

On Tuesday of this week, our citizens will have a chance to vote on the construction of a city county law-enforcement center. I understand it will house offices for the city and county law officials as well as a jail for the city and county. All that, I understand, without additional cost to the taxpaying public. It seems to me that an affirmative vote by all is in order and would go a long way to giving to Denison one of the most up to date facilities in the area.

But that is not the kind of prison that I have in mind this morning . . . rather the prisons of our own devisings. As a background of our thinking we turn to John 8:25-36. John records the words of Jesus: "If you abide in my word you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free". In these days of chaotic living we encase ourselves in a cloud of confusion. We restrict our spiritual vitality, we shackle ourselves by the littleness of our spirits. But Jesus said if we abide in his truth we are freed. Freedom is an outgrowth of divine truth. Now let us not leave this in the abstract, and think only in terms of vague thoughts, but rather let us try to bring this down where we live. How do we imprison ourselves? Let us think about 3 ways.

1. We imprison ourselves by lacking purpose in life. To discover ourselves we must lose ourselves. Jesus said that to

find your life you must lose your life. It is in effect a death and resurrection affair. The old man dies; the new man rises to life to give himself to high and holy purposes. Too many of us are living for purposes which are selfish only. Purposes that a worthy of Christians must be centered in Christ. Much of what we do centers elsewhere and consequently lacks the vitality of divine purpose. Most of what we do centers around man, his whims, his prejudices, his desires with no effort being made to relate these to God's will. Consequently many of us live lives which have no lasting purpose.

We are lack old Willie who was a large church custodian. He was asked one time how it was possible to work for so many people. . so many bosses telling him to put tables here and chairs there; sweep here and do this and that. Willie said: "I find it very simple. I just shift my mind into neutral and I go where I am pushed". Lots of us are like that. We drift with the currents of life. . we dress alike, hair styles are alike, we play the same games, we read the same books. we listen to the same music . . we do all the things that everyone else does. If the hemline goes up an inch, up goes ours; if it drops a couple of inches down goes ours. We have lost our individuality and with it our unique purpose in life.

Paul had a singleness of purpose. His was to preach the gospel. "This one thing I do" Preaching the gospel might

not be your purpose. . but that was Pauls highest aspiration.
He, as Jesus, could be in the midst of a crowd and yet alone
as on a desert island. For him the purpose of his life was
to preach the gospel.

Our need is for a purpose in life which captivates our
spirits. We need a purpose that thrills our minds and takes
hold of our thoughts. We need something that draws out the very
best in us...not some namby pamby idea that is not worth the
effort, but some earth shaking idea which is worth living for,
and if need be, worth dying for.

2. There is a second way in which we imprison our-
selves. We do it by thinking of God as being remote. The
Psalmist said "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" The
modern age tends to relegate God to a corner of the universe
and place him in retirement. The personal touch is lacking
in our time, we live in an age of depersonalization, Automation,
computers, assembly lines. The pride of craftsmanship is gone.

And we have deperonalized God too. And that makes God
unreal to us. God for us is at best abstract. Novelists have
referred to him various ways. One has called him an Oblong
Blur, another has called him the Infinite Blah. Deperonalizing
God, making him no more than an abstraction, imprisons the soul
of man for it makes God so remote that he is not real. And
there is nothing there for our spirits to relate to . . to be

drawn beyond ourselves. But the Bible presents a personal God . . . certainly more than an Oblong Blur or an Infinite Blah . . . but rather as a loving, compassionate Being with whom we can have communion and to whom we can relate.

Unless God is real and personal to us one of our deepest needs cannot be met . . . that is the need to face God in adoration and surrender. Only in adoration and surrender to God are we released from allegiance to lesser things and set free to be fully human. Only in adoration and surrender do things get placed in proper perspective. That is the only way to "get it all together". We are then able to see what it is all about, what we are all about, who we really are. And in discovering who we are comes the release from the prisons of aimless wandering and futile effort

We hardly will surrender to an Oblong Blur, nor will we bow in adoration before an Infinite Blah. No, our God is personal, he is real . . . he is, as our Lord said, like a Father . . . one who, indeed is above and beyond us, , yet nearer than breathing and closer than hands and feet. We imprison ourselves by making God too remote, we free ourselves when he becomes real to us and as we bow before him in adoration and surrender. For then the deepest need of the human spirit is met . . . to relate to something eternal and infinitely important.

(3- Prison of earlier commitments - . . .)??

3. There is a third way in which we imprison ourselves. This one we don't like to hear because it is that fact that we are sinners and we don't like that. Yet it is true. We are imprisoned by a lack of a sense of the reality of sin. We seem to believe that we live in a Pollyana world where if we shut our eyes and take a deep breath everything will be alright/ We ought to know that the world is a mess, but we see to think that thru some modern Cinderella story everything is going to change. But let us face up to reality. Prince Charmings are mighty scarce these days and there probably are none who will come along and kiss us awake into a world of fantasy/

I like the lines of William Sangster who refers to the "homesickness of the soul" There's a song that used to be sung "Heaven is my Home". The idea expressed was that we are pilgrims here and that we are just wandering thru this earthly life. . heaven is where we really belong. But that is a fantasy. . For this world is our home . . This sin sick world has become the place of our living. Under God we are not simply to wander thru it, leaving it untouched. We are to apply our best efforts to alter it, to change it until the hope of our Lord "Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" becomes a reality. We shall never make significant inroads for God's kingdom until we recognize that sin, even ours

is real.

But we don't like to be reminded of it. We prefer to be called maladjusted, or something else. Call it whatever you will but recognize that there is something fundamentally amiss with man and his relationship to God. Let us understand that with all our doodness, all our pretensions, that we are not right with God. Understand further that it is not God's will that we be that way. The first step in being freed from the imprisonment of sin is the recognition that we are sinners. Then the grace of God can come to us in our humility, cleanse us, restore us to God, and free us to life.

We can be free by getting a commanding purpose in life, by finding a real and personal God, and by acknowledging ^{- earlier commitments} our sinful state. There are many other areas which imprison us - - our sense of inadequacy, our sense of guilt, our humanistic attitude which suggests that God is obsolete.

Let these three, tho, be suggestive of the fact that we can get out of any prison which holds us by responding to God and his truth which sets us free. God in Christ sets the captives free, he loosens the bonds that shackle our minds and spirits and let them soar into the very will and purposes of God. Jesus said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if you abide in my word you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. Abide in his truth. Get out of the prisons of your life. Christ can give you a life of freedom.