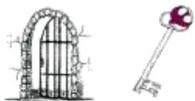


Jesus Is The Key
Ministries



Isaiah 61:1

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Newsletter

Chaplain Ed Welsh

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

Central America Prison Outreach 2007

So the last will be first, and the first last. Matthew 20:16

And so its going to be in this newsletter. I can't help but write first about what has happened last. I just got home yesterday at one o'clock in the morning from our missions trip to Central America. And what a trip is was, there is so much to write about, so many pictures, this will probably turn out to be my longest newsletter yet.

First of all I have to say that as much as it meant to me to go on this trip, I am so glad to be back home. I can't remember the last time I missed my wife and kids as much as I had the past two weeks. And we take so many things for granted. All it takes is some time in a 3rd world country to realize how good we truly have it here in America.

That being said I would be happy to go back and do it all again if the Lord ever opens the door for me to return some day.

Before I left on the trip, I had people ask me why it was I wanted to go at all. After all I get to see all the prisoners I need right here. Being the Chaplain at Men's Central Jail has more to do than I could ever hope to accomplish.

While that is entirely true and I will always consider my work at the jail my primary calling in ministry, I never want to limit what the Lord can do to use me. He opens these doors for

a reason.

At this time I would like to assure anyone who contributes to this ministry that none of those donations were used to go on this trip. I am very grateful the Lord provided all the funds for this trip mainly from a church that sponsored most of the expenses and the rest came from individuals who expressed that they wanted to donate towards this trip.

The Lord sometimes provides in the strangest of ways. I actually received donations from some non-Christian chaplains who serve at my jail. At the time it happened, it really amazed me and all I could do was give God praise and glory.

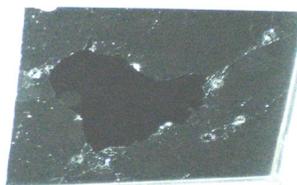
Well enough about my reasons for going. I need to get on with what happened over there.

This past Saturday night was our last night before going home. I stayed up till after midnight hoping to be good and tired for the flight home, wanting to be able to sleep on the plane.

As I laid on my bed thinking back to the things that had happened over the past two weeks, my thoughts were interrupted by bursts of gun fire not too far from where we were. There must have been a total of 30 shoots fired over a 15 minute period. And then came the sounds of the ambulance sirens.

I had to look no further than up at a the shot out window in the

church we were staying to remind me of the ever present



violence that surrounds us.

The crime and violence in these countries is unbelievable. Another indicator of how severe the problem is, the armed guards everywhere around the city. Not just the security guards we are used to seeing here in this country but instead guards carrying riot shot guns. Then added to that, there are the police and military personal who are walking around carrying machine guns. You can't walk into a McDonalds over there without an armed guard opening the door for you.

These countries have a history of violence that goes back for decades. Beginning with the years of gorilla warfare that spawned so many of their current problems. And what later would bring it to our own country.

Back in the early 90's there were a number of Central American immigrants who fled the warfare of their own countries and settled in the Rampart area of Los Angeles.

They were trying to escape the violence they thought they were leaving behind only to discover they where just trading it in for the street gang violence of the Los Angeles

style.

The Central American groups added their years of experience growing up in the war torn countries they came from and that formula has brought about the most violent gangs our country has ever seen.

Once it became apparent to the authorities here in this county that there was a growing problem from the Central American gangs they developed a course of action.

That action was to start deporting them to their countries of origin. The end result is that we inadvertently started exporting the hybrid version of L.A. style gangs back to their countries.

It brings us up to the current conditions that now exist in both our countries. I don't think it is anything anyone ever foresaw and now it is rapidly becoming a global epidemic.

The end result of all of this is a growing prison population within both countries. To give it perspective 27 years ago when I left prison for the last time, there were 13 prisons in California. Today in Honduras they have 19 prisons with a population that I am sure is far less than what the population of California was 27 years ago.

