



Newsletter

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Isaiah 61:1

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I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Matthew 25:36

We Finally Got On The Tiers!



There are three main yards at San Quentin. In the old Humphrey Bogart movies they called it the "Big Yard" but it's actually called the "Upper Yard", then there is the "Lower Yard" which is really the biggest of the yards. Then there is the "Lower Lower Yard", its is one I never made it to in my stay, I think it was for minimum custody.

As we walked onto the Upper Yard it brought back many memories for me. It had been thirty years ago that I walked across that same yard, January 1972. There was a big difference then, I was just another man in denim with a number. Now I was there to use my past for God's glory.

Ever had the experience of going somewhere you hadn't been since you were a child and then going back thinking to yourself how small everything is? Well I was young when I was there, around twenty-three but I wasn't a child and yet everything did seem smaller. I guess because everything about the

place was very overwhelming back then.

In August of 1971 there had been a shoot out on the upper yard that ended the lives of three prison guards and three inmates. One was of the " Soledad Brothers", George Jackson of the Black Panther Party.

It helped to set the stage for the most violent time in the 150 year history of the prison. In 1974 alone they had more stabbings and killings than any other year till that date. We were locked down (kept in our cells) nine months of that year! That meant that the three months we were not in lockdown, all of the violence happened. East Block, where I lived, was called Vietnam.

Another reason that the yard may have seemed smaller to me now after all these years was because they have put exercise pens on the yard for all the inmates housed in East block who are on death row. All I know for sure was the whole thing looked different to me now, I suppose because I look at everything through different eyes. As I am writing this I recall pointing out to one of the other guys I was going in with, where I had watched a man die so many years ago. Now we

were going in to tell them of another man who had died so that they might live!

When we walked through the rotunda gates of South Block we walked into another smaller yard. So they have a yard I never knew about. You see South Block was a Honor Block when I was there, something I never saw. Well, now a days it is used as a reception center for parole violators. And that day it was full of inmates wearing the bright orange jumpsuits



This is a picture from East Block where Death row is. South Block looks the same, without all the barbed wire

The cell block consists of five two sided tiers with fifty cells to a tier. They are so crowded in there that with two men per cell they still have to put a large row of bunks on the first floor. There are two rows of gun rails that travel the entire inner diameter of the building. With guards holding carbines walking around the two levels, instead of instilling a sense of security in the volunteers, I could

There have been so many things that have happened since the last newsletter.

At the end of June I once again went up north to San Quentin and the French Camp facilities. We had a great time and the Lord did many awesome things.

In the beginning of July I was blessed to be able to go back east for the first East Coast IPM Prison Ministry Conference. Watching fireworks on Chesapeake Bay for the first 4th after 9/11 had a special significance for me.

As many of you who have been reading these news letters know, every time we go to San Quentin we are in hopes of being able to go into the cell blocks and walk the tiers, going cell to cell. Every year something has happened to keep us from doing it.

Well this year was different. A team of twelve of us were allowed into South Block. We were let loose to walk the tiers for about four hours.

We Finally Got On The Tiers! (continued)

tell some were more than a little uncomfortable at first. But it didn't take too long until all of us were roaming up and down and all around the cell block sharing with every inmate that would talk to us.

At one point I happened to notice Pastor Bob Hoekstra standing at a cell talking to an inmate and it reminded me of a familiar picture of his dad Chaplain Ray.



that they have to wear while in reception.

Of course Bob doesn't wear the hat like his dad did. At least not yet. But with Living in Christ Ministries now moving to Dallas Texas, who knows maybe he will start sporting a ten gallon hat too?

Along with Pastor Bob, we had Pastor Matthew Hoekstra (Chaplain Ray's grandson) who will be taking the helm of International Prison Ministry. Pastor Mike Sasso from Calvary Downey. And Pastor Carlos Ayub from Calvary Costa Mesa. Also a number of people from "New Life Prison Ministry" of Calvary Downey.

At one point I was sent to a man who was asking to see me. He had heard I was there and knew me from somewhere else we had been he just wanted to give me a praise report of what has been happening in his life. It's a blessing when you get to see real growth in the seeds that are planted.

