



# PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

*"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*  
(John 8:32)

No. 2 (28)  
April—May—June, 2020  
Distributed Free

## CHRIST IS RISEN! HE IS RISEN INDEED!

Today I remembered an incident that happened 7 years ago. I was sitting in a chair at the dentist's office. They were preparing my teeth for crowns and to do this, they had to do a root canal. Usually, when removing a nerve, each tooth is anesthetized, and then they drill it, screw in a special pin, which then pulls out the ill-fated nerve that is responsible for giving a lot of people unbearable pain. Like any other person, I had to endure my toothache with great pain and therefore I really hoped that after the injection it would not be as painful anymore. However, the doctor turned out to be either inexperienced, or ran out of the pain relief medicine since I still felt the pain. If I had the chance, I would have got out of my chair and gone to another dentist. In my case, my options were slim: either walk like a vampire, with teeth cut at an angle, or do the root canal without any pain killers. I've decided to proceed with the dental procedure and bear with the pain.

I gripped the side of the chair as tightly as I could and opened my mouth wide so that the dentist could get to work. First, he reached into my mouth with the scary "drill". The pain was like an electric shock to my entire body, and it was just the first tooth he started preparing for nerve removal. The thoughts in my head were racing one after another, my whole being inside me just screamed. At some point I was ready to jump up from this terrible chair and leave the office, but suddenly I heard a voice as if from the outside: "Christ suffered pain several times more than you are now suffering, all for you!" To be honest, this spiritual image significantly shook me, and before my eyes appeared the whole picture of the mockery and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Before my eyes stood the bloody Man, scars from whippings, out of which blood oozed. The long robe, which resembled a chiton, was so saturated with blood that I thought I could smell the blood. Then the picture changed, and I saw a more terrible sight — the crucifixion itself. Huge thick nails from the impact of a heavy hammer tore the flesh on the hands and feet of This Man and embedded themselves into the cross. I



### CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

looked at His face, and the pain I saw in His eyes made me uneasy. For the first time, I was afraid of the picture that I saw in front of me. Then the cross was raised and before me, exhausted with pain, hung the whole bloody Man. I looked into His eyes and was very aware of the pain He was suffering, without blaming or condemning anyone. I understood perfectly well that I was seeing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, all the suffering and pain that He endured for the sins of the whole world, including my own. For a moment, I was in great pain. I opened my eyes and looked at the dentist, who looked at me with a surprised look and said, "Wait a little longer. I'm finishing the last, eighth tooth. I am very surprised that you are so calmly enduring so much pain for so long". In fact, I didn't know how I'd endured the pain. The fact is that I did not feel the pain in my mouth as much as my hands, which were numb from the death grip on the side backs of the dental chair. It turns out that when I saw the scene of the execution of Jesus Christ and the terrible pain in His eyes, my physical pain just turned into a mosquito bite. The same biblical words were repeated over and over in my mind: *"For He made Him who knew no sin a sacrifice for us for*

*sin, that in Him we might become righteous before God"* (2 Cor. 5:21).

To be honest, I could not even imagine the physical pain of Jesus Christ that I saw in my vision that it almost completely numbed my toothache.

As it turned out, our pain and suffering are sometimes so small that they can't be compared with the suffering and pain that Jesus Christ suffered on the cross for the sins of the whole world. He suffered for us and endured pain, being a sinless person. His pain and our pain are simply incomparable. However, few people think about the sacrifice that the Lord made for us all.

In today's day and age, on the day of Easter, the following words are pronounced: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!" Unfortunately, all this has become so commonplace that many do not even understand and do not attach any importance to the price that was paid for all of us, so that every person had a chance to be saved.

For many years I have been practicing with my brothers in Christ who are with me, to instead of greeting with "Good Morning!" to instead say "Christ is risen" — to which the answer always sounds, "He has risen indeed!" Thanks to this greeting, not only do we not forget what happened two

thousand years ago, but we ourselves now fill the space daily with exclamations and statements that Christ has truly risen.

It seems to me that if everyone is fully aware of all the sacrifice of Christ and the love that God loved us all, then surely the whole world will become much cleaner, brighter and kinder.

The Bible tells us that Christ was betrayed for our sins and resurrected for our justification. Why did God do this? We find only one answer: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (Jn. 3:16).

I. GORIK.

## Miraculous rescue of 40 children during a tornado

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Members of a Baptist Church in McCracken County, Kentucky, are thanking God that 40 preschoolers and 10 Church employees left the building unharmed after a tornado tore the roof off their church.

A powerful EF2 tornado with wind speeds of up to 135 mph caused chaos and tore off the roof of the church at a time when children were praising God. This happened on March 2019.

"God was definitely with us", church member Michelle Rushing told news station WPSD. "The church secretary and I went through the door when we heard the glass break and saw the tornado start tearing the roof off".

The Associated Press reported that a state of emergency was declared in the Western district of

Kentucky. There, the tornado caused damage within a 5-square-mile radius, destroying power lines and covering roads with debris.

When the storm hit the church teacher Toni Mathis said they didn't even know what was going on after they took shelter in a safe place.

"We didn't really realize what was happening", she told news station WPSD. "We sang with the children and prayed in a safe place".

The children sang songs of praise, "Jesus loves me" and "The whole world is in His hands".