There is a need to protect ourselves from criminals so there will always been a need for prisons. But prisons are

not the answer. I certainly don't think I have all the answers but really when you boil it down to its root, all of it has to do with sin and the only way to deal with sin is with the cross.

There was a pastor I met, Pastor Armando, who is doing something about it by reaching out to the children. He goes into the prisons and works with the gangs but he also has started 5 churches in poor areas of the city. The places where the gangs recruit from. Only Pastor Armando is recruiting the kids for Jesus in his churches and one by one there are less of them joining the gangs because of his efforts.



As I watched these children perform their skits and dance routines for us it brought tears to my eyes when I realized these kids were kept off the streets learning these things.

During the two weeks of our mission trip we went to 12 prisons. The prison outreaches were during the day and at night we went to different churches and would do the same program again there. The turnouts were amazing really, many came long distances.



Now that I have tried to explain the back ground of what is happening and to some degree how the current problem started, I had better get to what happened during our trip to Central America.



We first arrived in El Salvador early in the morning on Monday March 5th. There were ten of us who arrived from three different places. Two came from Yuma, Arizona. One from Mexicali Mexico. And the rest of us were from the Los Angeles area. When we later got to Honduras the two from Arizona and the one from Mexicali left and another man met up with us for the rest of the trip.

In the above picture we are standing in front of the bus (driven by Rudy who is standing third from the right in the back row) we would spend many hours in of the next to weeks. Also shown in the picture is the two prison ministry workers who arranged the El Salvador part of our trip.

Going into this trip the only one I knew from the group was Jorge Garcia (far right in above picture). He is on staff with Prison Fellowship, Chuck Colson's ministry. Jorge and I have done many things together over the years and he was the one who organized this trip.

Not only was I the only Gringo on this trip, I was the only one who spoke English as my first language, in my case it is the only language I speak.

There were some others on the trip who spoke no English at all. Unless I had someone next to me to translate I was left to wonder what they were talking about. What was really amazing to me was many times while listening to them I would be able to understand to an extent what it was they were saying. Driving in the bus hours on end listening to Spanish worship turned out to be my time to either get into the Word or a time to just be still. Something I realized I don't do often enough.

Our first prison outreach was to a women's prison. They lined up outside the church waiting to be let in.



Compared to some of the other women's prisons we would end up going to this one was one of the better ones. Later during the service they really got into the worship, many came forward for prayer at the end of the service.

What broke my heart was to see the little children who are there with their mothers. Innocent little kids who didn't do anything to be in there but they are also serving time in that place. This little boy in the picture below touched my heart and made me think of my grandson at home.



The church that hosted us while we were in El Salvador is a church that calls itself Maranatha and has a number of churches throughout their country.

After going to the women's prison in the morning, we went to the mother church that first night. They ended up having a large sanctuary and even with it being a week night they filled the church with people praising the Lord.

This turned out to be the pattern for the rest of our time in Central America. We would go to prisons in the daytime each day, then go to a church in the different communities at night. This picture below is the service at Maranatha Church that first night.



The following day we headed out to go to another prison. This time it was to a men's prison. As we walked onto the yard the familiar smell of unsanitary conditions and decay was unmistakable. Too many unclean bodies crammed into too small an area.

At this particular prison something that caught my eye was the large pile of smoldering trash that lay smoking on the yard. It made me think of the Valley of Hinnom that was used as the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. Refuse, waste materials, and dead animals were burned there. Fires continually smoldered, and smoke from the burning debris rose day and night. Hinnom became a graphic symbol of woe and judgment and of the place of eternal punishment called Hell.



In this first men's prison we started to see that there were many very young men within the population. What a shame to see all these young men's lives being wasted away inside these places.

Another thing I was more than a little surprised was the way the cell blocks were built at this particular prison. They were made out of cement blocks with a few of the rows of blocks turned sideways so that the hollow center, normally filled with rebar and cement for strength, served as the only ventilation for the building. I can't imagine how hard it would be for someone who had trouble dealing with confined places. Not to mention the darkness and dampness it would cause.



