

When people discuss objectionable prisons the name of Alcatraz is often mentioned as one of the toughest. Alcatraz was often referred to as “The Rock” and has been described as the “island of **no** return.” According to a guide booklet published by the Golden Gate National Park Association,

the prison was redesigned as a maximum security facility to house “incorrigible” (non-reformable) civilian inmates from other Federal institutions. “The Rock” was a place to isolate troublesome convicts and adjust their behavior in prison. Surrounded by the cold, swift currents of San Francisco Bay, the natural isolation of Alcatraz was reinforced with barbed wire, guard towers, and double-barred windows. . . . The central corridor of the cellhouse was nicknamed “Broadway.” The men spent 16 to 23 hours a day in their individual 5 ft. by 9 ft. cells. . . . correctional officers were numerous—usually one guard for every three inmates . . . D Block . . . was reserved for those inmates who broke Alcatraz regulations. Men were usually kept in these cells 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Inmates left their cells once a week for a 10-minute shower. . . . Inmates who were disruptive or committed offenses . . . might be further isolated in one of the solitary confinement cells . . . The average stay in these steel boxes was three days, often in total darkness.

While Alcatraz was certainly a gloomy place with rigid discipline, there have been many others prisons and detention camps where conditions were worse. In fact, as bad as Alcatraz was, it did not even begin to compare with the barbarity found in Nazi concentration camps.

Although it is a tragic thing when anyone has to go to prison and we do not want to minimize the sufferings of those who are

incarcerated, most sentences are for a limited period of time. The Bible, however, warns about a prison which lasts forever, and Jesus says that the worst thing that can happen to people is for them to end up imprisoned eternally because of their own sin and selfishness: “For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world and **loses his own soul**? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (NKJV, Matthew 16:26) Again, in Matthew 10:28, Jesus made the gravity of the situation very clear: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell.**”

Although many people would like to believe that these warnings are only meant for murderers or those who exhibit extremely violent or evil behavior, the Bible makes it plain that they apply to all of us. In Romans 3:23 we learn that “**all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God.” In chapter 6, verse 23, of the same book we are informed: “For the wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What we need, then, is to have Jesus set us free from the chains of sin:

Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **whoever commits sin is a slave of sin**. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the **Son makes you free**, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:34-36)

While the Bible has very bad and depressing news concerning our sinful condition (i.e., that we are headed for destruction), it has some remarkably good news for all those who will receive it:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish** but

have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:16-18)

Unfortunately, some people have been led to believe that just an intellectual consent that Jesus is the Christ is sufficient for salvation. The Scriptures, however, teach that the devils believe there is a God, but that they have no salvation (see James 2:19). The word “believe,” as it is used in the Bible, has a much deeper meaning. In the Introduction to *The Amplified New Testament*, we find this information:

What does the word “believe” mean? It is extremely important, for multitudes are pinning their hope of heaven upon it . . . most people believe in Christ—that he lived; that He was a perfect man who sincerely believed Himself to be the Son of God, and that He died on the cross hoping to save sinners. But this is by no means the meaning of the Greek word . . . The Greek word is “pisteuo,” and means, “To adhere to, cleave to; to trust, to have faith in; to rely on”—which summed up in, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,” means an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Intellectual belief is not enough; we must completely rely and trust in Christ. D. Shelby Corlett has said that “We do not believe in Him unless we act on it, unless we give the whole life to Him.” A sailor relies and trusts in his compass because it shows him in which direction he must sail to arrive at his destination. If he ignores his compass

and goes in a different direction we would know that he does not really believe in it. A man may claim he believes in honesty, but if he continually steals people's money and possessions, we know that he does not have a sincere belief. We would, in fact, consider him a hypocrite. The same is true of a person who claims to believe in Christ but lives contrary to His teachings. Those who are in trouble with the law may say they believe in their lawyers, but if they continually disregard the wise counsel given to them, it avails them nothing.

To say we believe in Christ and to refuse to walk in His ways is more foolish than to claim to believe in a parachute and yet jump out of a plane and neglect to pull the rip-cord. Another comparison might be to a man who professes to believe in the value of a life line, but refuses to cling to one when it is offered to him in the middle of a turbulent sea. In effect, the Bible teaches that we are all lost in a raging sea of sin hundreds of miles from shore. God has offered us a life line in Jesus Christ. If we refuse to hold fast to it and try to swim to shore on our own strength, we will perish because we can never swim that far.

If, however, we pray to the Lord with a sincere heart and turn our life completely over to him, we not only escape the penalty of eternal separation from God, but we are promised a place in heaven. While some people seem to believe that heaven will be a boring place, the Scriptures give every reason to believe that it will be a place where everyone will be continually rejoicing. Sorrow, pain and fear will be absent in heaven, and we will live in a state of perfect joy which is beyond our ability to comprehend at the present time. I Corinthians 2:9 contains the following:

But as it is written: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him."*

C. S. Lewis wrote the following in his book, *The Problem of Pain*:

Be sure that the ins and outs of your individuality are no mystery to Him; and one day they will no longer be a mystery to you. The mould in which a key is made would be a strange thing, if you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions.

Lewis goes on to say:

Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it—made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.

It will be so pleasant in heaven that we just cannot imagine it now. The happiest times we have ever had in this life are only a preview of what is to come for those who love the Lord. Only God knows what will bring us the greatest joy, and we can be certain that he will provide that for us throughout eternity.

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# THE WORST PRISON OF ALL

