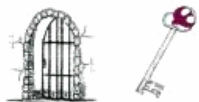


Jesus Is The Key
Ministries



Isaiah 61:1



Newsletter

Chaplain Ed Welsh

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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*

Beauty from Ashes

As I sit here and start to write this newsletter it is a time of reflection for me. One in which I am thinking back to this past year and all that has happened. Actually it has been a time of real spiritual battles for me and this ministry on many fronts.

There have been times where I questioned myself and God; whether I should continue or not. I have to confess to all of you that there were times when I just wanted to give up, feeling that I just couldn't go on.

There have been many discouraging things happen and I know that it should be expected in jail/prison ministry. There will always be battles and setbacks it's just the nature of ministry.

So what I am trying to say is that it was nothing that hasn't happened in the past, it's just that this time I let it get to me like never before. What was different was that I let the enemy in with his lies. There is nothing that I can do in my own strength and trying to do it alone I will be defeated every time. I nearly started to believe the lie that the ministry was ineffective and that I might as well just give up.

The word says in Zechariah 4:6 "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," but what I started to do without even realizing it was to just push on, going through the motions, allowing the enemy the victory by trying to do it in my own strength.

That's a big part of why it has

been so long since I wrote a newsletter. I became too dry and empty to come up with anything to say. Day by day I was slipping deeper into defeat and like the frog in the pot on the stove, I didn't realize it as the heat was slowly being turned up.

It's not that ministry wasn't going forward, it was. And it wasn't that people's lives weren't being touched by the Lord. It's just that I had become too discouraged to find the joy in it as I had in the past. For months I was doing little better than going through the motions.

Things have been tougher this year in many ways. At the jail it's a constant battle to regain ground over and over again. The administration "say" they will cooperate with us but in the end it is a secular institution that is not willing to really work with us in any meaningful way. This past year has been full of many disappointments.

At the state level it has been even worse. The prisons are over crowded and the department is struggling to work with the unions who supply the work force. All you have to do is read the local papers on a regular basis to see the political battle being waged over the prison system.

An example of the discouraging things that have been happening in the ministry is: for the 4th of July we were supposed to go into the minimum yard at the Chino prison and have a Bar-b-queue/outreach. We had differ-

ent churches and ministries participating both with donating food and cooking the hotlinks.

When the Warden heard that the guards planned to have the "blue flu" on the 4th, there was a memo sent out he would require a doctor's note to prove their illness. Well, instead someone got creative and "lost" their keys so of course the facility went on lock down and so there was no picnic allowed that day for the inmates. We were there cooking hotlinks all afternoon but the inmates were fed in their housing units.

When we go for evening Bible studies at CIM West Yard, they are supposed to start by 7:30 and we end about 8:45. Many times this past year the volunteers come and wait for count to clear and most times never even get to see an inmate and other times we have gotten in for less than 20 minutes where we had no time to do anything but pray with them.

At CIW, the women's prison, it's been just as discouraging in different ways. But the result is the same; we are kept from seeing the women and doing the Bible studies.

I could go on and roll out a list of things but I don't want to turn this newsletter into a gripe session. Actually everything I have said up to this point was to give background for me to now try to explain how the Lord has worked in the past few months to turn it all around for me.

I don't mean that He has worked all these problems out that we were having. Actually it is still a continual battle and probably always will be. What has really changed is my heart concerning all of it.

One thing that has really helped me to hang in there is. every time I got feeling like giving up, I was always reminded of the story in John 6 where Jesus asked the disciples if they wanted to also leave like the crowds had done and Peter comes back with "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

It's like that for me concerning this ministry, where else would I go Lord, you called me to this and proved to me over and over again that You are in this. I love what I do, I had just gotten to hate what it had become for me. I was focused on the discouragement, the battles, instead of the victories which is the fruit of what God continues to do.

On October the 1st it was the anniversary of me becoming a Chaplain at the Men's Central Jail. It was amazing to me when I stopped to realize that it has now been 6 years! The Lord has been so faithful during all that time! How can I do any less?

When the anniversary came it made me stop to think of all the Lord had done. All the places that Lord has taken me that would have never happened any other way. With my

Beauty from Ashes (continued)

own criminal history it is a miracle that I am allowed to do anything.



