

Allen Gardiner – Martyrs' Seed

The following is a story of tragedy, and later glory. It tells of the death of the English Christian missionary, martyr and sailing vessel Captain Allen Gardiner and team, at the ends of the earth in "Tierra Del Fuego" (land of fire), Argentina during the nineteenth century

Captain Allen Gardiner (1794-1851)

From earliest childhood, Allen Francis Gardiner was thrilled by stories of adventure, strange lands and of war. In 1808, when he was 14, Allen left home to enter the Naval College at Portsmouth, England. Though he had an exciting career in the British Royal Navy, God had bigger plans for him. He accepted Christ in the Navy and became aware of the futility of idol worship when he saw it firsthand in China. This was a turning point in his life. He had to do something to reach those who were putting their faith in idols. He became an avid Bible reader. From God's Word, Gardiner became acutely aware of the Lord's desire to be glorified among all nations. His naval career ended in 1826.

Gardiner was called by God to reach the Indian tribes in South America that had not been reached even by the Roman Catholics. In 1838, he crossed the Andes Mountains on mule back. He had no plan; all he wanted to do was reach the unreached tribes. All of his attempts to reach the Indians failed. Then in the early 1850s, Allen Gardiner and six other men attempted to go to tribes in southern Argentina. This ill-fated effort left all of them dead from starvation. But the challenge he gave, to reach animistic tribes, is still carried on by the South American Missionary Society, an Episcopalian outreach to Latin America. The two books he wrote paved the way for Protestant work. In the second half of the 20th Century, the Holy Spirit has been moving mightily in Latin America. Gardiner was one who planted the seeds that lead to a harvest many years later.

In the summer of 1850, Allen had arrived on Picton Island, not far from Puerto Williams, with six other Anglican missionaries. His sole mission was to bring the word of God to the Yagan Indians of Tierra Del Fuego. With his two small sailboats, Gardiner took off again for an evangelizing trip, along with a surgeon by the name of Richard Williams, a young Bible teacher named John Maidment, a carpenter named Joseph Erwin and three strong fishermen from Cornwall: Babcock, Pearce and Bryant.

They did find some Yagan Indians, but all they wanted to do is steal everything they could get their hands on. As the missionaries couldn't detain them or combat them (their mission was to evangelize), they reloaded the boats, saved what they could and sailed away from Picton Island. The Yagans chased Gardiner constantly with their canoes, which were lighter than the heavy missionary boats. Finally they found protection in Spanish Harbor (Bahía Aguirre) on the island of Tierra Del Fuego.

It was not a favorable coast and the boat "Pioneer" was destroyed upon landing. The men started to have problems with their health. The sea invaded the cave where they were living, taking everything with it, including their Bibles. So they decided to go back to Picton Island with the other boat, "Speedwell."

Fate was already playing its role in their lives. A very hard Patagonian winter set in (which can reach 20 degrees below zero Celsius) and they started dying one by one, of sickness, starvation and cold.

The last notation in the diary of Williams was on the 22nd of June. His last words were: "The will of the Lord be done." Babcock is the first to die. In July, Gardiner writes that they have been on reduced rations for seven weeks. In August, Erwin and Bryant died.

The next spring came without ever having shared the Gospel of God with even a single Yagan Indian. These are some passages found in Gardiner's diary (translated from Spanish):

"Lord, at your feet I humbly fall, and I give You all I have, all that your love requires. To lack is best, for all is yours. Take care of me in this hour of test. Do not let me have the thoughts of a complainer. Make me feel your power, which gives life, and I will learn to praise You while carrying your cross..."

On the 29th of August, 1851, at age 57, when the winter was coming to an end, he said good-bye to his wife and children, including these words:

"If a wish was given to me for the good of my neighbor, it would be that the Mission in Tierra Del Fuego be pursued with vigor. But the Lord will direct and do everything, because time and reason are His. Your hearts are in His hands..."

His last lines written in his diary on the 6th of September, 1851 were: "By God's grace this blessed group was able to sing praises to Christ for eternity. I am not hungry or thirsty in spite of five days without eating; wonderful grace and love to me, a sinner..."

On the 21st of October, 1851, the ship "John E. Davison" at the command of Captain William Smiley, and Piedra Buena as official, found the "Speedwell" with the bodies of Williams and Pearce aboard, with Babcock meagerly buried nearby. They left because of a bad storm without finding anyone else.

