



There are many prisons. Prisons are places of isolation, despair, defeat, rejection, and hopelessness. Some people are subjected to the prisons of addictions such as drugs, gambling, sex, alcoholism, ill health, unemployment, homelessness, loneliness, and hosts of other situations that often dictate, limit, and control their social function.

The word prison to most of us suggests a place where criminals are warehoused. These institutions claim to offer rehabilitation as well as punishment for illegal behavior. Quite often the prisoners of these institutions receive the reverse of what is desired by society and are eventually released back into said society only to continue the same life style that they knew before their incarceration.

The church being the vehicle of Christ's mission to the world, He has presented His followers with the 'Great Commission' (Matt 28:19-20). "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world".

### **The Purpose of the Church:**

The controlling purpose of the local church is to make disciples of all kinds of people. Those who are evangelized and converted should then be baptized, attesting to their identification with Christ and the local body of believers. The final phase of the Great Commission is to train disciples in Christian knowledge and for effective service. The Great Commission is a simple command with three steps: evangelism, baptism, and education.

By teaching His followers (that's us today) to go into the nations, His ministry will grow in places that would seem unreachable to most people. Nations in bible days were most tribal. We continue to see this today in America (Apache, Shawnee, Cheyenne, etc.). Some nations are organizational (Aryan nation, and Outlaw nation). Just look around your community. I see French (Gauls), Irish (Celts), Germans (Vikings, Huns, etc.), and so on. America is the melting pot of all modern day nations.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus were walking around earth today, just where would we most often find Him. We might find Him in undeveloped regions where people have never met Him or heard His word. He would be found healing, restoring, and raising in places like Aids Hospices, taverns, prisons and jails, suppressed areas of the world, at the bedsides of the sick and dying, along with every other location on this planet.

Today, the average reading ability of those incarcerated is around the 5th grade level. Even though most have heard of Jesus, few can read about or study Him. Prison society and peer pressure often retard any spiritual growth. Most of the incarcerated are busy just trying to survive.

By visiting the incarcerated (Matt 25:34-40) through organized ministry, there has been a profound reversal of the old norm. Through Christian efforts such as the Kairos Prison Ministry, many new disciples have been

made for Christ. These new followers are reaching out to those around them. Ah, the times they are a changin'.

### **Prison Statistics:**

America's prison population is the highest in the world. It's nearly 2 1/2 million men, women, and children (1 out of every 132 people in the USA). 1 of every 32 people in the USA is on parole. There are over 93,000 juveniles locked up. The USA has less than 5% of the total world population, but we have more than 23% of the world's prison population. In 1994 the recidivism (rearrested and returned to prison) rate was 67.5%. Currently, thanks to programs such as organized prison ministry, this rate has been lowered to 38%. In 2005, 39% of the prison populations are of the African-American group. The national population percentage of this group is only 12%. 1 of every 21 male blacks in the USA is locked up. This is six times higher than whites. Only 49% of convicts are violent criminals. The greatest numbers of inmates are in prison due to offences that involved illegal drug activity.

However, there are more first timers being locked up into an overcrowded system as secular America continues its current trend of moral down spiral. Whatever their personal demons or prisons might be, there is only one 'sure fired' remedy along with its founding, healing physician. This is the personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He promises us in Ephesians 2:1-10 that by our faith in Him, we will be saved. It's a miracle healing! And, it's free!

My vision for the Shawnee Valley and the Sugar Grove UMC is that we will develop, with God's blessing, a ministry to serve prisons, county jails, juvenile facilities, and rehab units within our district.

This can begin when one person steps forward in faith to do Christ's mission. I pray that this person will be you. God has given us everything needed to accomplish His plan through Christ Jesus. Will you join me in this mission?

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