

A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

This word of exhortation is from OSWM, a Watchman serving behind the walls at a west coast state prison.

The 1946 movie "It's A Wonderful Life" is a well-known holiday classic. In that movie, George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart) is given a "gift," a glimpse into the future. This glimpse provides George with a new understanding and perspective. It helps him appreciate what he has, find a new purpose, and summon the fortitude to press-on.

Though it may seem strange, I see that in some ways, my incarceration is a "gift," an opportunity to catch a glimpse into the future and gain a new understanding and perspective. In this writing, I will share how my experience in prison (and exposure to gang activity) provides a glimpse into the trials of the "last days" and the coming Mark of the Beast.

MY GLIMPSE

Prison is much like how you've seen the end of the world depicted in popular post-apocalyptic movies. In prison, law and order are compromised. There are officers, but some actively support violence, facilitate drug traffic, and unnecessarily provoke inmates to bad behavior. A jaded criminal is not writing this; it is written by one with a gentle spirit who would not have believed the surreal conditions had he not witnessed them firsthand.

In many ways, prison conditions foreshadow what believers will experience in the coming days, particularly in the post-rapture world. Consider these similarities:

IN PRISON...

There is pressure to conform: In prison, there is great pressure to affiliate with a gang. Inmates who identify with a gang receive a new name and a tattoo. The recruitment process can be intense. It often begins with a presentation of advantages (better food, safety, preferential treatment on some work details, access to places [unofficially] restricted to those not affiliated, etc.).

If the perks are not convincing, a discussion of non-compliance consequences follows a discussion of perks. Threats follow if neither of those work. Those who do not accept the "invitation" to affiliate can be shunned and shoved, berated, and beaten, taken advantage of, and have personal items taken. If an inmate is not affiliated, they are viewed as strays - unprotected from the flock - vulnerable to prowling lions and wolves.

There is pressure to accept false teachings: In prison, inmates are constantly bombarded with lies and half-truths. The confused, lost, and impressionable are particularly vulnerable. Popular

false teachings include: 1) the route to earning respect is marked by violence 2) success is determined by how many people fear you 3) there may be a God, but He cannot forgive someone like you 4) God may exist as Creator, but He is not concerned with humanity today. Number 5 is more of a list. The life of an inmate embodies every one-liner you've ever heard: Survival of the fittest. The end justifies the means. If it feels good, do it. Every man for himself. There is a constant barrage of mixed messages and misinformation.

Life similar to the prison life dynamic will be rampant during the last days - the season of "birth pangs," even more so in the post-rapture world. Scripture notes that in the last days, "love will wax cold" (Matt. 24:12), law and order will falter (Rev. 13), leaders will be corrupt (2 Thess. 2:8-10; 1 Tim. 2), and apostasy will abound (2 Thess. 2; 2 Tim. 4). The Antichrist's government will be marked by violence, incentives to comply, consequences for noncompliance, all justified by many false teachings.

Spiritual Warning

Overcoming future trials will require GREAT strength, more than we realize. I entered prison thinking I was spiritually prepared for the difficulties I would face. Indeed, initially, my concerns focused more on physical than spiritual issues. After several months here, I have found that although physical issues have been significant, spiritual attacks have been catastrophic. I did not think I would be brought to the brink within a year, but I have. I have not lost my faith, but at times I have been so wounded and weary in spirit that I struggled to pray, I experienced a diminished capacity to share or serve, and I came dangerously close to slipping into despair. By God's grace, I persevere.

Please do not read pride into this statement, but I have been known as one who was strong in the faith—mature, able, a teacher, a ministry leader. I share this to note that I look to be well-positioned, at least on paper, to overcome hardship and spiritual attack. And I have, but barely, and at times I have been shaken to the core. The sobering truth is, what I have experienced in prison is the black and white version of what will play out in vivid color in the days to come.

In prison, living conditions are uncomfortable. During the Tribulation, living conditions will be unbearable. In prison there is bad (sometimes literally rotten) food. During the Tribulation, there will be famine and lack. In prison, not affiliating with a gang and taking their tattoo could put you in danger. During the Tribulation, not taking the Mark of the Beast will cost many their lives.

My time in prison has provided a glimpse of pressures and trials yet to come. My study of history offers insight as well. For example, Ignatius of Antioch (100s AD) was imprisoned for his faith, then thrown to lions. Polycarp (150s AD), a disciple of John, was imprisoned and burned at the stake for starting a school to build disciples for Christ. Guido de Bred (1560s AD), a student of John Calvin, was imprisoned for writing that Jesus (not the Pope) was the head of the Church. He was kept in a dungeon that was "so low he slept in sewage." Yet, amid his

suffering, records note that he "exhorted prisoners to come to faith and be of good courage." History records that Christians have suffered terribly in the past. Scripture states that in the last days, things will be worse.