After the disaster struck, Mathis saw the damage done to the environment and concluded that "God was really on their side".



"I was deeply shocked by the fact that we were miraculously saved. The Lord was there with us,

and His hand protected us from the tornado", she said.

Ryan Will Cutt, a McCracken County Sheriff's Deputy who was trying to get to the church to help when the tornado hit, said he had to take shelter from the elements himself.

"I saw tree roots rise from the ground and trees fly through the air, and power lines rise and lie over the road", he said. "I just put my head down, covered it with my hands, and started praying".

Another teacher, Lauren Hanelin, told news station WPSD that she knew the tornado was very close to

them, but felt supernaturally calm as she waited for it to calm down.

"It was like I was deafened, and I felt a strong vibration from the tornado", she said. "But there was so much peace in the room we were in... I never felt God's hands on me as I did that day. I knew we were going to be fine".

She continued: "The roof of the nursery, which was within reach of the room where we were, was torn off... we were really protected by God".

The church's senior pastor, Wes Conner, also praised God for this miraculous salvation.

"When you look at this building and you see the destruction and you know that there were about 50 people on this site and no one was injured, then you understand that God is wonderful and great", he said.

<https://cni.news>

# PASTOR SENTENCED TO DEATH PENALTY

God tests every believer in their faith. It is difficult to live a faithful life, to go through trials without losing faith, to stay strong in difficulties without breaking down, and if you've fallen to rise and continue to serve the Lord.

## YOUNG SUCCESSFUL PASTOR

Yaroslav Mysyak was born into a Christian family. From an early age he was fond of drawing, sports, played in a Christian musical group, and succeeded in everything he undertook. In 1991 he entered the Kyiv Bible College of St. James. The clergyman had rapid career growth, and all seemed well. Yaroslav was elected assistant bishop to work with the youth of the evangelical churches in the Transcarpathian region. This position had the opportunity for spiritual growth, developing and advancing the ranks and other opportunities such as missionary work around the world which also opened up the possibility of traveling abroad. During the collapse of the Soviet Union, traveling seemed an unprecedented success.

But it was God's plan for Yaroslav to go through trials which without faith in Jesus Christ, were impossible to overcome without breaking.

## HORRIBLE DREAM

One evening, Yaroslav was preparing for the service that was the next day. He wanted every worship service to be unusual, colorful, interesting and informative. So the pastor sat until late evening developing a script for the biblical events in Sodom and Gomorrah (reminder: the Lord destroyed these cities because the sin and vices in them exceeded all possible limits; the example of Sodom and Gomorrah is often used as a warning to refrain from sin). Yaroslav distributed the roles between the participants, checked the scripts and rewrote them by hand. Because of this he went to bed well after midnight in a state of pleasant tiredness, anticipating the success of production on the stage of the church. At night he had a strange dream: his parents died. He woke up alarmed and he told his wife Snezhana about the dream. And as if a continuation of the dream, a police squad arrived. As it turned out, Yaroslav's relatives were murdered that night: his grandfather, grandmother, and his uncle. They lived in a separate house. Quite recently Yaroslav also lived in this house at the request of his grandfather. The problem was his uncle, who led a strange way of life: he owed large sums of money to some people from Yugoslavia. Suspicious people were constantly looking for him, Yaroslav's uncle hid in the attic while his grandfather covered for him. Yaroslav's grandfather asked him to stay with them for some period of time until his grandfather sold the house and paid off his son's debts. Yaroslav's grandfather asked him to make sure they wouldn't get swindled while selling the house. They found a buyer for the house and received a deposit, which was transferred to the account of people Yaroslav's uncle owed. It was also necessary to get the second part of the payment to fully pay off the debt. And then this terrible event occurred. They killed everyone who was in the house: grandfather, grandmother and uncle. Killed with a knife about forty centimeters long. An examination established that all the strikes were done professionally. Every blow is dealt to a vital organ. A person who does not have special knowledge and technique could not have inflicted blows of this nature.

## INVESTIGATION

Yaroslav was brought to the regional police department as a witness for questioning. The investigation received a lot of attention since it happened just before the elections and the local leadership was under pressure from Kyiv itself. The investigation was conducted jointly by the Security Service of Ukraine (Ukrainian version of the FBI) and the police. Yaroslav, brought to the

*No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

*First Epistle to the Corinthians (NKJV)*

regional department as a witness, became the only suspect, and then the accused. Two searches of his residence did not yield anything: no evidence, no blood, no instrument of crime was found. At the same time, they "worked" intensively with Yaroslav in order to obtain a "sincere" confession. Yaroslav held steady until the investigator said that the next suspects to receive a biased interrogation would be his wife and one and a half year old daughter. Yaroslav agreed to any conditions to keep his family safe. He signed a confession that alleged that he killed his family, but he hoped that due to the evidence, or lack thereof, the truth would triumph in court. The motive for the murder was not established at all. The phrase "because of hostile relations" only appeared in the decision of the Supreme Court. Reproduction of the events at the crime scene was carried out. At the direction of the investigator, Yaroslav testified "how he killed" the individuals. A third search of his residence was carried out, and they suddenly found a package, in an obvious spot in the boiler room, with pants that had two drops of blood on them. The DNA was not analyzed and the blood type coincided with the blood type of Yaroslav, and in fact it matches the blood type of thousands of people. Then a knife was found in a sewer pipe, allegedly placed there by Yaroslav, but he never walked the road where it was found. A witness who lived across the street from house in which the murder was committed, testified that a certain citizen, drunk and with company, was going for money to Yaroslav's grandfather's house with a knife about forty centimeters in length. Unfortunately, this version of the murder, and any other, was not considered.