Our third day of outreaches in El Salvador brought us our first sense of danger but we weren't even aware of the possible danger until well after it had occurred.

The third prison we were scheduled to go to was going to be our first high security prison, one that was dedicated to housing gang members. Before we got there we were lead to believe that they would be from the 18th Street gang.

Once we arrived at the prison things started to go wrong right away. Even though the government of El Salvador had already approved our coming, the director of the prison had his own agenda and was not about to let us enter. We spent a good hour or longer just waiting outside while the organizers of the mission and the administration went round and round. We all knew we were in a spiritual battle and we took it seriously. We got together in groups and started to pray. I told myself that I knew there

were a lot of groups back home who were also praying for us. Realizing that gave me some real comfort.

There was something else that gave the moment a surreal kind of atmosphere to the whole thing. There were a group of school girls playing baseball in a field next to the prison wall. So between our time in prayer we watched the girls play ball as we waited to find out if they were going to let us go into the prison.



The director finally made his decision, he had a legal document drawn up and asked us all to sign it. What it said was, it released them from any responsibility if anything happened to us while we were in there. We all gladly signed it, "let's get this show on the road."

Later we found out what some of the concern was all about. They have been having a lot of gang violence in the prisons around the country, actually all three countries. So in El Salvador they had been attempting to come up with strategies to curb the trouble. One such attempt was to move out all of the 18th street gang and they had been replaced with the MS 13 gang at this particular prison. This gang had been recently involved with the murder of some guards so it was very understandable that they would not have a favorable attitude towards this group.

As we were escorted into the depths of the prison we were taken next to a large cell block that had a huge set of bars and gate which made up the front of the block. I was already bummed out that the director had not let us bring cameras in, as it turned out it would be the only time in this country that the administration wouldn't let us take pictures. Later in one of the other prisons it would be the prisoners who wouldn't let us.

We were lead into a courtyard that was in front of their church building. It was something I thought real ironic that in every prison in Central America they had church buildings for the prisoners and in our own country I have been to many prisons where they only have "multi-purpose" rooms to have services in. Isn't our country the one founded on "In God We Trust"? Not much any more.

This courtyard was anything but one that had a spiritual feeling about it. The walls had these paintings all over them that looked like they had been there for awhile. Pictures I would in no way put into this newsletter if I had been able to take them that day. This art work was right out of the pit of hell. Depicting all kinds of perversion, violence and drugs.

There had been the gang graffiti of the number 18 that had been removed, giving you an indication of who used to be there and of course it had all been replaced with MS 13 letting you know who controlled the prison now.

When the prisoners were let out with us they walked in with a sense of reluctance that I came to understand later in our trip. As it turns out the MS 13 group is far less receptive to hearing about God than the 18th Street gang.

It is my understanding that MS 13 swears an alliance with the devil upon joining the group. But then one of the markings that the 18th Street uses with their tattoos is 666, which adds up to 18. When you ask them if they realize that is the mark of the beast, they laugh and say of course they do. Either way the entire time we were there I never saw anyone from MS13 bow their head to pray. That was not the case when it came to the 18th street groups.

As what became the pattern of all the outreaches, they would set up the sound system and start with worship. Of course it was in Spanish so I didn't really understand any of it but some of the prisoners seemed to like the music part of the program the best.

I wasn't part of the program that day so it gave me the chance to go around and talk to people individually or in small groups. I like it better that way anyway. The guy who did most of the translating for me (Martin) stayed close by most time

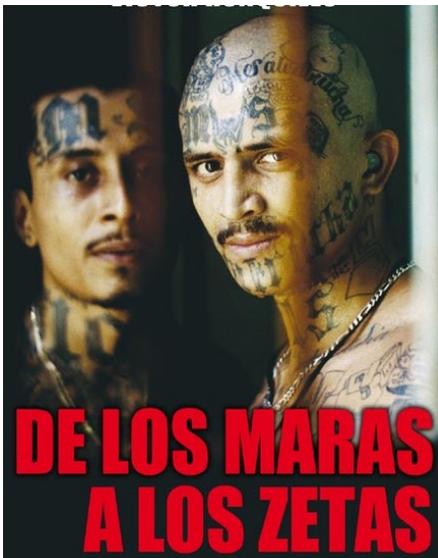
and all I had to do was call him and he would come over to help.