In January 1852, by order of the Admiralty, the ship "Dido" commanded by Captain Morshead (also guided by the paintings over the rocks at Picton), finds the boat "Pioneer". Then his crew buried Gardiner and Maidment, and rescued the diary of the missionary. All of them (Allen Gardiner, the doctor, the Bible teacher and the sailors) died of hunger, cold and sickness.

This man of incredible will, tried to evangelize the pagans of Africa, the Chilean Araucania Indians, natives in New Guinea, the Telueche Indians of the Magellan Strait, the Caco Indians of Bolivia and the Yagans of the Beagle Channel. Turned down everywhere, without converting anyone, he was the first Martyr of Tierra Del Fuego.

From Captain Gardiner's diary, written on that desolate shore as his life was wasting away, several most touching entries were given in the history of the Mission, circulated for the benefit of the South American Society. They all breathe a spirit of noble heroism and of most affecting Christian resignation under privations and sufferings of a most distressing kind. Such was the pitiful end of those noble men who were left to their fate in the far-off region of Tierra del Fuego. Why the provisions they expected never reached them, is useless now to inquire. They died as thousands of martyrs have died, their blood shed for the church that would later be born out of it. They died, but the cause did not die.

The heart of Christian England was stirred to sympathize in the work, and other devoted men were found to take up the mantle of noble Gardiner, starting forth better equipped and better prepared in every way. Years of faithful service since then have redeemed the character of the Patagonians; many were radically changed physically, mentally and spiritually.

Revival Begins

In 1949, a missionary to Mendoza, Argentina, by the name of R. Edward Miller, was drastically discouraged. Miller accounts how he and a friend had recently arranged a two-week gospel crusade to which not a single person would attend. At that point in time, a church of eight converts was considered a huge success. Not knowing what to do, he felt led to pray and fast for at least eight hours a day for a week. That week became over two months before the Lord gave Edward his own personal revival.

After six more weeks of prayer, the Lord said He was ready to pour out His Spirit and that Miller should gather people together for prayer meetings. God set the times, dates, and requirements of the meetings, such that only four people attended. Each night the small group would kneel and silently pray, or sleep, as Edward accounts, for four straight hours. At the end of each night, the only leading of any sort that they had was that one woman felt led to knock on a table in the room. The only problem was that she refused to act on this leading. It took four days of four hours of prayer before she finally, sheepishly tapped on that table. Miller accounts what then took place:

“When her hand hit the table, immediately it was like a rushing wind swept through the room from one corner to the opposite corner. In seconds, the retiring, timid servant lass was on her feet worshipping the Lord in great ecstasy. Her hands were raised in the air and her face was transformed. She radiated the joy and glory of the Lord as she spoke in an unknown language.”

This event was the beginning of revival, not only for this area, but also for all of Argentina.

City Bell

In June of 1951, exactly 100 years after the death of the first martyr (Babcock) in Allen Gardiner’s missionary expedition, revival broke out in City Bell Bible Institute. A young man was reading his Bible outside at midnight and the glory of the Lord was so bright he could read the words with no light. He felt the Presence of God so strongly that he fled to the dormitories to escape it. Once inside, every student awoke and began repenting of their sins. Participants described the presence of a “heavenly visitor” who translated some of them to different parts of the earth or delivered messages from the Lord.

For ten weeks, the students prayed literal rivers of tears for 10 to 20 hours a day, as they repented and interceded for their nation. Then, one day in September, the Lord spoke to them, “WEEP NO MORE... THE LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH HATH PREVAILED! I HAVE OVERCOME THE PRINCE OF ARGENTINA.” From that time on the tears stopped, and in their place the students were filled with joy and laughter. This time of divinely initiated intercession had set the stage for a nationwide move of God just a few years later.

The City Bell experience reminds us of the book, “Visions Beyond the Veil” which tells the story of the Spirit of God falling upon all the children in an orphanage in rural China. Both have similar accounts of heavenly visions and intense times of intercession. People did get saved and healed through these events, but that was not the main focus.

Tommy Hicks

By 1954, the move of God was spreading through the country and a group of pastors decided to bring Evangelist Tommy Hicks, over from the U.S.A. for a series of meetings. By this time, Eva Peron, the President's mistress turned wife and holder of a strong demonic stronghold over the nation, had recently passed away. Tommy shocked the pastors by requiring them to procure a very large soccer stadium for his meetings. Even more shocking was that the Lord told him that the President of Argentina, Juan Peron, would help him.