## CARRYING OUT THE SENTENCE

The appeal trial also sentenced Yaroslav to death by firing squad, as did the original trial. The Supreme Court approved this decision without delay and sent Yaroslav to death row. Even in nightmares, Yaroslav could not imagine that he could go from a young successful and promising pastor to a death row inmate whose life was seemingly not worth a penny. Death row inmates were a category of convicts who were generally not considered to be people and were treated as such. They had no human rights. In the morning and in the evening they were beat, in the afternoon they are herded through the corridor while soldiers from all sides beat them with mallets and rubber truncheons and they let out the dogs on them. Showers were cold water from a fire hose at random times. They killed those that complained about illegal sentences. And the words "European Court of Human Rights", up until 2001, was perceived by the administration as a red rag to a bull.

Yaroslav passed all these tests and praised the Lord. The pastor was convinced that God sent the trials to temper his faith. He prayed incessantly and cried out to the Lord. Only once Yaroslav could not stand it and thought that God had left him. This was when there was only a week left to extend the moratorium on the use of the death penalty. Satan tried to sow doubt in the pastor's soul regarding God. It was

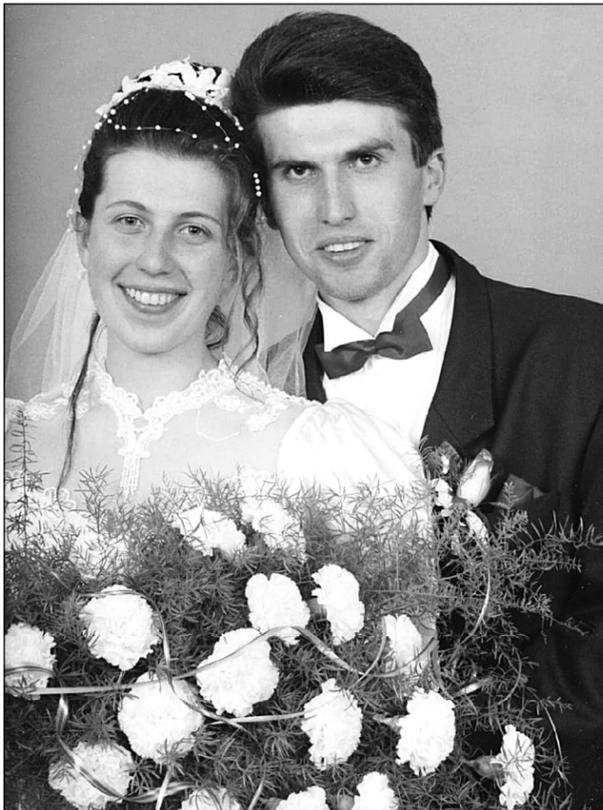
then Yaroslav told his wife to move on because he might not be alive soon.

## PRAYER AND MINISTRY

But the prayer of his wife Snezhana's did a miracle in the soul of Yaroslav. She breathed life into the disappointed pastor's soul, and with it came a prayer of repentance. Yaroslav believed that God has His plan for him. Twenty-two years now Yaroslav is serving a life sentence for other people's crimes. Moreover, he is free from sin, has peace, righteousness, and joy in his soul, and is filled with the Holy Spirit. Many people, while free are imprisoned by their sins. They have wealth, family, children, unlimited possibilities, but they are in the prison of sin and lust. In twenty-two years of captivity, Pastor Yaroslav revived prison services, he breathed hope, freedom from sin and thirst for life into many with the name of Jesus Christ. The local church of Vinnytsia decided to appoint Yaroslav responsible for the services that take place in the Vinnytsia penitentiary institution (No. 1). Thanks to his ministries and his attitude towards other convicts, many of them turned to faith in God. In the Vinnytsia institution, which until recently Yaroslav was in, there is a prison church, numbering more than fifty prisoners sentenced to life in prison.

## CHANCES TO REVIEW A SENTENCE

Our country has no procedure for reviewing criminal sentences in the event of significant violations of substantive and procedural law. Moreover, Yaroslav



was sentenced according to the norms of the Soviet punitive Code of Criminal Procedure which is no longer relevant. Until 2010, such sentences could be reviewed by the Supreme Court of Ukraine in special proceedings. To correct these legal inconsistencies, human rights defenders proposed a number of bills to parliament over the course of a decade, including draft law No. 2033a, which the people called the "bill of last resort". It was voted in, in the first reading. In the current parliament, this bill has been registered under No. 0881, but for no reason it has been withdrawn from consideration as irrelevant.

In other words, Yaroslav Mysyak now has practically no chances to review the verdict.