There were more than a few decisions for Jesus and others who found their way back. All of us had an awesome time that day. And

But the time came when we did have to go. That was all right because we were going to be coming back in just a few hours to do a chapel service.

We had a good turnout for the chapel and it started out with some great worship from the San Quentin choir. They can really rock the house down.

I had just gotten up to share my testimony and was about half way through when they stopped the service and rushed us out of the facility. They had some kind of violence happen on the Lower Yard so they put the whole place on lock down. Some things just never change.

It all worked out when another team went in the following day and put on two more chapel services. And while they were there another group of us went to French Camp and did two services there.



really didn't want to leave when it was time to go.

The service we did for the women is one I'll remember for some time to come. I was the one who MC'd the service, introducing the different people. One of the women in the group caught my attention. You could tell she had a lot of pain hidden behind the expression on her face.

After introducing one of the speakers, I sat down and said a simple prayer for the woman. I asked God to touch her and give her comfort. I have to believe it was the Lord giving me a discernment that there was something very wrong there and it just needed prayer. I

felt compassion for her and yet I had no idea what was even wrong.

It wasn't too much farther into the service when I saw the woman get up, go over to one of the women volunteers in tears and then the two of them walked out side.

The volunteer should have never left the secure area like that. I went to the door to look outside and when I did the volunteer saw me and waved for me to come out. It turns out the inmate had been at the women's state prison in Stockton a few years ago. She remembered me (from the only time I went there) from Stockton.

What she had told the volunteer in tears before leaving the room was she wanted God in her life and she wanted it right then, not willing to wait for the invitation that would be given at the end of the service.

Pray for Sharon (God knows her real name) as she has full blown AIDS and probably does not have much longer to live. Her condition wasn't her motivation for wanting to accept Christ as her savior that night. The way she put it, she just knew inside herself that she needed God. Without even realizing it, she was saying the Holy Spirit had spoken to her.

She had never reached out to God before. She came that night thinking she was going to play Bingo! Well she got the best Bingo she could ever get, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"I cry out with my whole heart; Hear me, O Lord! I will keep Your statutes. I cry out to you; save me, and I will keep Your testimonies. I rise before the dawning of the morning, and cry for help; I hope in Your Word." Ps 119:145-147

Making New Friends

It seemed like no sooner did I get back from our trip from northern California and then I was right back on a plane heading for the east coast. Destination: Baltimore, Maryland. International Prison Ministry was having their first east coast prison ministry conference.

The event was held at a place called Sandy Cove. A Christian conference center on the Chesapeake Bay.



There were about fifty people who came from all over the east coast. From as far down south as Georgia and as far north as Maine. I roomed with a man who was a Chaplain from Delaware.

Making contact and getting to know people from other parts of the country who are in prison ministry was blessing.

For instance I meet a brother from a Calvary Chapel in Macon, Georgia. He is a blonde haired blue eyed man that is a Chaplain in a jail that is nearly 100% black. Hearing the challenges he has had to overcome and what he still faces makes me stop to realize once again who it is that is in control.

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain. Ps 127:1

Another group I met was called Calvary Prison Ministry from Rochester, New York. They have about thirty churches that are affiliated with what

they are doing. I would love to see us have something similar out here on the west coast! There is talk of a possible conference that will happen in Rochester in September. If I can't make it to that one, I still hope to go back for a visit at some time in the future and see what it is all about. For anyone interested in finding out more about them we have a link to their web site on ours.

Being able to meet and network with different ministries from around the country helps to strengthen all the ministries. Its is one of the many things that Pastor Bob and Matthew Hoekstra are attempting to accomplish in renewing International Prison Ministry. To be able to be involved is a real blessing to me. I believe in what they are trying to do, if they become even half as effective as Chaplain Ray was, it is going to be awesome.

One of the days there I was able to spend a couple hours in our nation's capitol. History really does come to life there.

After the conference was over we spent the next few days going to two prisons there in Maryland.



We went to one of the state prisons in downtown Baltimore. We had to drive through the ghetto to get there and I thought as we drove by run down buildings, with trash everywhere, how can this be like this, so close to our nation's capital?