At that time, all Christian meetings had to be registered with the government and the country was not exactly open to Christianity. Hicks decided to approach the President with his idea for the stadium. After healing one of the President's armed guards, he was able to get an appointment. He explained to Peron that he wanted to hold massive healing meetings and asked if he could pray for the President's terrible skin condition. Peron agreed and was instantly healed! As a result, he gave Hicks full authorization to hold meetings anywhere he wanted and also signed into law, that very day, the freedom of religion for all Christians.

The healing meetings began and soon the largest stadium was too small. So many people had to be turned away that giant speakers were placed in the streets. People estimate that over one million people attended these meetings. So many were healed, it was said that if anyone spoke out against the revival anywhere in Buenos Aires, there would be ten people who would answer them with stories of how they themselves or someone they knew had been healed as a result of these meetings. During this time, hundreds of people left their jobs to begin their own healing ministries. (Book "Secrets of the Argentine Revival" – Dr. R. Edward Miller)

The In-Between Years -- On the Positive Side:

From 1955 to 1966, many different evangelistic crusades were held in various places of the country, as the healing move continued on. Countless numbers of people were saved and healed during this time.

In the years of 1967 to 1972, a move of God's manifested Presence and Glory broke out in Mar del Plata, Argentina. Incredible stories of changed lives came out of that time. Just about everyone who was deeply affected in this move, is now serving the Lord in Argentina or in other countries of the world.

Another move of the Spirit broke out in the late sixties and decade of the seventies that was later called the "Charismatic Move". This move impacted the entire country as it did the world. Many church going people, who had been brought in through the healing revivals, were gloriously filled with the Holy Spirit and set on fire. Countless denominational Christians were excommunicated or expelled from their churches and scores of home groups sprang up throughout the country. Many of these home groups grew into large churches that are thriving in their communities even to this day.

The In-Between Years -- On the Down Side:

Argentina experienced several military dictatorships as well as an intense level of occult influence in the highest levels of government. At one point in time a warlock was appointed as vice president. Throughout the 70's more than 30,000 people "disappeared" at the hands of para-military groups and secret police. Over 8,000 people were documented as murdered for political reasons.

An individual in the government confided in a Christian pastor during that time that mass graves were being dug every week with bulldozers to bury huge amounts of dead young people's bodies. Rumors circulated from pilots of planes that flew nightly trips over the Rio de la Plata and dumped dead bodies into it.

The nation was under such a high level of censorship that most citizens believed their country had won a war to claim the Falkland Islands (The Malvinas as they named it) when, in fact, they had lost. (Miller-Smith)

Carlos Annacondia

In 1982, after the loss of the Falkland Island war, Argentina was nationally devastated and spiritually needy again. There were already several key pastors and ministries in place that helped set the stage for the next outbreak of revival lead by Carlos Annacondia.

Annacondia was a former businessman and relatively new believer yet, when he started his ministry, within 6 months 130,000 people had accepted Christ. One of the trademarks of his ministry was mass deliverance and even publically taunting demons to manifest so they could be dealt with. His meetings often have large deliverance tents where thousands find freedom. Signs and wonders like missing body parts and organs growing back were common. (Wagner, Deiros)

Note: To read some of the outstanding signs wonders and creative miracles that took place in his ministry, (as recounted by Luis Barboza, a pastor who worked with Carlos in his deliverance tent) please go to the article entitled "Carlos Annacondia's signs wonders and miracles" on this website.

Claudio Friedzon

In 1992 Claudio Friedzon began his ministry and was soon leading meetings of 65,000 people. He received a new level of breakthrough after reading Benny Hinn's "Good Morning Holy Spirit" and also receiving an impartation from him. After that, his ministry skyrocketed and launched a whole new wave of national revival. In contrast to Annacondia's emphasis on spiritual warfare and tearing down strongholds, Friedzon's emphasis was on worship, holiness, praise and building up the body of Christ. (Riss)

Throughout the 80's and 90's many churches grew in attendance of upwards to 14,000 daily. Many have several services per day, often meeting in several locations just to accommodate the masses of people. According to Ed Silvano, in recent years the nation has seen a 2,000 percent increase in born again Christians. (Wagner)

In its history, much of the Argentinean revival has been birthed in a place of prayer followed by massive breakthrough. Men like Gardener sacrificed their lives and others like Miller dared to believe that there could be a different strategy for missions. Groups like the City Bell Bible Institute, community wide prayer initiatives and even child intercessors helped spur on the movement. Others like Hicks, Annacondia and Friedzon and many others stepped up to the plate to bring in a massive level of healing power evangelism that transformed entire cities.