I urge you to steel yourself. Prepare for a season of unprecedented testing. The atrocities of the past will pale in comparison to the havoc and suffering that will come at the hands of the Antichrist and False Prophet. We are promised the Rapture will come, but persecution is already here, and will continue to escalate until the Day of His coming. We must remain faithful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIVING UNDER PERSECUTION

Establish Strong Christian Friendships: Scripture notes: "*two are better than one*" (Ecc. 4:9). Each of us needs a spiritual go-to person for counsel, comfort, and encouragement. It's not merely a suggestion; it is essential to overcome the fierce storms that are coming. If you do not have a strong spiritual prayer partner, encourager, and confidant in your life, pray, then join a local small group where you can interact with Christians. Position yourself to meet new people and develop friendships. Watchmen never stand alone. A lone watchman is not a courageous hero; they're an easy and obvious target.

Notes on spiritual partnership: 1) Your prayer partner and go-to person should be spiritually mature 2) Community study groups or groups from sister churches are often available if your church does not provide any at this time 3) Many factors can impact meeting schedules, contact leaders for up-to-date schedule information 4) Use online meeting options like Skype, Zoom, or Teams. These tools are beneficial but do not allow virtual visits to replace meeting in-person.

Study the Word: One of the best ways to overcome is to know your enemy. In the early days of US involvement in WWII, American and British forces were losing ground to Rommel's German army and tank brigade. After a series of setbacks, General George Patton became the new Commander of US forces. Patton had a unique advantage; he had studied the military strategy book Rommel wrote some years before and was able to anticipate the enemy's next move.

Patton's troops prepared accordingly, and victory followed. There is a spiritual parallel. Studying the Word positions us for victory. Knowing Scripture will help you know how the enemy operates. Being familiar with Bible Prophecy will help you know what the enemy will do in the days to come. Being familiar with biblical precepts will help you navigate and respond well during times of tribulation.

Quote Scripture: In Luke 4, we read how Jesus was tempted by the Devil. Satan struck when Jesus was alone in the desert and weary from fasting. Satan often attacks when his prey appears vulnerable. Though Satan is an expert tempter, Jesus overcame the fierce onslaught by

quoting Scripture when He responded to each temptation. There is power in God's Word. Ephesians 6:1:17 calls Scripture our sword. Drawing on Scripture checks the enemy and strengthens our witness.

Downsize: Do what you can to lessen dependence on a continuing high salary. Many who enjoy a high salary still live paycheck to paycheck. Stop that cycle. Cut unnecessary expenses like subscriptions and music streaming. Save enough money to live and pay your bills for at least three months if your income was suddenly interrupted. Store at least some of that in cash at home just in case bank teller machines and debit cards become unusable. The economic forecast is not good. Do not allow economic or employment conditions to drive your spiritual decisions or impact your witness.

Save and Share: Prepare for disruptions in services. Stock up on medical supplies, food, water, fuel, and general survival gear like flashlights, camping cookware, lanterns, and solar charging devices. Store enough for you and at least one other family. Our goal is to show the love of God by helping, serving, and sharing with others when tough times come.

Go-to Prayer and Praise: The best time to learn to swim is before your boat hits stormy seas. Tough times *will* come. Prayer, praise, and recounting Scripture is your life preserver and a mental firewall. Memorize Scripture and spiritual songs. Train your mind and heart to focus on them in times of trial and trouble. This discipline will minimize stress and increase peace. Remember the admonition to focus on "*whatever is noble...just...pure...lovely...[and] good...*" (Phil. 4:8).

Perspective: There is a positive correlation between proper perspective and perseverance. Proper perspective means taking a long view and adjusting your attitude accordingly. It means not giving up when you fumble the ball or get sacked in the first quarter. It means you focus more on the future reward than on present trouble. Paul described the proper mindset in his second letter to the Church in Corinth, writing: "*The troubles all around us will soon be gone, but the joys to come will last forever*" (2 Corinthians 4:18b, GN).

Establish good goals: We often commit significant resources to pursue personal and vocational goals. These might include fitness objectives, travel, purchasing a home, securing a promotion, completing a degree, etc. These goals have their place, but especially in the last days, our priority goals **MUST** be spiritual, not personal or professional. The faithful Watchman will pursue witnessing more than winning, giving more than getting, great faithfulness more than great followings, and finishing well for the Lord more than living well for self.

Expect and prepare for difficult times: The Rapture can happen at any time but perhaps will not take place before the world faces new and unprecedented trials. This is not the first time Christians have faced problems and persecution, and if the Rapture does not occur soon, it

won't be the last time we face them. Watchmen must expect challenges, know how to overcome, be committed to persevere, and be prepared to guard our witness even in the midst of - perhaps, *especially* in the midst of - tribulation and persecution.

Our new 64-page eBook, *“The Grid Plan - A strategy for those living for God in the post-rapture world”*, presents information on how to navigate coming trials and increase your witness for the Lord. *This resource will be especially helpful for new believers in the post-rapture world. It is located on the Rapture Kit USB drive in the following folder:*

\Section 04 – Books\

May God richly bless as you strive to grow in (and shine bright for) Him.