The first thing I always did was to ask if there were any who spoke English. That always worked better, it freed Martin up to do his own thing and I think some of the prisoners trusted it more when one of their own translated.

Because it was the first gang prison we had gone to, I made it a point to try and talk to who looked most like the gang members and if possible who the leaders were, you can usually pick them out from the crowd. Once they found out I was the Chaplain from Men's Central Jail and that I also had been in prison myself they would become more open to talk with me.

Upon leaving there that day while taking the sound equipment back out, we passed the director in a walk way. When he looked up and saw us coming he had a look of surprise on his face. Later when we were driving away in the bus, Martin told me he had heard the director say, "well you made it out of there safely after all".

That afternoon we went to a shopping mall to get something to eat and pick up a few things. Someone from the group went in to a book store and found this book about the gangs. The man on the right of this book cover is one of the guys many of us had just got through talking to in the prison we had just left. The director didn't want us to take pictures but we still ended up with something from that outreach after all.



In total we ended up going to seven prisons while we were in El Salvador. We would later move on to Honduras where we would go to three more prisons and then to finish out the trip we went to two more prisons in Guatemala. And each country had its own differences from landscape to its food. And I found it all very interesting.

El Salvador means the Savior. And I understand that Honduras means the land of many valleys. Guatemala is famous for its many volcanoes and there was one that was erupting while we were there. There is certainly a lot about the countries that is very beautiful. I didn't realize how tropical it was. I have never been there but I understand the weather is much like it is in Hawaii.

Hours on end we traveled between cities on our bus. From San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador to San Miguel, was about a six hour ride. Then on to Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. But the longest trip of all was from Tegucigalpa to Guatemala City, about a thirteen hour trip. We got to see a lot of the country side that is for sure and we went places and did things no tourist would ever do.



What was most meaningful besides going into the prisons was being able to do outreach where the gangs came from out in the neighborhoods to the inner city.



To meet the people, eat their food and just get even a small understanding of how they live. I just hope this experience will allow me to help some gang member I meet in my own jail someday.

One of the most memorable outreaches we did while we were in El Salvador was another of the 18th street gang prisons that we went to. I was coming to understand that each prison had its own distinct characteristics. Some were in the country far from the cities and others were right there in the middle of the city. This prison was in the middle of the city and I assume had been there for a long time. One thing for sure, it was very crowded!

When they started to come out into the courtyard where we held the outreach, they literally surrounded us there were so many of them.



This was one of the outreaches where I found a man who spoke English and was able to speak with many of the men myself. After awhile I had started to really find it amusing that they were so surprised to find out that I had spent 15 years myself as a prisoner. I guess I am getting old, at least some of these guys thought so and all I can say to that is praise God that I have been able to make it this far, with the life I lived for so many years, I should have been gone years ago. Its only by the grace of God! .

I like being able to tell these guys how they too can have a new life in Christ, just like I have had. Many gave up long ago and it is important that they hear the truth that it is not too late that they too can have a new life if they would just trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Most of these guys have grown up hearing all their life that they are no good. That they have nothing to hope for. And in their circumstances that is really true,

unless you add the hope of the gospel to the equation. There is still hope for a better tomorrow, that God does love them and that they can still find forgiveness. I tell them all, if God can do it for me, He can and will surely do it for them to.

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?

Romans 10:14



As you can see from the picture above, they are not really responding very much to the worship. I guess they were more concerned with wanting to look cool. And yet by the time the message was finished there were many within the group who did bow and pray.