One of my favorite pictures from the mission trip to Russia where I was giving my testimony. The start of what lead to me going into prison ministry.

It all started for me around a dozen years ago when I went on a mission trip to Russia and was asked to share my testimony at an outreach. Soon after coming back to the states my pastor said I should pray about starting a prison ministry. I didn't want to go back to any prisons, I had seen enough of them in my past from the wrong side of the fence. Now look at all these years later what the Lord has done.

Ironically one of the things God recently used to get my attention was an inmate at Men's Central Jail that has come to mean a great deal to me. He has been there close to five years now, nearly as long as I have been there. He is appealing his death sentence and it has taken all this time for the legal maneuvering to go forward to start his retrial that was granted to him.

Many of you who have read these newsletters for a long while will probably remember the articles I've written about "Monster". He went from turning his back to me every time I went on his row passing out Bibles to now he has accepted Jesus as his savior and devourers all the Christian material I can get to him.

A short time ago Monster decided he didn't want to listen to his law team that is representing him. Instead he has the courts discharge all of them from the case and planned to go forward into trial representing himself. He said it was his

life and he didn't want the lawyers telling him what he should or shouldn't do with his life.

Of course what he was really doing was giving up, afraid to face that uncertain future. He knew what was ahead for him if he went back to death row, he had been there since the early 80's.

I told him he couldn't give up, he had been bought with a price, his life was not his own. I told him God had a plan for him and that He was going to use Monster's past for His glory just as He had been using mine.

Monster has gotten to where he knows the Bible just enough to quote things out of context to try and justify what he was planning to do. I said I would put together a Bible study for him and asked if he would be open to reconsider his firing his lawyers if I could show him it wasn't scriptural? He said he would.

The four scriptures that helped turn it around for him were:

Ephesians 1:4

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world

John 6:68

I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father."

1 Corinthians 6:19 & 20

For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Matthew 5:16

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

I was really happy when I later found out that those scriptures helped change his mind and he is now going forward with his trial this coming month having the lawyers representing him.

He is not ever getting out because of his

crimes. But I do hope he will end up with life without possibility of parole and then he will be able to go to a maximum security facility where he can be a witness to others and use his past for God.

This one incident helped turn things around for me as well and help give me a different perspective. How could I possibly give someone else counsel that they shouldn't give up when that is what I was thinking of doing myself. I too have been bought with a price and my life is not my own. I have been called and where else would I go?

Proverb 16:9 "A Man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."

Isaiah 58:6

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the bonds of wickedness, To undo the heavy burdens, To let the oppressed go free, And that you break every yoke?"

You know one of the most amazing things about how this all worked, as soon as I changed my outlook, everything began to turn around. Not the battle itself; finances, prison ministry programs, politics down at Men Central Jail, etc., they are still there.

What has changed is my focus, this is the Lord's ministry and it is His battle. I am just his instrument and I want nothing more than to be used by Him.

I have failed Him so many times in the past but by His Grace and Mercy He has always been faithful to me.





Jesus is the Key that unlocks the prison door

Another anniversary has also just passed. On December 6th of last year we were down in Mexico with Nue Start ministry from Germany. One of the prisons we went to while we were there was El Hongo near Tecate.

I just got back the other day from another outreach there. What a blessing to go back, see some familiar faces and see some fruit from previous seeds planted.

We went there with some other ministries that was leading this outreach. They brought down some doctors and dentists to minister to their physical needs and I wanted to try to minister to the spiritual needs.



Inmates laying on portable cardboard dental chairs designed to take on the mission field. Due to extensive drug use many inmates teeth are in very bad shape

I went to Mexico with a friend of mine who also went with us last year with the Germans. He was used mightily both times. He has gone as an interpreter. When we left to go down there we had no idea that these other ministries did not have anyone who spoke Spanish.

On the way down there my friend was telling me how he wanted to get more involved in Spanish ministry. From what happened while we were there I have no doubt that the Lord is already opening the doors to give him the desires of his heart. It was amazing to see what God did and what doors He has opened!