Then right in the middle of this ghetto was this huge medieval looking black prison. To me it seemed like the ghetto was the grave yard and the prison was its big black headstone. I'll bet more than a few have nothing more to look forward to than to some day graduate from the neighborhood to the prison.

The chapel service was packed when we got inside. We had gotten there late so it was already in progress. Temperatures were very humid and it made the fullness of the room more intense. Something I had never seen before in the places I have been in, the population was nearly completely black. Unfortunately because we got there late we didn't have much time. Pastor Bob gave a short message and it was time to shake many hands and then we had to leave.

The other prison we went to was in a place called Jessup, Maryland. It was amazing, we kind of got lost, there are so many prisons there we couldn't figure out which one we were supposed to go to.

But once in, the service was awesome. A number of us spoke, then at the end, another first, the inmates all gathered around us and prayed for us.

I miss my family every time I'm gone and I'm always happy when I get back home. But I still look forward to the next opportunity go and share.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Matt 28:19

All the time I am having people ask about Hannibal. I'm afraid I have to confess that I am struggling with him lately. In fact there have been a couple incidences where I have acted much more in the flesh than I should have.

I have tried to just get away from Hannibal and tried to tell myself things like I am just throwing pearls after swine. At best he is hard to deal with. Very demanding with so little fruit for the effort. Sure glad the Lord doesn't give up on me as easily as I nearly have with Hannibal.

But in truth I know I am called to continue to be there for him till he dies. I have to let my yes be yes and I promised him I would be there for him.

There really is more to it that I haven't explained. It isn't that I have just gotten discouraged over him, even though he is very discouraging. He recently tried to intimidate me into what he wanted me to do. Something I could not and would not compromise on. I never have responded very well to threats no matter how empty they may be. Really all I need is to have a cooling off period and then I'll be back seeing him again. Hopefully this will teach him something, or at least make him realize that he won't get anywhere with that approach with me. He has been asking for me and I just tell them to tell him I'll be back when I can see him again. Please pray for him and for me in this matter.

While I am on the subject of my resent struggles of late, I need to tell you of another incident where I definitely got into the flesh.

Many at our Church know my friend Danny Barabas. He and I have known each other somewhere around thirty-five years. We first meet in Youth Authority. Done many things over the years. Danny has gone from being on the Most Wanted list to being an Elder at his church today. He has come down a few times to participate in the prison crusades we have done.

About thirty years ago Danny's older brother was killed in a senseless murder and what made it worse was that the killers used to be some of Danny friends. Later Danny would lose a second younger brother who was also murdered in a widely publicized case. It is all part of the consequences of the lifestyles we chose to live.

Danny caught up with the shooter of his older brother while they were both in the county jail thirty years ago and nearly killed him. Many people, including myself, over the years wanted to finish the job and kept their eyes out for him also. But that was thirty years ago.

Well two weeks ago that all changed for me. I had Just finished showing the movie "Left Behind" and usually a number of them would stay after to ask questions on the Bible and would ask for Bibles and other things.

Well this one guy walks up asking me

for a Bible and saying he was a new Christian. He turned himself in to clean up some things hanging over his head and would be out again soon. In the mean time he is conducting Bible studies with other guys in his cell.

If you haven't already guessed it, he turned out to be the shooter of Danny's older brother, And that is where I wasn't much of a Chaplain. When he started telling me how he struggles with his guilt over the murder, all I could think of was my friend and all he went through because of this guy. I didn't tell him of David's sin with Uriah and how God forgave him. Or how Paul had helped to have Christians killed till he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

I was feeling very guilty about it later that night when I called to tell Danny what had happened that day. I thought it might give him comfort to know that the guy had a lot of remorse and guilt over what had happened and wondered if God would ever really forgive him. What Danny asked me to do if I happened to see him again, was to tell him that Danny had forgiven him and the if he had been able to forgive him, how much more would God forgive him.

I recently saw the man for a second time and gave him Danny's message. His answer was to have me tell Danny he will be praying for him!

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Phil 4:13

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: for what we do as Chaplains. My support comes solely from donations made to send me as a missionary to the incarcerated . :
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