For the sixth year, lawyers have been trying to secure a review of the sentence



in accordance with newly discovered circumstances. Lawyers conducted an independent examination, which completely breaks down the prosecution's position. It turns out that with the knife that is being used as the murder weapon in the case, it is impossible to inflict blows of the nature that were inflicted on the victims. Do you think everyone was delighted that finally, after twenty-two years, justice will prevail? Do you think the judges rushed to review the verdict, and the prosecutor's office decided to rescind the sentence? Nothing of the kind, the system does not give up and fights to the end. People whose interests are to keep the sentence in force made a second expert conclusion, which is exactly the same as the previous twenty years ago. And now it can take years while the parties argue which conclusion is correct and which is not.

## FINAL

There are many such stories (about judicial arbitrariness and fabrication of case materials). In our country less than one percent of trials are acquitted, while in civilized countries in which the rule of law is more than a word, up to twenty to twenty five percent of trials end with acquittals. Catch the difference?! Or, maybe the investigative and judicial bodies work twenty to sixty times better in our country than in Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Canada or the United States?

The third chapter of the Book of the Prophet Daniel tells how King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden idol and issued a decree that applied to everyone without exception: as soon as everyone hears the sound of musical instruments, they were obliged to kneel and bow to the golden idol, and whoever disobeyed was to be thrown into a furnace heated by fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow and worship the golden idol. And when the king called them to him, they answered: "...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up".

The king ordered to heat the furnace seven times more than usual, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the hot furnace. Moreover, the flames of the fire killed the people who threw them in but Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained unharmed, their clothes were not damaged, they did not even smell like fire, because the Spirit of God was with them in the furnace.

Yaroslav Mysyak is not alone in his cell of life imprisonment, the Holy Spirit abides with him. And as the Lord brought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the burning furnace unharmed, so he will bring Yaroslav alive and unharmed from life imprisonment. God alone knows how but Yaroslav is faithful to the only God, Jesus Christ and believes in his liberation.

**Andrey DIDENKO,**  
Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group.

Pastor Lyonya Semikolen has spent many years in prison for theft. However, everything changed when God appeared in his life.

**Question: Please tell us what attracted you to the thief's lifestyle?**

**Answer:** From me talking about my childhood, many of my peers chose to walk the same path as me. Some were influenced by older friends when they left prison. Not me, no one influenced me. On the contrary, I dominated my peers. I liked that people were reaching out to me. The guys, four or five years older than me, considered it an honor to commit a crime with me. Although I was younger than them, I had the talent to develop criminal plans.

At that age I did not think about the truth, about the meaning of life, about honor. I met with professional thieves and personally observed their way of life. When I met them, I liked the fact that they not only beautifully told how to live, but also lived as they said. That was the most important thing for me. I wanted to belong to the "thieves" society.

You could say that in all that filth there was no light. In principle, there is no truth in the



**Question: You said measures have been taken against you to break you?**

**Answer:** Yes, and not only to me. Probably to all who adhered to such a lifestyle. There were many situations when the administration tried to beat out our stubbornness. But by chance, nothing ever worked. It was no longer supernatural for me that I was fed hot food every other day in the

house. He went, inserted the key into the car, but did not sit, but stood and talked with the parking employee. He turned the key — an explosion went off — and his leg was torn off his arm was shattered and shortly after he died in the hospital. Then there were a few more attempts. In one five-story building sat two killers with a sniper rifle. My windows from there were clearly visible. That day, when the

assassins climbed into the attic, we flew to Sakhalin for a week on business. The killers sat in the attic for three days. One of the residents of that house saw them and called the police, and they were detained. At the end of December 1998, we had to go to Bratsk. However, I got very sick. I suggested to reschedule the meeting until January next year, however my friends still went without me. In Bratsk, it turns out there was a planned killing. As a result, all my friends died: they were taken to the forest, shot and drowned in the Bratsk reservoir. Now, of course I understand that God protected me, that the Lord had plans for my life.

**Question: I imagine that living with a feeling of constant danger is difficult. Did you somehow cope with this fear?**

**Answer:** From the feeling of

## “You are a thief, forgiven on the cross”. Mob Boss Lyonya Semikolen spoke about his path to God

criminal system. But I can't say that it does not exist at all. For example, you are sitting in a cell with other criminals — they will not deceive you there, they will not betray you. If you fall ill, they will take care of you, your socks will be washed, and they will treat you with love. But this is a very small number of people.

**Question: You said that you knew how to create criminal schemes. Tell me, when did you commit your first offense?**

**Answer:** Probably the first time I committed a crime was in kindergarten. There were some outbuildings behind the fence. The men were going fishing, packing things: a backpack, hooks, fishing tackle. Observing the whole process, I decided that I needed the fishing tools. When they were distracted, I just threw everything into my backpack. Of course, they did not think that someone from the kindergarten class would do it. I liked it, because no one suspected me.

**Question: Did your parents somehow try to influence you when they learned that were committing crimes?**

**Answer:** My parents tried to influence me. However, if I knew that they would punish me, I would run away from home with my friends somewhere. Naturally, we were caught — sometimes on the road, sometimes upon arrival — and sent back. My parents were afraid to punish me because what if I would run away again. After the death of my father, my mother accepted my bad behavior.

**Question: How many trips have you made? At what age did you start traveling?**

**Answer:** I started traveling at ten years old. Two of my friends went with me. By the age of twelve, I had probably been to all the children's homeless centers in the Soviet Union. We traveled in all directions, but mainly where it was warm.