We drove down separately from the other ministry that went by bus. They had to go through a completely different boarder crossing than us, which was going to take them at least an hour longer to get to the prison. We decided we would just drive on by ourselves and meet up with them at the prison. We thought we could find the place on our own and we did with a little help.....

Once we got to Tecate the realization hit us that we didn't actually know how to get to the prison. So my friend who was driving pulled up to a man standing at a stop sign and asked him in Spanish if he could tell us how to get to the prison.

The man at the pole had a stunned look for a moment and then smiled and pulled out his identification card to show us that he worked at the prison. His first words were "God brought you to me". I was just praying and asking for God's help. He had missed his bus that would have taken him out to the prison. It wasn't his normally scheduled day to work at the prison but they had called him in for some special need. He was in a hurry because he had to get back home for his children's first communion.

With him mentioning God the way he had it gave my friend the perfect opening to start sharing with him. By the time we got to the turn off on to the prison's road, we pulled over. The man prayed and asked Jesus to come into his life and be his savior! So the first acceptance of Christ that day was not a inmate from the prison needing to be set free. Instead by his own words the man said he had all the material things he could ask for but he still felt empty. Now he has the

Spirit to fill that emptiness.

We parted ways at the front gate to the prison not thinking we would see each other again but the Lord had other plans I will write about later.

It takes a long while to get a bus load of people cleared to get into a prison. Especially when they are binging in medical supplies! A doctors scalpel or drugs is just something they don't want to get loose on a prison yard. So it did take longer than usual to get into the prison but once we got in it didn't take long at all for the men to come.

While they were still getting started an inmate asked me to "tell my story" but I tried to explain to him I was not there to speak just to help out in whatever way I could. The other ministry was leading and had their own program.

He asked me to come over to where he was sitting and then this other guy introduced himself in English saying he had been there last year when we came. He had been telling the man who had first called me over all about it and so this guy wanted to meet me.

It turned out to be a real blessing because I got to share with a group of them by ourselves before the program even got started. And then later when many people began to break up into groups they, along with others, came over to me to share with them. In the end the whole day became a real blessing as any outreach does, seeing the power of the Spirit working is always awesome.

(continued on next page)



There were many who for the first time ever prayed at all. And many more who were the Prodigal Son's

Jesus is the key unlocks the Prison Door (continued)

There were many teeth pulled that day and many more who had their eyes checked and glasses given to the ones who needed it. But most importantly, all were given the Gospel message.

After saying our goodbyes to everyone and everything packed up, we made our way back to the administration building to leave. My friend and I who had been the first to get there, ended up being the last to leave. Our vehicle was the one to bring everything in, so we were the last to leave too. But it was all in God's plan to work that way.

Where my friend had been doing most of the translating that day he had a lot of opportunities to talk with the prison officials. There is this one woman who represents the Mexican government and is responsible for approving all the programs that come into the prison.

Normally we go through a missionary by the name of Alma, who goes into all the Baja prisons on a regular basis. Just about no protestant group ever gets into one of these prisons without Alma setting it up. But doing the translating all day opened the door for direct access to the prison in an unexpected way. The prison's official was telling my friend of some real and present needs. Out of the 4,500 prisoners only about 800 of them ever get visits. Those inmates get their families to help take care of their needs. The government doesn't spend the funds to give them anything beyond the bare minimum for the rest of the men.

El Hongo prison is in the high desert and during their winter months it gets very cold. With the prison being built of all cement and steel it helps to make it even colder. I have only been there in the winter, I can only imagine how hot it gets in the summer but that's for another time.

We were told that there is a great need for warm clothing, especially jackets. And the need for tennis shoes. For many who don't have someone on the outside helping them they are just out of luck.

The administrator suggested that if we were able to get some of these things she would arrange for the ones most in need to come out for an outreach that she would arrange for us.

What we have decided to try to do is obtain, through donations, enough jackets, sweatshirts and shoes to outfit 200 men. I have already been calling many of the resources I have and some others are doing the same. So for all of you who read this and may have any connections that would want to help, please e-mail me or call to pass on the information. The contributions can be tax deductible through the ministry.