All the time we were in El Salvador, the leader of the mission had wanted me to wear long sleeve shirts because he was very concerned how the gang members might react to my tattoos if they saw them. As I've already mentioned, it's very tropical and that means it was warm. I did what I was told and kept long sleeve shirts on all the time I was in El Salvador. But once we were on the bus headed for Honduras I put a tee shirt on.

Upon arriving in Tegucigalpa we stopped at a gas station that had a

convenience store and we all got out to stretch our legs and get sodas or whatever. I noticed almost immediately that everyone there was looking at me strangely and I didn't know why. When the police car pulled in they too were looking at me hard while talking on their radio, I knew this couldn't be good.

The leader of our group came over to tell me to get back in the bus in a hurry and get a long sleeve shirt on because he had just found out that it was against the law to have tattoos in Honduras. A few days later I would end up meeting a man in a prison who was serving a 6 year sentence for having tattoos!

I think you can see that they are very tough on the gangs in Honduras. My question is, with a law like that in place, how can any of them ever hope to have a chance to get their life turned around? Talk about a hopeless condition.



Of the three prisons we went to while we were in Honduras the one that sticks out to me the most was the men's prison we went to. All three prisons were in the same general location. On the first day we had just finished the outreach at the women's prison and we drove by the men's prison to drop off some soccer balls we were donating and at the same time verify that we were still scheduled to go in there the following day. As we drove up the driveway to the guard shack the first thing I noticed was the was large 18th Street gang logo painted on the wall of the prison, leaving no doubt as to who it was in this prison.

We were waiting for what seemed like a long time to just drop some things off. Then all of a sudden out walks some armed guards escorting two prisoners. They turned out to be two of the leaders of the gang. They actually let them come into the bus to talk to us and yes we were all set for the outreach the next day.



From where we were parked outside the guard shack you can see the logo (pictured above) on the outside of the prison wall. Its their way of proclaiming to the world outside who it is that lives within these walls.

At this prison it was the prisoners themselves that would not let us take any pictures. And of course after I saw what was in there I really wanted to have my camera. There had some prison art on the walls on the inside of that prison that I would have loved to have pictures of. One in particular was about 50 feet of a wall had what looked like a mountain scene on it, but it was a mountain full of tombstones, all of them had R.I. P. and under them a gang member's name. There were many peoples names on that wall. I thought to myself as I looked at them, that is a list of condemned who would now never have the chance for redemption.

It was at this prison I met a guy named Ricky who spoke very good English. As it turned out he went to Los Angeles when he was 3 years old and had spent his life growing up thinking of himself as an American. He is in his middle 30's now and was just deported to his homeland two years ago. What seems like a foreign land to him.

Ricky had been to prison a couple times while in California. And while talking to him I found out he had been to Chuckawalla prison in Blythe around ten years ago. I asked him if he ever had gone to any concerts on the yard there at the prison? He was starting to tell me how he had gone to a Christian concert where there was this big guy with a bunch of tattoos who once was in prison himself and it was about that moment a look of surprise came on his face and he said, "That was you" and then turned to the other English speaking people there with him, and said "this is that guy I was telling you about". Now how weird is that? Who would have

thought that far away from home I would run into someone like that but even more important that he had been talking about it to them before we had even got there. Talk about God preparing their hearts ahead of time!

I knew he actually did remember me when he asked what had happened to me. He said I was much bigger back then and now instead all my size has gone down to my waist. Ouch that stung!

The time seemed to always be too short it would go by so fast and was always the same for me. I would meet someone and just get them to really start to open up and it would be time to leave. I really wished I could have spent more time with Ricky and his friends. But at least for now that was not meant to be.

The last place we went to was a prison for kids, ages ranging from 9 years old to 16. The day before when I mentioned to Ricky that we would be going there, he said I needed to be careful in there those kids were really bad. I found that somehow ironic, the pot calling the kettle black.

The places for the kids was set up differently where there were smaller groups kept in their own areas that consisted of a building they slept in and a courtyard where they could go outside.

