

# Focused Minds

by Alfred Marcus

I've heard it said of humans that we are creatures of habit, and I believe that this is correct. We acquire knowledge through the process of repetition. We master certain skills by doing them over and over and over again. We tend to behave in the same manner and we usually do not act that differently, hence you have the saying, "A leopard never changes his spots". When we see certain people we talk about the same things that we always talk about. We have our daily routines where we eat, sleep, work, watch television, and pray at the same times of the day. The drawback of routines such as these is that the things that we do so routinely may begin to lose their value. We may not appreciate our jobs as much any more. We may not appreciate our time with our families as much any more. We may not appreciate certain people as much anymore. We may not appreciate the ability we have to get up and place our feet on the floor so that we can work or the ability to open our eyes to even see our families as much any more. I think we can also do this with the Lord and his memorial service as well. I mean let's face it. Every week we come to the same place, and see the same people, and perform the same ceremony, and eat the same bread, and drink the same fruit of the vine, at about the same time. The fact that many people have partaken of this ceremony for years, is an additional reason that this lack of appreciation may happen. As a result, our minds could be on the football game coming on, where we are going to eat, who we are going to talk to after our service, or what we are going to do after the service instead of the meaning behind the Lord Supper. This opens the door to us for not appreciating Jesus' love for us as much; not appreciating his suffering as much, and not appreciating his death as much anymore. Our appreciation for these things should not diminish but instead our appreciation should deepen as we grow in wisdom and knowledge. Today, for a couple of minutes, we are going to try and go into the minds of a couple of individuals that were present when Jesus was crucified. Our goal is to see where there minds were so that we can take something from their possible mindsets and apply it to our own minds so that our appreciation for the Lord and the Lord's Supper will deepen.

The first person that we are going to consider is Mary. In John the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter, we find that Mary was standing by the cross. I obviously can not speak from personal experience but I surmise that one of the strongest

bonds in mankind is the bond between a mother and her child. If you are a mother, ask yourself this question: how would you feel if someone were trying to harm your child? The temperament of the meekest person could even be dramatically changed under those circumstances. You can't mess with a mother's child! How do you think that Mary felt as she watched Jesus knowing that there was nothing she could do? Imagine the pain that she had to be going through. What could have been going through her mind? I would suggest to you that she was not thinking about His deity or His heavenly kingship or the fact that He was dying for our sins. I believe that she was thinking about her little boy. This is the boy she fed, this is the boy she nursed, this is the boy she taught when He was little, this is the boy she clothed, this is the boy she protected and this is the boy she watched grow up. Now here He is; bloody from head to toe, gasping for air and hanging from a tree; from a tree by his hands and by his feet. What was she thinking? Were there thoughts of sorrow? Why? Her beloved boy was dying. Now we may not be able to feel the same kind of maternal love that Mary had for Jesus but we can focus on how much we love Jesus, just like Mary probably was.

Let's consider the thief on the cross. This was a man that committed some heinous acts in his lifetime. This was a man that was characterized in the scriptures as being a "thief". Do we know exactly what this man did? No. However we can conclude that whatever he did, it was worthy of death. I came to this conclusion not just because he was crucified, but from his very own testimony. As he was hanging from that cross he told the other thief, "We receive the due reward for our deeds". We also learn something else interesting about the thief on the cross. Imagine that you are him and you are hanging there on that tree. You are feeling all of the agony and pain of the crucifixion and you know that you going to be leaving the earth in a matter of hours. Then, you notice all the yelling and jeering that is being done for a certain man that is hanging there beside you. You catch a glimpse of the man as you're struggling to get a breath and realize that it is Jesus of Nazareth. You have heard of this man before and maybe you have even come in contact with people whose lives have been touched by Him through teaching, preaching, or some other miraculous way. You know that this man has power from God and that this person is different from others that have come before Him. You have probably heard all kind of stories about Him since news of Him traveled across all of Jerusalem and all the surrounding countries. Now here He is hanging beside you just like a common criminal being put to death. The natural inclination would be to

say, “Well, I guess he wasn’t who he said he was. I know he said that he was a king but I guess he isn’t”. Instead of thinking those things, he said, “Remember me when You come into your kingdom.” As Jesus was dying on the cross this man was thinking that Jesus is a king and He would still come into His kingdom. Another thing that we can keep in mind as we take the Lord’s Supper along with our love for Jesus, is the fact that this King died for you and me.

I would like to consider one other thing that could have been on the mind of the thief on the cross after talking to Jesus. The thief did not look at the circumstances that were before him as the final chapter of his life story. He saw a brand new chapter of his life unfold before him. It was the hope of the kingdom that persuaded him to ask Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. Now Jesus is going to confirm whether or not the hope that he had was true or false. Jesus says to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Imagine, hearing those words come from Jesus. What would it have been like for him to hear those words? I have not experienced this, but to know that your death is imminent, would have to be a very sobering thought. Memories of your life, of the people you knew, would have to go through your mind. Maybe you would think about the friends you’d never see again or the family you’d never get to be with again. You may think about things that you wish you could have done in your life that you never got a chance to do. You may think about the opportunities that you missed out on. You may think about the things that you would do differently if you could do it over. You may also think about what lies before you as you are about to proceed to the hereafter. Am I going to heaven or to hell? Was I good enough in life? Will I make it? Since he was a thief that was condemned to die for crimes done to others, he may have questioned if his soul was in jeopardy. However, right beside him is the Good Shepherd; The Way, the Truth, the Life. In the midst of all of the vexing questions that are running through your mind, He says to you, “It’s okay. You’re coming with me”. Think about the relief that must have filled his soul. Think about the feeling of euphoria he must have had to know that shortly, despite all the things that he did, he would be with Christ in His kingdom. Even though people were probably yelling things to both of them, he could have peace in the fact that shortly he wouldn’t hear anybody yelling anything derogatory to him again. When it comes down to it, are we really any different from the thief on the cross? We have all committed crimes against God that are worthy of death. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and none of us deserve to be with the Lord. But

through our faith in Jesus, just like the thief on the cross, we have the opportunity to be in paradise by the grace of God.

So as we partake of the Lord's Supper there are many things that we can focus on. We can think about our love for Jesus, as Mary must have. We can think about our King dying or we can think about the relief that we should have in knowing that we are going to be with Him in paradise, as the thief must have. But whatever we think about, let's make sure our minds are focused on Jesus, as their minds must have been.