

God helped him feel true forgiveness even though he had been . . .

Punished for Another Man's Crime

Imagine yourself with a ball and chain attached to your leg, your back sore and aching from thirty lashes of a whip, and knowing you will be spending year after year in a cold, dark dungeon. Such terrible punishment, and you hadn't even committed the crime! Could you forgive the person responsible for getting you into that place?

A sixteen-year-old boy heard the words, "Twenty-five years at hard labour." He had arrived in Tacoma, Washington, just as a murder had been committed. He had been accused and convicted even though someone else had done the crime.

For the next eighteen years he was treated as a criminal. One time, because he talked in line, he was placed in a dungeon twenty feet underground, his hands tied to the prison door. The third day as he was hanging there, chained by the wrists, he cried out in desperation to God. God heard him! That very night he was moved from the dungeon to work in the prison hospital. He worked there for the next three years, and then he was discharged. But by that time his mind and body were nearly wrecked and he had no home or friends.

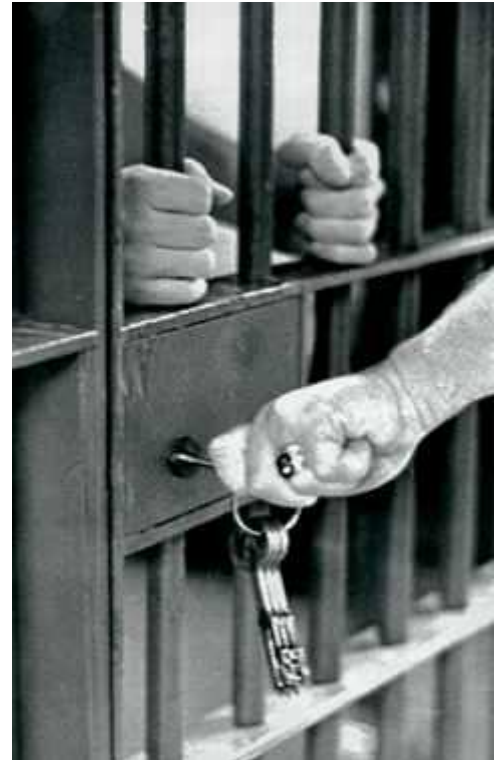
When he was released he was given a ticket to Portland, Oregon. After four days of searching for work with no food or place to sleep, despair overtook him. What could he do? Where could he turn? There seemed to be no answer. He started for the Burnside Bridge to throw himself into the river. Just as he was climbing over the railing the bridge keeper saw him. Pulling him down, he told the ex-convict, "You can't do that!" As he stumbled across the bridge, he looked up and saw the sign "JESUS, the Light of the World" above the Apostolic Faith Mission. Something made him turn in there, and he found himself in a church meeting. By the time he sat through the service, he wanted to pray! But he was too weak from lack of food to make it to the altar. Someone helped him and there he cried out to God for forgiveness. Peace flooded his troubled heart.

In the months that followed he went to the meetings at the mission and often told what God had done for him. One night while telling his story, a strange event took place—a stranger in the audience got up and ran down the stairs. Later someone told the ex-convict, "That man knows something about you!" Investigating, he later located the man in the county hospital in San Francisco, dying of tuberculosis.

After getting acquainted, one night the sick man asked the ex-convict to read the story of the Prodigal Son to him. Then he asked an unusual question, "Can you forgive me for the wrong I have done you?"

Startled, the ex-convict replied, "You have done me no wrong!"

The next words he heard seemed almost unbelievable. "Yes, I have. I am the man who committed the crime you were sent to prison for!"



The thoughts of the ex-convict flew back to those long years in prison—the steel bands around his leg, the dank walls, the handcuffs, the hard work day after day. His life had been ruined! How could he ever truly forgive? He couldn't answer the man.

Leaving the sick man, he went into a little room alone and locked the door. Kneeling down on the concrete floor, he prayed. For nearly three hours he forgot everything else as he pled with God to give him a real spirit of forgiveness.

At last a Voice said, "Forgive him for My sake."

He went back and took the dying man in his arms. "I forgive you," he said, "but you will have to ask God's forgiveness too." The man prayed, and God had mercy and saved him. Three days later he died in the arms of the man who had suffered for his crime.

There is a story in the Bible which gives another example of forgiveness—that of Joseph, a young man sold into slavery by his own brothers. How would you react to that? Joseph was able to look beyond the wrong done him and forgive his brothers.

Without a doubt, though, the greatest example we have of forgiveness was when Jesus spoke from the cross, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." He showed us in His death the true meaning of forgiveness. He tells us in Matthew 6:14, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

A snub, an insult, a malicious rumour, an unprovoked assault . . . you will probably experience one of these at some point in your life. How will you respond? It is not easy to forgive someone who has done something against you. But your own forgiveness by God depends on it!