**Question: At twelve years of age, you ended up in a special school. One must have a certain character to not mentally shut down. In your opinion, what exactly helped you do this?**

**Answer:** There were no special difficulties. I knew how to behave, what kind of life is there. I considered this my element; I was like a fish in water. Of course, I was punished for my behavior, but you can't be held in a punishment cell for more than three days. I don't even know how many times I spent three days in a punishment cell for falling out of the general format.

Difficulties began when I ended up in a penal colony for juvenile delinquents for seven years. In there they tried to break me, so that I would change my ways. But there I violated the regime. I was kept in the isolation ward for ten days. I understood that if I want to live a thief's life, then I needed to go through these difficulties.

**Question: It turns out that in this way you earned credibility?**

**Answer:** There wasn't a goal of gaining authority, but nevertheless it was developed. There were only a few who went against the administration, so the bulk of the prisoners respected us.

detention center, that I was deprived of everything.

**Question: In your testimony, you said that when you were transferred to a special prison near Grodno, they wanted to send you to a "press hut" (a cell for torturing prisoners). Then you managed to injure the guard with a glass fragment. What would you have done if you were inside this cell?**

**Answer:** "I had no purpose at all to be there, so I did not consider this option". When they put you there, they search you to the skin. There are five to six healthy guys sitting there who feed you for slaughter, resulting in months of undernourishment. In addition to everything, they have the tools ready to kill you. Whatever the administration wants to be done to that person, is what ends up being done. Therefore, I wanted to be alone with the chief of corps and, if my life was taken then the life of the chief would also be taken. I knew that for killing him they would kill me too, but I was ready.

**Question: After that, the officers beat you and your lower body became paralyzed. However, the doctor suggested that you become an experimental rabbit for his scientific work. Was it scary to give in to his hands?**

**Answer:** Miracles began to happen when I ended up with a broken spine in a Kazan psychiatric hospital for prisoners. Doctors said that in a maximum of a year I would die from bedsores. However, at the same time Professor Yakov Tsivyan, the founder of the Novosibirsk NIITO, invented his next innovation. He turned to the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs to find out if there was an opportunity to "practice" on prisoners. I was the first. At the meeting, he made it clear to me that the chances of a successful outcome of the operation were fifty to fifty. I was not afraid, as it was my chance. Moreover, I knew that they would kill me.

**Question: You noted that miracles began to happen in the hospital. Did you turn to God while in a medical facility? Have you heard the gospel before while in camps?**

**Answer:** Before my spine was broken, I did not meet any believers. Probably, every person when going through a hopeless solution has experienced the fair of no one understanding them or being able to help them. That's when a clear realization appears: God can only help. You really feel it. From a good life, no one has yet come to God. God allows some situations in a person's life for this understanding to come. At that time, I did not know who God was, who Jesus Christ was. But I knew that there is a God. I said: "God, why did you let this happen to me?" I am sure that if a person, being in his delusions, sincerely turns to God then He will answer. It does not matter to Him what position you are in and what you have done.

**Question: Crime, especially in the nineties of the last century was marked by a series of armed conflicts between criminal groups. How often have you come across death?**

**Answer:** In 1994, there was a serious attempt on me. My car was in a parking lot near the house. My friend came to me. I asked him to drive the car to

hopelessness and fear, I began to use drugs. Drugs brightened up the situation. I have always been their adversary, although I tried them before. I always believed that a person should be free. If you adhere to some way of life, then there should be no compromises. But in the end, I myself fell for this bait. And when I understood this, the question arose: how to get out of this situation?

**Question: Faced with hard drugs, you decided to free yourself from them. How did you get the idea of opening a clinic?**

**Answer:** The idea came on its own. There were no clinics, no rehabilitation centers for people struggling with addictions. We had doctors we were familiar with it, so we turned to them for help: we would provide the money, and they would organize everything else. We bought everything we needed and rented the first clinic. Then they moved to another facility.

**Question: What was your relationship with the underworld during your drug addiction?**

**Answer:** In 1991, a serious thieves rally was held in Moscow, at which it was decided that in camps and prisons the crowning of master thieves, should not be carried out. They decided that they should be held only at large. After liberation, I had to go to Moscow, and at this thief gathering they were supposed to take me into the "thieves" family. But I was playing for time, then I began to use drugs. After that, I realized that being both a thief in law and a drug addict is wrong. I always thought that I would free myself from drugs, recover, and then I would solve my question. But I couldn't, and I didn't solve my question. Twice I declined the offer of joining them.

**Question: What prompted you to go to your mother's home and, as you said, die?**

**Answer:** There is such a belief that one must die at home, at home, where they were born.

**Question: Why did you decide to read the Bible? And what touched you so much that your life has completely changed?**

**Answer:** I have long had great interest in the Bible. I have always been interested in the wisdom of the Bible. All the thieves' gatherings I attended in prison ended with quotes from the Holy Scriptures. We all considered ourselves believers, wore crosses. I saw the Bible with my mother when I came home to die (she was a believer). I first opened the middle of the book, and I came across the thirty-seventh psalm. Then I opened the end of the Bible and began to read the Gospel of John. I liked Jesus. He always said everything as it is. The story of the prostitute said that people brought her to Him to tempt Him. In such cases, people usually begin to delve into the life of a person to understand everything. Jesus had a dilemma: to remain fair or merciful. But it was a trap. I began to think: what would He do? When I read to the end, I realized that He was God and that I should pray to Him. I prayed, and God gave me healing right away from everything: crystal, nicotine, fornication. But most importantly, He gave me freedom from a dead end.

