his life.

For example, he was led to take a course through the Fortune Society for which he would receive remuneration. In order for him to receive this, he had to open a bank account, and in order to do that he had to obtain an identification card from the Department of Motor Vehicles. He applied for the ID, and supposedly it was sent to him, but it was lost in the mail. He tried to open an account anyway, but was turned down at the bank. He presented his now invalid prison ID, but they would not accept it. He became very discouraged and left the bank determined to have it out with the post office for not delivering his mail. On his way he passed another bank and he said something told him to apply there. He entered the bank and a very kind woman helped him through the process, accepted his out of date ID, and he walked out with his first time ever bank account.

In the Bible lesson that morning was the passage: "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This *is* the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." (Isaiah 30:21, 22) When he was told of that Bible passage, he realized that was what happened to him. He recognized it was God with him. He visits the Reading Room on a weekly basis, sometimes more, and studies the Bible Lesson and the Bound Volumes. He has received help from The Principle Foundation who very kindly gave him an Iphone for a year and a gift card for necessities. He is very grateful. He is realizing that it is God and not coincidence or luck that is providing for him.

SUFFOLK ZONE REPORT: “Here am I: send me”

by Madeline Cassidy, Chairman

I am sure that you are familiar with the verse from Isaiah: 6:8 Which says: "... I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then said I, Here am I; send me."

This verse so perfectly encapsulates the efforts of the workers of the Suffolk Zone this past year. And you might be tempted to say: What a year! This set me thinking about another quote. This one is from John Flavel, a 17th Century Presbyterian minister. Flavel said, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." This statement has significant relevance in the context of our ministry work this year. It has been, and continues to be, a year of opportunities. They are the opportunities to be where we need to be, when we need to be there. True, the "there" to which I am referring has not always been inside the jails themselves. Since the end of March, both of our jails have been in strict lockdown mode. But, you know, prayer can never be in lockdown mode. Prayer heeds no boundaries of concrete walls or iron bars.

So, as it turned out, the ongoing prayers of our Zone members during the lockdown prepared the way to have one-on-one sessions with inmates at Riverhead Jail, in June. One of our members responded to that opportunity by saying in effect: "Here am I, send me." And for the better part of June, this dedicated and steadfast worker held one-on-one, back-to-back sessions with inmates, spending two or more hours a day, depending on the number of inmates wishing to meet with her. She went two or three times a week and met with the inmates, one at a time, sharing ideas from that week's Lesson Sermon. She brought her Bible and *Science and Health* marked with pieces of paper for each citation, as no metal markers are allowed in the facility. She said, in one of her reports, "If an inmate needs more than 30 minutes, I will come as many days as needed. Whenever possible, she would give the inmate copies of the periodicals. Doesn't this level of commitment show the Isaiah - spirit in action?"

In July, Riverhead reopened their rehab unit and we were allowed to meet in the chapel. We welcomed those who had been coming to the one-on-one sessions and another who had been attending before the lockdown.

Prior to the lockdown, a visitor to another volunteer group would always stop at our table first to take Sentinels and Monitors with him. On one occasion,

he took a *Science and Health*. On another visit, he enthusiastically told us he had begun reading it. He was to be released soon and asked if there were a church near-by that he could visit. We gave him that information and he was able to attend a Wednesday evening meeting before the church services were temporarily stopped.

We have noticed every time a truth is shared or a self-less deed is done, it has a ripple effect. Over the past two years, there has been a softening effect in the attitude of the guards at Riverhead. Whereas before we'd felt an inhospitable attitude, we now notice the guards are accommodating, gracious, and outright friendly. This has so lifted our spirits and encouraged us.

Our experiences at Yaphank were more of a challenge in 2020. Before the lockdown, we were getting maybe one, but more often, no visitors. This was due in part to the change in the cash bail laws, resulting in fewer detainees. At the beginning of this year, a colleague and myself had a wonderful surprise. A former Sunday School student, whom I remembered as being in and out of jail many times, came to our session. It was remarkable because it was such a surprise, but also, he had committed his infraction in Nassau County. Yet here he was in a Suffolk County jail. I did my best to hold back a few happy tears as we stood smiling at one another. He brought along a friend, a practicing Muslim, who had not signed up for our group, yet there he was. They were each given copies of our textbook which they were happy to receive. That was a very special session .

Now, back at Yaphank, we find ourselves in stand-by mode. Until we can resume our activities there we will be ready to be where we need to be, when we need to be there. If we can't be at Yaphank, our literature will serve as our proxy, as divine Love's ambassadors. Every other week I bring packets of our periodicals to Riverhead. The lieutenant in charge of the Rehab Unit in both jails graciously delivers packets to Yaphank on our behalf. Both facilities receive gift subscriptions to *The Monitor* through the Christian Science Institutional Committee. We are confident that these magazines are having a healing effect.

We can say that the workers in all institutional committees everywhere in the world are saying in the spirit of that great prophet Isaiah: "Here I am. Send me."