When we got inside and set up for the outreach the boys came out in the courtyard to join us. There were 12 of them, all were in the MS 13 gang and all 12 of them were in there for murder. They had told us about these boys before we got there.

As the program got under way, they just sat there and didn't seem to even pay much attention to what was going on. First the music and then a testimony and finally the preaching. As I watched the faces of these boys, I just felt in my heart that they were shutting us out and not wanting to even hear it.

The plan was that once the program was over the group was going to go over to another similar courtyard and do another outreach there. I asked if it

would be possible to stay back in here with the 12 kids to talk with them by myself, well not completely by myself, of course Martin stayed with me to translate. I was really pleased when they said we could do it.

I shared with them many different things. Starting with some testimony of myself and what God has done in my life. I took my shirt off and showed them my prison tattoos, explaining that there were some that were up to 40 years old and that how a few years ago I came up with a plan to redeem the evilness that my tattoos represented by adding in Bible themes and verses. I used them as an analogy as to how God will also redeem their lives if they would only ask. Knowing that all of them were murderers I told them the story of King David and how he also was guilty of murder and yet God forgave him and the Bible said that David was a man after God's own heart. I talked about how Moses also murdered and still went on to be used mightily by God.

When you do public speaking you know when you have the peoples attention or not. And as I looked into the eyes of those kids, I know that everyone of them was listening, unlike earlier when the program was going on. When I opened it up for questions I was very encouraged when they asked the questions they did. One asked, how long after I asked God into my life was it before I knew there was a difference. He wouldn't have asked that unless he was considering it for himself.

I have no way of knowing if there will be any fruit from any of the seeds scattered that day with those 12 youth but I pray that some would consider what they heard for themselves.

Earlier in this article I mentioned Pastor Armando and the work he is doing in Honduras. He will be coming here to LA at the end of this month while he is here working out some issues with publishers on his first book. It is going to be printed in both Spanish and English and I am really looking forward to reading it myself. I hope to be able to meet with him while he is here and also arrange for him to come a have a tour of Men's Central Jail.

In the past Pastor Armando received some grant funding from the United Nations for the work he is doing in his country. I hope

that more will be done in the future to help him with what he is trying to achieve.



The picture above is of Martin (on the right) Pastor Armando in the middle and me.

Before leaving Honduras Pastor Armando said he would like me to come back to Honduras again where the two of us could go in and spend some one on one time discipling the gang members. I don't know if the opportunity to go back will ever present itself, just have to wait and see.

For now one thing I hope to be able to do is just help get some Spanish Bibles to send both to Pastor Armando and to the prison ministry in El Salvador. The rest will come in its own time, if it is meant to be.

The last segment of our trip was to Guatemala, where we would end up going to our last two prisons.

The first prison was a women's prison and here as in all the other women's prisons we were able to find a few gang members in there too. In the picture below are three gang members who wanted to see my prison tattoos and I try to now use them as a way of witnessing to others. I know there are those within the church who are offended by my tattoos and if I had it to do over again I wouldn't have them, but I do, so I try to use all my past for His glory .



The last prison we went to turned out to be very interesting. Unlike most of the other places we had visited, this prison was not cramped and over crowded. The grounds were very large and spread out.



In the picture above you can see the secure building they are locked in at night but during the day they spend their time in the tent city (shown below) where everything under the sun goes on day in and day out. If you have the money to pay for it that is.



As was true in all the prisons we visited there were gang members. I got to spend some time with them and give them a book that I handed out at some of the prisons. It's a new book that has recently been published, a testimony book about a guy named Donald Garcia. They call him Big D. He was one of the founders of the prison gang, *the Mexican Mafia*, and now he works with Pastor Jack Hayford's church in gang intervention. The book is not translated yet into Spanish so I could only hand it out where they read English.

Everywhere I went they were interested in the book and I am sure it will make a difference to the gang members who read it and understand that they too can still change their lives.

There was something that happened just before we left on our trip. I called Donald to see if his book had been printed in Spanish. He told me it hadn't and that most of the printed books had already been given away. These kind of books are

not the kind that generate a lot of money for the writer, because they are given away to prisoners.