(Continued on the 4th page)

## “You are a thief, forgiven on the cross”. Mob Boss Lyonya Semikolen spoke about his path to God

(Ending.  
Beginning on the 3rd page)

**Question: Please tell us how you ended up in a rehabilitation center for addicted people?**

**Answer:** The next day I went to the store and saw an ad promoting rehabilitation services. I didn't know what it was. However, I noticed that the announcement stated: the Christian church. The next day I went there to get answers to my questions that arose after reading the Bible. The believers there convinced me to undergo rehabilitation. As a result, I remained there and serve to this day.



**Question: What difficulties did you encounter while being in the rehab center?**

**Answer:** The difficulty was pride. I'm used to always leading people myself. They began to teach me: what to do, how to do it, that's when my pride revealed itself. There were times when the ministers ran out and slammed the door because they could not talk to me. That's when I realized that this was wrong, repented, prayed, and God changed me. Otherwise, there were no difficulties.

**Question: The criminal world has a strict hierarchy, and Christianity, on the contrary, calls for the equality of all members in the community. Have you ever had to overcome your principles in order to communicate with those with whom you would not even stand next to?**

**Answer:** It was like that. At first, going into the

common dining room, I only washed my own mug. Later I began to wash other mugs and pour tea into them. People noticed this. I realized when you walk with Jesus, you change. As in the Bible, for example, if a Jew communicated with a Samaritan it tainted their reputation. But the disciples walked with Jesus and communicated with the Samaritans. When your mind is enlightened by the Gospel you look at everything differently.

**Question: Tell me, please, what are you doing in the church now?**

**Answer:** I am the chairman of the Novosibirsk branch of

demnation because people understand that faith is a private matter. Nobody said that I betrayed something. The fruits of prison ministry are very small, but they still exist. As a public figure, I often visit prisons. On one of the trips to the tuberculosis zone, I went to where the violators were locked up. I was given an office. They brought out a Caucasian man. He had eight months to serve. He had a serious illness, but as a trouble maker, was put into isolation. I was left alone with him. He said that he did want to leave prison because he did not want to infect his family and friends. I began to tell him about Jesus, about the robber who went to heaven. He replied that he also prays, but Allah does not hear him. I invited him to pray, and not to delve into inter-religious debate. After repentance, I saw that his eyes had changed. They became different. Before that, they were full of hatred, but then everything changed. He simply said: “Thank you for coming to me”. A day later, I was on the train. They called me and said that he passed away.

**Question: Today among the Russian youth, the prison subculture AUE (“The prison way of life is united”) is widespread. What would you recommend to young people who adhere to its rules?**

**Answer:** I think that advice, might remain at the level of advice. Because few people actually accept them, relying more on life experience and personal views. I would advise believers to pray for youth. Young people can only change as a result of God's judgment. But to change a person, to tell them some worldly wisdom — this does not help. People may just listen to my story like a fairy tale. However, we try to work with people in prison, we try to convey the truth to them even within their lifestyle.

The interview  
was prepared by  
**Aleksey KOVALYONOK,**  
**Anna SUTURINA,**  
<https://bog.news>

the public organization “Choice”, which is involved in crime prevention. For ten years now in Novosibirsk, I have been serving in penal colony number nine. At the beginning of my Christian journey, I asked God questions in prayers about who I am. Once I met a prophet who, not knowing me, said: “You are not a priest, you are not a Levite, but a thief who has been forgiven on the cross”. God forgave me, so I went to where people are in dire circumstances, to where I once was myself. His word was brief, but I understood what God had told me through the prophet. Therefore, all my questions were answered.

**Question: Have you encountered people in your ministry who considered you a traitor to the thieves?**

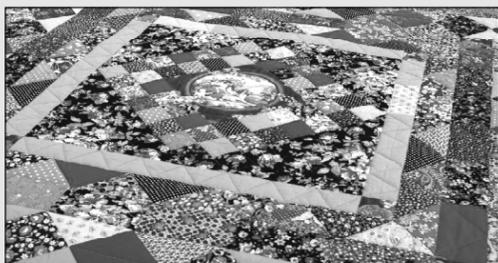
**Answer:** When I repented, I didn't see anybody's con-

### Life as a quilt blanket

One person became desperate. He climbed to the roof of the house to commit suicide.

By chance, he looked down and saw a crowd of people gathering. It looked like a large quilt from above. It was on the eve of the holidays.

Looking at the crowd, a realization hit him. Human life is like a large patchwork quilt, and only God Himself knows what pieces should be in it and how much happiness and sorrow, health and illness, joy and trouble. If you arbitrarily interrupt this process, you get a piece of fabric that no one needs. He came down the stairs and went along the difficult and harsh path but also full of miracles and amazing discoveries of the knowledge of God.



### Fence

Wealth and poverty shared a neighborhood. All was fine but suddenly it began to seem to wealth that poverty prevented him from living sweetly. He would start to eat cake with tea, but outside the window, poverty gnaws at a rusk and drinks water from the well. As he lies on a soft bed, somewhere behind the wall poverty groans: it's hard for him to lie on the mat, and he's freezing... All the pleasures of life from wealth immediately disappeared!