Upon leaving El Hongo prison we saw that the other group had already left. After driving out the gates we could see that their bus had stopped to take a picture of the prison from the public road. (similar to above picture) The prison doesn't want pictures taken from the outside for security reasons, so they went out to the public road, piled out of the bus to take a group picture with the prison in the back ground.

As we drove by the bus we honked as if to say goodbye. But just as we got past the bus who do we see standing there but Jose Luis, the man we had picked up earlier in the day who showed us the way to the prison.

He had once again missed his bus

because of being delayed inside the prison.

He had ran the mile and a half out to try and catch the bus only to end up at the public road, bent over, hands on his knees, out of breath.

When he looked up and saw where he was standing he realized he was standing at the place where earlier that day he had prayed and ask Jesus to come into his life.

Then he turned around looking back up the road towards the prison and he saw the bus driving up to him. When it stopped and they all got out to take their pictures he thought God had blessed him again. He asked them about us but they did not understand and told him they didn't speak Spanish. He turned in disappointment only to hear our horn honk and he turned back around to see us come from behind the bus.

We gave Jose a ride back to his house and we able to share more with him. He has full of joy and was praising God.

We spent some time explaining what he needed to do next by getting into a fellowship and also getting into the Word. He was so open to all we had to say. We spent a lot of time with him and talked of many things that were a real blessing but would take too much to try to explain here.

My friend is now looking into coming back to Tecate and starting a Bible study at Jose's house. You see how it works, on the way there he talked about wanting to get into Spanish ministry and then God opens the door for him. Our God is an awesome God!

Like Gideon's Army

There has been ongoing articles and news stories about the "increasing violence" that continues to happen at Men's Central Jail and the other seven facilities throughout the Los Angeles County.

The theme of most all these stories is one that attacks the Sheriff and the department for not handling it well enough. The way I see it, its about the same as when the media blames our government for what the terrorists are doing.

Its true that we have had increasing violence within the jails. But we have had that same kind of increase all over the country. I can not understand how the media blasts our government for us losing 3,000 soldiers in a four year period of warfare, while we have had 16,000 murders in the country this past year. There is something crazy and distorted about all of this.

I never thought I would be defending law enforcement but I have come to know and respect many of the professional people that make up the Sheriff's department. They have a very tough, no win job. Its like the Goldie Locks story with the pourage. Ones too hot, ones too cold and in the Department's case they will never find one answer that is just right.

They have to take care of anywhere from a high of 23,000 inmates to the low of 18,000 at any given time. About 3,300 uniformed employees watch over the inmate population. By contrast the New York City Department of Corrections, which oversees about 5,000 fewer inmates, has three times as many uniformed guards.

At least one in five Los Angeles County inmates is a gang member. Nearly 90% are awaiting trial on felony charges. Just what does the media, who is so quick to criticize the Department, expect them to do? Given the resources that they have been given to work with, I think for the most part they do a very good job. Are there mistakes made? Sure there are. Are there ways to improve? Of course there are. But to just criticize, tie their hands and come up with no viable solutions is as counter productive as what we are doing (in my opinion) in this war on

terror. There is also a war on crime in this country or more correctly a spiritual war with sin at its core. As we become more Godless as a society everything is becoming increasingly corrupt .



Look down the row of single man cells (above) that house the higher security inmates at Men's Central Jail. The chaplains walk these rows passing out Bibles and other Christian materials. We try to instill in them the message of hope, the good news of the gospel, that they can change and have a new life in Christ.

It is amazing to me how as a society we are increasingly turning our backs on the truth for a lie. As a society under the banner of political correctness we continually turn away from the principles of God and then wonder why everything has gone crazy.

They started with taking prayer out of schools, then the abortion conflict, then the Ten Commandments came down from the court house. With the "In God we Trust" controversy on our currency, taking God from all pledges and now in the past few years, taking Christ out of Christmas, is it any wonder that violence (sin) in our prisons, jails and on our streets is on the increase?

There are years of statistics that show that whenever prisoners get involved with faith based programs while in custody, they are five times less likely to come back to jail. And of the ones that do come back for some reason they come in for crimes far less serious than the ones in their past. With all that proof of it's benefits why is it that it is increasingly difficult to conduct prison / jail ministry than ever before?