Donald said he would call someone to see if he could get some more books out to me before I left to Central America. The day before I was to leave I got a phone call from someone asking for directions to drop off the books. It turns out that he was coming from well over an hour a way from where I lived and when he told me he only had 2 books to bring, I thanked him but said he didn't need to drive that far for just 2 books. I had 3 books already and I would just make due with them.

The man politely rebuked me and said he was coming and that these 2 books would change someone's life.

The man who showed up turned out to be a Latino in his late sixties. We talked for awhile and when we got ready to part I shook his hand, thanked him for coming and asked his name. He told me, people call him Killroy, a name I heard of for years, another of the original members of the infamous prison gang that Donald had also been from. I thought to myself, how ironic, a man well known for the violent life he lived, willing to travel all that way to bring me those 2 books because of his conviction that those books would help to change someone's life!



What I would really like to see happen is to have Donald and maybe Killroy come down with me to Central America and talk to all these gang members. I'm sure it would make a big impact. Maybe somewhere down the line it might happen.

I am definitely going to encourage Donald to get his book translated to

Spanish so at least his book can make it down there sometime in the near future.

We ended up having a little extra excitement at the last prison. Jorge finally gave in and let me show the guys my tattoos while I gave my testimony. He turned out to be right that it might agitate the gang members.

You see most of my tattoos are 30 years old or older. But a number of years ago a pastor made a comment to me about my tattoos that started something that has developed into what they have become now. The pastor said that my tattoos were either of something evil or something pornographic. So the first thing I did some 15 years ago was to put some clothes on the woman that is on my arm and put an apple in her hand suggesting that she was Eve.

Some years later I was talking to a tattoo artist who is a believer and I was saying how I wish I could do something about all the evil that is depicted on my arms. So we came up with this idea to add scriptures and in some cases some artwork to tell a different story, the story of redemption. It has turned out to be a real blessing. I can't count the times it has opened the door to share Christ with people.

Well this time it ended up nearly causing some real trouble instead. I have a verse address on each wrist. On my right wrist it is Genesis 3:24 that speaks of the fall of man and some related art on my arm. Then on my left wrist it is Revelation 20: 1-3 that speaks of the fall of the beast and him being chained in the pit for 1,000 years.

It was that tattoo that caught the eye of a gang member. You see he didn't notice the dash between the number one and the number three. What he thought he saw was the number 13 as in MS13!

He hadn't been out there earlier when I gave my testimony. He just noticed me as we were walking out to leave the prison. And while walking out none of us noticed at first that this guy along with a handful of his friends had started to follow us and kind of surround our group. It was Martin who called over to me and alerted me to what was going on.

There were a tense few moments once we sized up the situation.

The main guy had his hand wrapped up with a bandana, something that usually indicates they are intending to stab someone and the bandana is a way of trying to protect the hand from being cut.

Once I saw what was happening I did the only thing I have ever known to do, I confronted him. Asked him to come over to me and talk. I asked Martin to come over and translate for me and Martin didn't want to go to him. The guy did come to us and I asked him if he was curious about my tattoos. It was then I found out that he hadn't heard my testimony so I gave it to him there. Explaining what the tattoos now meant, by adding the scripture to them. It totally disarmed the situation and in the end we were both laughing.



In the end before we left they let us take their picture and as you may notice the one on the right still has his hand wrapped in the bandana. I guess the thumbs up sign means we're ok now?

The tension was very real and I am sure it wouldn't have taken much for it to have turned out very differently than it had. But I can honestly say I never really felt threatened. It is not because of any bravery on my part. I just knew God was and is in control and because of that I felt we had all the protection we needed.

We were talking about it in the bus later and actually there is another verse address higher up on my left arm that also could have been miss read by the gang members had they ever noticed. It is Proverbs 8:13

They could have seen the 13 and had the same kind of reaction as this other guy had. Or they could have reacted to the number 8 thinking it was part of 18 from 18th street. Really kind of ironic when you look up what

the verse says :

The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate.