Then he decided to fence itself off from poverty. There was no shortage of money, a fence was built above the house, above the trees, to the sky! Thus wealth was shut off from poverty, and at the same time from the sun and from God — although he did not even notice...

<https://pritchi.ru>

## DON'T BE DEFINED BY WHAT YOU'RE AGAINST

The point of Christianity is not about avoiding sin. It's about embracing Jesus.

I used to work with a girl who was a part of a strict conservative church. She wasn't allowed to pierce her ears, get a tattoo, cut her hair short, wear dresses that showed her knees, or listen to certain kinds of music.

While churches vary in their laws and lifestyle recommendations, many Christians seem to believe that a Christian can be identified by what they avoid.

To be fair, there are commands Christians are called to obey. Jesus Himself says: *If you love me you will keep my commands (John 14:15)*. There are things Christians should strive to do. There are things Christians should try to avoid.

But when things we do or abstain from doing become the defining characteristics of **who we are**, we lose the greater identity of “**whose**” **we are**.

I grew up very conservative. For several years my family was involved in a church that was against anything the Bible didn't directly give us permission to do. The church believed you couldn't even use instruments to worship God because the Bible didn't specifically say it was OK.

Because of this extremely narrow perspective on how Christians must behave, I grew to be very aware of rules. Even in cases where Scripture isn't specific, the group consensus seems to be that Christians are: anti-alcohol, anti-marijuana, anti-abortion, anti-graphic movies, Christians are pro-second amendment, and we vote Republican.

Sometimes our stances on issues are stronger than the Bible's stance on them.

Look at the comment section of any quasi-religious story or video and you are likely to find a Christian person explaining why they are against whatever is being discussed and why it's wrong in the eyes of God. It seems we mistake taking a **stand for Jesus** as synonymous with taking a **stance against everything** we personally don't like or agree with.

It's like we build these soapboxes of self-righteousness and then we climb on them with our bullhorns trying to win everyone else over to our point of view. Try asking someone you know who isn't a Christian what it means to be a Christian. You might find that their answer has little or nothing to do with following Jesus, but they probably know what things Christians typically view as sinful.

In building our platform on what we are **against** we have often neglected to establish a foundation of what we are **for**. As a result we are not often known by our **love and grace** to the community outside our walls.

What if we changed our approach? What would the Church look like if the first impression we gave outsiders was not one of judgment? What if we were known for our compassion, our connections, our graciousness, helpfulness and concern, rather than our separateness or our rules?

I'm not saying we should condone sin. I'm merely suggesting that the policy to judge first and ask questions later may not be the most effective one, or even the most biblical one.



In John 8, the religious leaders bring a woman caught in adultery to Jesus. She's guilty. There is no denying that. They are using her as a trap against Jesus.

But what Jesus does is unusual. He doesn't see a failure. He doesn't see someone to be judged and tossed away. He sees a woman, a person whom He loves and values. He has every right to judge her for her sin, but He doesn't. He forgives her. He doesn't approve of her sin. He doesn't tell her it's OK, but he gives her grace. He sends her away, after saving her, after loving her, with a commission to leave behind her life of sin.

Jesus loved first. It's through that love that He transforms hearts. Jesus didn't have to take a **stand against** everything, because what **He stood for** was so powerful.

We spend so much time trying to avoid sin. We **build** our integrity around what **we don't do**. But what if instead of first investing our energy in avoiding the appearance of evil, we started by simply focusing on **drawing closer** to Jesus? Trying to avoid sin doesn't by default draw us closer to Jesus. However, it is impossible to draw near to Jesus without pulling away from sin. If we set out to stand against then our default will often be self-righteousness, judgment, and wrath. Jesus's default was love, grace and peace.

Again, just to be clear: Obviously, we shouldn't advocate or approve of sin. However, the best stance against sin is not to focus on what we're against but rather on what we're for. The closer we draw to Jesus, the more we begin to be molded into His likeness. We are called Christian “little Christs” because the early church was defined by their **imitation** of Jesus.

That is what really transforms people's hearts. Not arguments. Not empty proof-texting. What changes lives are encounters with Jesus and with those who are so close to Him that they start to **look like Him**.

If our lives are to be characterized, let them be characterized by our imitation of our Savior. We should focus first on aligning our hearts with God, growing in His love for people and caring about what He cares about. Our hatred for sin should be born out of our love for God and His people, and **not wanting** people to experience the destructiveness that sin brings.

The primary responsibility of every Christian is not to stand against sin. It is to draw near to Jesus, to know Him and to be known by Him. Christians stand for Jesus.

Tyler EDWARDS, [relevantmagazine.com](http://relevantmagazine.com)

## TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

## WHAT AWAITS US AFTER DEATH

Some believers, influenced by early Greek philosophy, believe that there is nothing after death. They even try to defend their ideas with the help of the Bible.

However, the scripture contains two passages that speak of eternal punishment in hell. **Matthew 25:46** mentions a great court, in which the Shepherd will separate the sheep from the goats: *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.* Please note that the same Greek word — *aionion* (eternal) — is used to describe the punishment of the unrighteous and the blessing of the righteous. Thus, the duration of punishment will be the same as the eternal life of the righteous. And since eternal life will be eternal (**John 10:28** — *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish...*), the punishment for unbelievers will also be eternal.