In my over forty years of combined ex-

perience of the prison system from both sides of the fence, I can never remember a time where it has been this difficult to conduct ministry to the incarcerated.

Its not just secular society either. A few years ago while working as the chairman for the prison outreaches for the Los Angeles Billy Graham Crusades I got to see first hand just how few churches have any concern when it comes to reaching the lost behind bars.

Being on the Executive Committee of the Crusade I saw how there where 1,500 churches who wanted to be involved with the crusade in some way or other. Of the 1,500 only 30 churches got involved with the prison / jail outreaches and of those only a half a dozen really got in and became active within the outreaches.

The good thing about that was that with just a handful of churches we were able to do more outreaches than they had done in the 50 year history of the crusades.

Its sort of like in Judges 7 where 32,000 of Gideon's men were too many to fight the 135,000 Midianites. Before God was done he cut the number to 300 men and then God got the glory for the victory.

I am sure that we will continue to have overcrowded prisons and jails, we will continue to build more prisons as the corruption continues to increase. The people will continue to blame the overseers (the government) and the guardians (the law enforcement) for their own godlessness.

I just pray that the remnant of the faithful will continue to be Gideon's army that stands in the gap and contends for the faith.

Please pray for the men and women who work in these places. First and foremost that they trust in the Lord themselves and that God would put His hedge of protection around them as they try to protect us.

I have made a practices over the years in ministry that when opportunities for ministry happen I just assume it is from the Lord and then if the door closes, I believe it is just His will that it was closed. The best ministry has always come without having to go out and pursue it because if I pursue it then there is always the possibility that it was my will I was trying to force into it.

Well there has been a new opportunity open up for ministry. In no way did I go after this, actually at first I was very skeptical about doing it. But the more I talked to others and was encouraged by them to go forward, I decided that if its Lord's will it is going to happen and if it is not He will close the door.

I have been asked to go to Central America and go to three countries within two weeks to go to 10 different prisons. There are a number of pastors and at least 3 different Para-church ministries besides Jesus Is The Key that will be going.

The trip is being sponsored by the largest Christian Church in Central America. I understand that there are 5,000 people who attend this church in El Salvador.

We will fly into El Salvador on March the 4th and go by bus into Honduras and then back through the length of El Salvador, then into Guatemala with our last stop being a soccer stadium that holds 20,000 people where we will be part of a crusade. Then flying back from Guatemala City on the 18th.

All of this has happened in just the past few weeks and there are already

pledges for nearly half the money that will be needed to make the trip. The funds to go on this have to come from money other than our regular operating expenses.

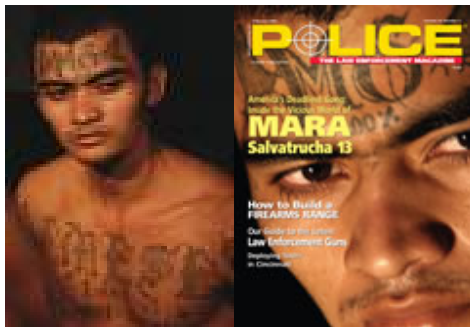
I had a man recently ask me why would I want to go, he said I had more than enough ministry to do just at Men's Central Jail. While that is true and Men's Central is what I concenter my main ministry, I still do not want to limit what the Lord may do to use me.

Beside whenever I go on missions trips, I am always blessed in so many ways , first and foremost in witnessing what the God does. And also learning things I can bring back and share with the men at my jail.

In this particular case I may be able to learn much more. The street gang MS 13 that many say is the most dangerous gang in our country comes from down were we are going.

The headline in the law enforcement magazine proclaims that Mara Salvatrucha 13 is.....

"America's Most Dangerous Gang"



Above is a picture taken in one of the prisons where we will be going. With how our government regularly deports gang members to their country of origin I guess it could even be possible that I may run into men I first met right here at Men's Central Jail?

Take the time to go to the internet and do a search just typing in "MS 13" and you will see what this is all about. How it started and what it has become is an amazing story that few know anything about.

Please keep this in your prayers that the team who goes will bring a message of hope that will touch hearts and change lives.

I look forward to getting back and writing another newsletter to tell all of you what the Lord does to knock down the strongholds of the enemy while we are there.

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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