I've been asked by many people since I've been back, "how many people got saved"? Or "is there some great stories of what you saw God do while you were there"?

I really can't answer that. Was there many who prayed, sure there were. Did the gospel get preached, everywhere we went. And we know God's Word does not come back void.

So the only thing I can say with assurance is that God will be the One who gives the increase. It is by His Spirit that any are called.

We were just faithful to go where He called us to go. It is up to Him to do the rest. Wherever He may send me in the future, I can do no more than that. And I look forward to go wherever that may be.



Tecate Prison Clothing Distribution and Outreach

Its hard to believe that it has already been a month since we did the clothing give away outreach to Tecate Prison. I know this newsletter has become far longer than any other one I have sent out in the past. But it would be an injustice to not report on what happened that day.

We packed up a 16 passenger van to the brim with jackets, sweat shirts and tennis shoes. And got ready to head on down to Mexico.



I don't think we could have crammed much more in.



Altogether there were 9 of us going down and not one of us in the group who could sing a note! We had everything set up but the worship. And the battles were yet to begin.

We thought we had everything all planed out, everything taken care of. We had an official letter from the government so we wouldn't have any trouble getting across the boarder. Only trouble was the customs people at the boarder were having none of it. We had to go back and forth three times before they finally let us cross. For a while there it didn't look like we were going to make it over at all but in the end and with minutes to spare we made it to where we were supposed to meet our contacts in Mexico. All three vehicles and the 8 people all made it to the hotel on time in spite of all the trouble we had getting there.

Once we arrived at the prison the first thing I noticed was that there was a full blown expansion going on where they were starting to build a whole new section to the prison. I was amazed at how fast it was all going up. We had been there just 6 weeks ago and none of it was there then. All I could think of was these prisons are all become too full of people, crime has truly become a world wide epidemic!



And it seems like they always choose to build the prisons where no one else would want to live. The weather is either too hot or in the case of here in Tecate, where it is too cold.



We were warmly greeted at the gate and it was only a short time and we were let in the gates.



We should have realized it by the way the guards at the gate were dressed but we were not at all prepared for how cold it was when we stepped out of our cars! It was so cold that it made you wish you

had gloves and a beanie because it was so cold your ears and hands hurt. We were told that it was 36 degrees out and with the wind it was really below freezing. The prison official who came out to greet us said that when it snowed there it got down into the teens. Then she said something that made us all pause. She said you think you are cold and the men here some don't have any coat at all and besides no coat they have no blanket or mattress to lay on. Imagine how hard it would be to live in those kind of conditions and not be able to do anything about it.

None of us had dressed warm enough for the cold so we ended up breaking into the coats we had brought for the prisoners and figured we could give them up once we got inside.

Matthew 25:34-36 says:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

We brought them both food and drink. And we brought them clothes and shoes to put on. We were visiting them in prison and best of all it gave us the chance to give them much more. The message of hope that is found in the gospel.



The one thing we didn't have taken care of was bringing any worship. Someone was supposed to bring a CD player and some worship music but some how it was forgotten. But as it turned out the prisoners provided the worship and it was awesome.



Everyone got the chance to get up and share something from their hearts.



Pastor Victor Alicea, who is pastor to a new Spanish speaking church in Chino, CA (a church so new I don't know the name of the church) gave a power filled message that reached out and touched many of the men's hearts that day.



There were many decisions for Christ and rededications from with in the men that were assembled.



And many happy men who received the clothing and shoes that was so generously donated from so many caring people.



All Chaplains associated with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department jail system , work on a strictly volunteer basis. There is a complete adherence to the separation of Church and State . So as a form of disclaimer, I wish to clearly state this newsletter in no way represents the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. I work with the Sheriff's Department in the spirit of cooperation for the purpose of serving the men and women incarcerated in the Los Angeles County Jail system . The county in no way compensates us 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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