THE PASSION

Many years ago, I preached a sermon, “Which Cross is Yours?” about the death of Jesus. (Remember, Leslie?) As we do the work that Jesus chose us to, HIS incarceration and death hits us often.

When we look at the conditions of mankind, we who follow the Bible can see the end of time coming sooner and sooner. As Jesus looks down to this earth where He was born as one of us, and the area in which He grew up, He must weep and suffer all over again. The condition of the world, its people, and its leaders should pull us all the more toward Him.

For a moment, close your eyes and look at Jesus on the cross. On His head is the crown of thorns. He wore it then, to be able to place another crown on your head in Heaven. You will see the stripes laid on him; skin, muscle and flesh torn, a gash in his side, and dried blood on wrists and feet from the spikes used to place Him there.

As religions argue about who put Him there, realize that it was the love He had for us and our need to be rescued from our sins that placed Him there. It still takes the shed blood of Jesus to cover us when we sin. Look into HIS eyes there on Calvary and listen to the words as He pleads with God: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

IF IT’S NOT BROKE, DON’T FIX IT!

Well, friends, the prison system is sadly broken. We have massive overcrowding, about 157% over capacity. There’s very little rehabilitation or regeneration.

We will spend $billions to warehouse men and women, boys and girls in prisons and jails, but little to build or improve our schools. No Child Left Behind in this Land of the Free and Home of the Brave should be: “No One Left Behind.

I pray that one of the debates during this election year hits on a subject no one wants to talk about—massive prison waste. We have worked with hundreds of inmates who graduated from High School who could not read or write properly; they were just passed on from grade to grade.
Two states make it mandatory to be able to read and write when you leave prison. I knew of one prison that had over 30 inmates ready to pass their GED, but no teacher to give them the test.

Applied mathematics: Say there are one million inmates in United States prisons, and some day 80% of them (800,000) are going to be released to your town or mine. Then, say, recidivism (convict-ed criminals who re-offend) is 70% (560,000). Is the system we pay for so dearly, working? It costs about $135,000 to build a cell. It costs about $46,000 a year to house an inmate. Sentences are getting longer and longer, but may still average six years—six wasted years of trying to survive in a system so corrupt you will be shocked when we tell you about it.

We intend, over the next few months, to take you into the corruption of prisons. You will hear stories of guards and brutality, rape and even murder. Why? We are Fighting the Good Fight and we need more and more of you with us.

Religion in prison is becoming a thing of the past. Many of the Chaplains now working are no more than cops in cloth. Regeneration works, but the system does not want men and women changed. Empty prisons cost states much, as prisons in many states are a main source of income.

SOME TOWN, U.S.A.

You have a Mayor, a Chief of Police, and various other jobs that demand results. When crime goes up, people want change, so convictions are vital, even if the person charged with a crime is not guilty. The Rich get Richer; the Poor get Prison. Enter the plea bargain.

Let’s say a person in your town is arrested, not guilty of anything. He or she is interrogated, sometimes for hours. Everyone wants a crime off the books. The arrested person fights off hunger and fear. Beaten down, he/she hears, “Look. If you go to trial on this charge, you will get ten years, but if you plead to (almost anything), you will only get a year at most. Take the year.

I was arrested a long time ago and charged with an assault. I pled guilty, because at the same time as the assault was going on, I had committed a robbery across town.

I was convicted and spent seven months in jail instead of eight years in prison. (My life story, called “Broken Pieces,” will soon be finished.)

Then there is the professional snitch—the person who says “I heard them say they did thus an so.” Police use them often; the system is bad. Jim (a snitch) was in jail on a parole violation which would send him back to prison for two years. In the cell next to him was George, charged with burglary. Jim told police he heard George admit to the crime. The only “witness” to the crime was Jim. George went to prison, Jim was set free. One more crime solved in your town, America.
MY NAME IS JONAH

I was arrested and charged with murder. I was arrested because I looked like someone who someone else saw do the crime. I was booked and taken to a room with two men who started in on me. Their job: to get a confession. About 13 hours later, I would not give in. One of the policemen said to the other, “You know, he really is not a bad guy.”

