

### DELIVERED TO BE A DELIVERER

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Our Lord quoted this verse, taken from the book of Isaiah, as He began His public ministry on earth. It is the same verse the Lord impressed upon my heart many years ago when **HE DELIVERED ME** from the horrible bondage of heroin **TO BE A DELIVERER** of the message of freedom in Jesus Christ. What a joy it is every week to bring the message of hope to hundreds of men who truly feel that there is no hope for them! I once sat where they now sit, and I enjoy letting them see a walking testimony of the life-changing power of the gospel. There is truly no place on this earth that I'd rather be than in a jail chapel filled wall-to-wall with defeated drug addicts looking for hope. There is no way for me to convey in words just how excited I am to see God touching the hearts of men.

The following letter is one of the many I receive from men whom God is drawing to himself:

Tuesday, July 18, 2000

Dear Chaplain Downs -

I hope you might remember me from the Harris County Jail. My name is Michael and I asked you for your address when you preached to us on the 10th floor. I asked for it because you are the first preacher I've ever met that did drugs and went to jail, yet you got out and stayed with God. I need to know how you did it. I have been in jail many times and drugs have a strong hold on me. I do not want to be a jailhouse Christian. I know I need God inside my heart and soul so I can finally be alive, so I can finally have life, and stay out of prison. Sir, what do I do to keep Him strong inside here and when I get out? I don't want to fake it. How do I do what you did and stay true to God when I get out? I need to know how to be real with the Lord. Please tell me. I know God is life and I need someone who has been where I am to show me how to take God and never let him go. I need desperately to change.

In Dire Need—

Michael Shawn B.

Michael Shawn is now enrolled in an inmate discipleship program that can take him all the way through seminary if he so desires.

### HE ALSO RE-OPENS DOORS

As many of you know from my last newsletter, an elderly gentleman with whom I minister on death row was grabbed by an inmate and seriously injured. He is recovering, but will likely never have the full use of one of his hands. It looked as though our cell-to-cell ministry to the 450 men on Texas death row was over until a call recently came from the officials at death row. I was asked to come and meet with the warden, but I did not know exactly what would transpire. The warden began the meeting with words that almost knocked me out of my seat. He said, "Fellows, nobody much cares about those guys back in building twelve (death row), but I know that God cares. I called this meeting to tell you, that if you indeed still feel like the Lord wants you back there, then you have my blessing." His only admonition was to always remember where you are, let the guards know where you are going to be, and do not pray with the men with your eyes closed. Yes, the Lord can not only open a door, but **HE ALSO RE-OPENS DOORS** that for whatever reason have been shut.

## **THE ONLY ONE**

Last week was my first time back onto death row since we were locked out. Going to death row is unlike any other ministry I do. Space does not permit me to share everything that took place just during my first two full days back on the corridors of the condemned. The emotions of the inmates on death row run the entire scope. At one cell I may be confronted with extreme hostility and rage, while in the cell next to him I will spend an hour praising the Lord with an inmate while we share the blessed Word of God together. The one word that would most often characterize the inmates' attitudes would be that of despair. Let me share just one visit I had on my first day back.

I had not gone very far in my cell-to-cell ministry until I came to the Michael's cell. Michael is fairly new to death row, and I could tell immediately that he was in trouble emotionally. I had given Michael his first Bible when I last saw him and had given him some scriptures to read. He said that he had read them, and they had really carried him, but he was still struggling with some things. We had a tremendous visit, and I took a little more time with him than I normally do with an inmate. Before I left, I asked him if he had a mom or dad that visited him. It wasn't until this point in our conversation that I realized why he was hurting so deeply. He informed me that his parents could not come because he had killed both of them, as well as his grandmother, while he was on some drugs. Having been on some of those same drugs that Michael was on at the time of his crime, I could relate to the state of mind he must have been in. You see, although Michael is saved and knows that God has forgiven him, he still deals with the fact that he killed the only people in this world who really loved him.

Please pray for Michael, and for me as well, as I point these men to **THE ONLY ONE** who can grant forgiveness where there is transgression, give peace where there are storms, and bring to the light the darkest of souls. After I prayed with Michael and turned to leave, he stopped me and said, "I'm glad they let you back in, and I'm glad you came to my cell today." I thought to myself how grateful I was that the Lord had spared me and allowed me to be there. I Corinthians 15:10.

## **PLEASE TELL HIM THAT I COMPLETELY FORGIVE HIM**

Recently, I was preaching to a large group of men who are incarcerated in a facility that holds 4,500 inmates. I was dealing with the issue of roadblocks in our lives that keep the lost from coming to Christ and the saved from getting real victory in their lives. I was sharing the story of a man whom I know on death row, and how God has used him on death row to bring many men to Christ. I told how he had come from bitterness to blessing. We had a great service and many men expressed the fact that they wanted Christ to help them deal with the bitterness and hatred they had in their hearts both toward God and man.

As always, many of the men lingered around to talk and pray with me but one man wanted an audience alone with me. With tears in his eyes he said, "I know the man on death row you were talking about today. He killed three members of my family. I am a Christian and the Lord did something very special today in my heart and life. I want you to **PLEASE TELL HIM THAT I COMPLETELY FORGIVE HIM** for the murders, and that I want him to forgive me for having murder in my heart for him."

That is why I can say with the apostle Paul that "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is the power of God unto salvation." I never get tired of seeing the power of the grace of God in the lives of men and women.

## **THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

This ministry goes forward because you have all been so faithful in your financial support and in your prayers for us. The ministry on death row was re-opened as a result of God's intervention, and many hearts are turned toward the Lord as a direct result of prayer. **THANK YOU** for your efforts with us in this great harvest!

~ CHAPLAIN JOHN DOWNS