

### **NOTHING COMPARED TO CHRIST**

One of the services I conduct on Tuesday is called the “protective custody” service. These are inmates that the other inmates would be prone to harass or even kill if they could get their hands on them. Many of them are police officers who have committed crimes and are now locked up with some of the men they arrested. For their own protection they must be kept separate from the general inmate population. Many of these men have come to know the Lord in our services and are indeed broken over the fact that they took advantage of their position and more importantly broken over the fact that they offended the God Who loved them so much.

One such officer who has come to Christ stayed behind after the chapel service to share with me his story. He told me that all he had lived for was to be the “best cop.” He said he even reached his goal of being named the officer of the year and yet he said he still felt empty. He said that he had been a leading speaker at public schools warning students of the danger of drugs and yet he could not help himself. He then gave me a big hug and thanked me for coming with the message of Christ. With tears flowing from his eyes he said that everything he had achieved was **“NOTHING COMPARED TO THE BLESSING OF KNOWING CHRIST.”**

He told me that now his goal was to be all that God wanted him to be and if it took going to prison for his crime then so be it. He knows all too well that going to prison as an ex-police officer could well cost him his life but he has a real peace about it now that the Lord is his shepherd. It is an honor to minister to fallen law enforcement officers and I think it is a bit ironic that God chose to use a chaplain with eight felonies to minister to these precious men.

### **EVERYTHING TASTES BETTER**

Another chapel service I hold on Tuesday is on the psychiatric floor of a large prison facility in downtown Houston. This is the same unit where Andrea Yates was housed during her recent trial. The men that come to my service are on suicide watch because they have basically given up and tried to end their lives. Many of them are facing some real battles mentally, and I know they are special to the Lord.

The officers on the floor recently tried to cancel the services because of the potential of one of these guys endangering lives. The Lord overruled, and He put an officer with a burden on the floor who insisted that “these inmates need what only the Lord can give them.” We have some very special times and many men who first came with no hope and a look of total despair on their faces have been saved and are smiling for the first time in a long time.

As always I direct the men to devote large portions of their time to the Word of God and I recommend particular passages for them to read. One of the guys shared with me that he had never had a history of mental problems but had faked being crazy because he heard “the food was better on the psychiatric floor.” He said, “I came to this floor for the food and I found Jesus in your service.”

He is back with the other inmates in general population now, and I saw him the other day. I asked him how the food was and with a smile on his face he said, **“EVERYTHING TASTES BETTER** now that He knows Who is providing for him.”

Only walking with God can turn the pit of a jail cell into a palace from God. One of the things I stress with the inmates is that they are living better in jail than most of the population of the world and they need to daily thank God for what he has provided in food and shelter and beware of an ungrateful and complaining spirit. May God help us all to be thankful for what we do have and more importantly what awaits all of us who do His will.

## **EAT A SNICKERS BAR**

One of the most exciting things I have seen the Lord do is what he has done in the lives of a group of juveniles that I work with on Wednesday. As you know these are juveniles that are so violent they have been certified by the state to stand trial as adults. In most people's eyes these kids are "beyond rehabilitation".

One young man in particular has won my heart. When he first came to my chapel service I wondered if he would come back the following week. Not only did he come back but after giving his heart and life to Christ he has become the brightest light on the entire seventh floor of that jail. At the ripe old age of sixteen he committed capital murder and was facing life in prison. I gave him his first Bible and he literally wore it out before giving it to a new inmate who needed a Bible. I gave him a second Bible and he again devoured it and wore the cover off of it. Many times while I am preaching I will start quoting a verse and this young man will finish it. We prayed for him throughout his trial and he recently got his sentence reduced from life in prison to forty years. He is literally one of the sweetest kids I have ever been around and yet when he came he was one of the meanest.

In our last chapel service before they transferred him to the big penitentiary to serve his sentence I presented him with brand new leather study Bible. I only wish you could have seen his face. After the service he stayed behind to say goodbye. Every week that he had come to church he had brought me a Snickers bar as a token of his love and appreciation for his new life in Christ. When he handed me the candy this time he began to cry and said, "I guess this will be the last time I get to bring an offering to you." He said he was worried that he would get away from God in the big prison and asked me to pray for him. I gave him a big hug and told him that not only would I pray but that I would be able to come see him from time to time. May I remind all of you that have prayed and given so that I could go that what happened in the life of this young Hispanic boy cannot be compared to all the riches in the world. Go ahead and **EAT A SNICKERS BAR** and thank God for the great things He has done!

*Chaplain John Downs*