To me: “Look, son,” he said, “we have got you cold on this and you will spend life in prison when convicted. We have a deal for you.”

I need to tell you I was an uneducated black from the ghetto.

“If you confess to manslaughter,” they told me, “you will get a maximum of three years.”

I was beaten, hungry and tired. I took their deal. My Plea Bargain went before the judge, who sentenced me to life in prison. I had done nothing.

...We found out about this man from a friend of ours. The real murderer was caught, who gladly confessed to that crime to prevent getting death for others he had done.

Jonah was released and the taxpayers settled his lawsuit out of court. I have been told as high as 40 % of inmates are not guilty of the crime they are serving time for. In no way do Yvonne, Jake and I want to defend real criminals. I was one and deserved everything I got.

Old saying: Do the crime, do the time.

WELL, I’LL JUST WRITE DIRECT

Betty wrote us that she had decided to write her Pen Friend direct, so we made a note of it. Her inmate wrote that he had borrowed some money and could not pay it back and if she did not send it he would die. She sent it: $75. He wrote again and said they wanted $50.00 more. She called us.

I called the prison and found out this was his game and it worked well. She again writes through us. He got six months added to his sentence.

Another wrote that he had bought some drugs on credit and could not pay. This one I intercepted. He said he went to guards. They would give him protection if he gave them all the names of inmates involved (this could be a death sentence for him). He was begging for money to pay.

I called the prison, and this man was given protection. When he was released from the hospital, he had been stabbed. He also gave up names.

I received a call just now—a woman wanting to call her pen friend, which she cannot do. [Inmates can call you, but all calls are collect. In addition, a special rate
is charged, which is very expensive. The inmate now also knows were you live. [There are the collect call charges, plus the prison’s “hookup fee” of at least $3 per call, plus the phone company’s per-minute fees and the prison system’s kickback from the phone companies. The State of Michigan prison system earns an estimated $7 to $9 million per year, from families without their breadwinners, who can least afford it.]

We would like to start a “Stories from Inside” section of the newsletter. Ask your friend to provide us with articles, good or bad, for our newsletter.

CLOWNS FOR LIFE

At Soledad we were connected with a really neat group: A bunch of lifers who became clowns. They put together a group and the prison allowed them to go into local towns to put on programs for kids “Not Scared Straight.” In all the years we have worked in prisons, we find that the lifer is the best inmate. They have resolved that unless a miracle happens, and sometimes it does, this is were they will die. They want to do their time as easy as possible, with no trouble, so they control the yards and dorms.

JUST SAY NO TO DRUGS

Years ago, this saying was going on everywhere. We got together three inmates who grew up either using or selling drugs. I contacted local schools and got them to let us bring these men in to speak.

One principal said, “Chaplain, that’s fine, but please don’t preach to our kids.” I promised I would not. The inmates had about 15 minutes each, and each one preached a sermon of how, when they said no to drugs, they needed a fix to replace the one they gave up. The High they were on now was from Above.

The principal said he would get even, with a smile on his face. We were able to put that on video, and on our to-do list is a mandate to make it available to all of you.

BOOKS TO INMATES

Hi, I am writing to a prisoner right now who would love to get the "40 Days of Purpose" study. Unfortunately, it is not in soft cover yet. Is there any way that I could contact the prison Chaplain and see if they would be allowed to do this as a supervised study?

Also, please refresh me as to how to send books to prisoners. I know that it has to come from a vendor. Are devotionals such as "Our Daily Bread " from RBC Ministries allowed?

Also, we have been writing about his family. He is estranged from his Mom and I
was wondering if it would be O.K. for me to write to her. Please let me know what is acceptable. Thanks for this great ministry. Dee

[Have an “approved vendor” book store send it direct. Our Daily Bread is in most prison chapels and yes, it is neat for you to write his mom. God Bless. Don]

**JAKE’S CORNER**

Hi, again. As I was telling you, my mom broke her leg and had five surgeries and eventually her leg got better. She did not ride a bike for a long time— once or twice, maybe, but only short rides.

Man, if that happened to me, I would not ride a bike, period! She went back to work shortly. But something was not the same there at work for her.

My mom and my dad got a divorce and my dad is still in prison. I talk to him once every month or so. If any of you have someone in prison that you feel like you should visit, I would tell you to pray about it, and then do what God leads you to do.

I listen to Grandpa and Grandma talking about families who cut all ties with family members who go to prison. I don’t think that is Christian. That’s all for now.

Please continue to pray for us

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**YVONNE’S CORNER**

In Prison Ministry you sow seeds, not knowing if those seeds will grow or not. Most of the time you never know the results. Just recently, we received a letter from a very special friend that I would like to share with you.

“I thought I would write and first of all let you know how much you are missed around here. I left Soledad in 1987 and returned in 1997. There’s no longer anyone here from those days but I certainly remember them well because of how much I grew in the Lord, in part through the faithful ministry of Someone Cares. The system has changed a lot and the services are nothing like back in those days. It is mainly due to budget cuts in the State of California.

“In 1989 I was married to a wonderful Christian gal who at that time was Ms Naomi Brown. Today we have a beautiful daughter from that union and her name is Nicole. She’s 9 years old and absolutely loves the Lord. (She was conceived in a conjugal visit) I just want you to know that I am very thankful for your ministry that I believe carried me this far and helped me to continue walking with the Lord, even at my darkest days in prison. It’s not always been easy, but Jesus has always been here with me.”

Please remember Henry & his family in your prayers. We give God all the Praise.
JEAN’S JOTTINGS

My cousin, who is a minister, shared two articles on the “Passion” with me. One item that impressed me personally was that God gave us a “Word Book”, not a “Picture Book,” lest we make idols. We’re living in perilous times and must look always to God’s Word, and the reason Jesus offered up Himself for all of us—so we might live with Him for all of eternity. That’s how valuable each soul is to Him.

On the topic of neglected education (passing kids with few skills): I’m appalled at the school systems that pay top management and school board members a five-to six-figure income, who waste resources and aren’t held accountable. Trouble is, one of the main lost resources is the children who turn to crime for a living because they don’t have the education to compete for jobs with a living wage. How fair is that?! It sure keeps the prison doors revolving.

Not all guards, nor all Chaplains, are without com-passion. Shirley and I have noticed, however, that at least one Chaplain we deal with believes if one is an inmate, he belongs in prison.

The rules continue to tighten from month to month where we serve as religious volunteers. Searches are more stringent, closer attention is paid to detail at check-in areas. Our mater-ials are more thoroughly exam-ined. Through it all, God watches over us and we try to keep up with the rules so we don’t cause any grief to those who are also doing their jobs.

We recently received one of the highest compliments in our prison ministry. It was from an inmate who told us we were the “real thing.” He’d been discussing some personnel in the past who had been less candid in dealing with them. We try to inspire, as we’re all sinners in need of Jesus’ com-passion to get us through life. We bring music to our services via the Chapel’s keyboard and a supply of hymnals in our locker there. Even the Chaplains enjoy the praise time. We give both the inmates and the Chaplains our handouts on pretty paper to treasure, or share with others until our next visit. Whether they agree with the content or not, we’re there to please God, and have nothing to hide.

Inmates tell us some surprising things, and we’ve learned to take them in stride. That kind of trust is difficult to come by, and needs to be carefully guarded.

Sometimes we do a Bible study, sometimes it’s an inspi-rational story we’ve acquired on the Internet. (Isn’t technology wonderful?) Always, it’s some-thing intended to draw our audience closer to God and give the reader courage to face the coming week with his fellow inmates.

We’re only given 50 minutes, sometimes 45 if the inmate(s) aren’t checked in on time. Our time with them flies by, but we are expected to close on time, so we accommodate the rules and “live peaceably with all,” as instructed by the Apostle Paul. The guards, in turn, respect us and have been faithful in escort-ing us across the yard.
Of course, we’re equipped with PPDs (personal protective devices) in case we’re threatened, which has never happened. These are little boxes with an antenna-like pin which can be pulled in an emergency. It sets off an alarm that summons the guards, like prayer summons angels. God is SO GOOD!

Someone Cares Home Page