The second passage (**Revelation 20:10**) describes a lake of fire, in which the torment will continue day and night forever and ever. The expression *day and night* is used to show unceasing torment. The lake of fire is described in **Revelation 19:20** as a *lake of fire burning with brimstone.* The Bible also warns that *anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire* (**Revelation 20:15**).

For those who reject Jesus Christ, the doctrine of eternal punishment seems inhumane and unbiblical. Of course, this is a difficult teaching, which is not pleasant nor brings joy. However, the unpleasantness brought by this doctrine should not encourage us to reject biblical truth, but to accept it as soon as possible, while there is still time. Let's look at some frequently asked questions about hell and heaven.

## I. HELL / THE LAKE OF FIRE

### Is there really a place we call hell?

The answer to this question is contained in the Bible, which teaches that hell is a terrible place of eternal punishment for those who rejected Jesus Christ.

It is sad that people treat hell very superficially and not seriously. For some, this is just a reason to joke, while for others, as in the English language, the word *hell* is one of the most often used cuss words.

The Bible speaks of hell as a real place many times. Lord Jesus Christ spoke of hell, probably more often than anyone else in the Bible. In the Bible, Jesus is often described as meek and humble but such a description can hardly correspond with the words of Jesus about hell spoken in **Mark 9:43-48**: *If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched". And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell into the fire that shall never be quenched — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched". And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched".*

In another passage, Christ calls the scribes and Pharisees *serpents, brood of vipers* and asks them: *How can you escape the condemnation of hell?* (**Matthew 23:33**). In our opinion, these words are very

harsh, however, He was not joking. He stated things as they are.

By doubting the real existence of hell, a person first of all questions the authority of the Holy Scriptures and the authority of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, because in the Christian faith everything is interconnected and one does not exist without the other.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He came down to us from heaven to die for the sins of this world and rise from the dead and thereby open to us access to the Heavenly Father. The words of Jesus are truth

and life. He cannot be convicted of a lie or deceit. Therefore, all that He said is worthy not only of our attention and respect, but also of faith and trust. And those who do not believe in hell that Jesus spoke about, have a problem with Jesus Christ, who came to not only tell us about this terrible place, but also to save us from eternal punishment and torment in hell.



the suffering of Jesus Christ. He suffered terrible physical abuse. They spat on his face, they gave him forty lashes, put a crown of thorns on his head, pierced his hands and feet with nails, pierced his side with a spear. He was hit on the head and face. His beloved disciples left Him. The physical pain must have been unbearable yet He never complained, He did not say a word about the pain.

### Why did God create hell?

**Matthew 25:41** says that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. This was the original purpose of hell.

Hell was not created for unbelievers or sinners... It was prepared for the devil and the fallen angels. How do we know that? Jesus Christ himself told us about this: *Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."*

### Is it true that fire will burn in hell?

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus repeatedly repeats the phrase *the fire that shall never be quenched — where "Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched"*. In our opinion, it is foolish to spend time on unproven disputes about whether there will really be fire in hell and whether there really will be worms. However, what's very interesting is that one of the words hell is described with is Gehenna. Gehenna was a city dump in the Hinnom Valley, which constantly smoked and exuded a stench — a place where worms and other insects would constantly find something to make use of... And this stench, smoke, and rot did not stop day or night. Will there be real fire in hell? In reality, this could just be a figurative description of hell with the help of images and terms we understand. And one can

imagine that the reality will be much worse than the words and symbols that describe it. And there is nothing joyful in the fire. If in childhood you received a burn of second or third degree, then you are unlikely to be able to forget about it. The Lord is simply trying to explain, with an analogy of fire, what a terrible place awaits those who oppose God. It can actually be much worse. Indeed, fire is not needed at all cause pain...

In our opinion, physical torment is not the worst thing in this world. You must have heard or read about

*eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire". But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received*

*lifetime you received your good things. We don't even need to talk about fire. Because the worst thing in eternity without Christ may be a one-on-one existence with your own memories: I remember how friends told me about Christ, and I just smirked and thought it was a joke; I remember once in a church I was offered to give my heart to Jesus Christ, but I said: "No, I still have time"; It is a pity that when I was offered to read the Bible, I laughed in their faces and said that this was nonsense; What a pity that I tore this little book with the title "The Way to Eternal Life"... It is unlikely that at this moment there will be anything else that could cause more pain than the answer of Abraham to the rich man: Son, remember...*

But you can avoid both physical and mental pain — eternal excommunication from God. All that is needed, — is to reflect on your life, on your destiny now and make the right choice.

Accept Jesus Christ as your God and Lord now, and eternity with your Creator will await you!

### What if I do not believe in hell?

You have probably heard of insurance companies. People insure life, houses, cars, property and so on. This is a multibillion dollar business. But have you ever thought about the fact that this whole business is based only *Maybe...* and *What if?..* When insuring their car, people do not do this in order to start crashing into everyone on every corner. On the contrary, they try to avoid accidents. But *what if?..* And so they want to insure themselves that both medical expenses and car repair costs would be covered by insurance.

Anyone who believes that the idea of God's judgment and hell is a fiction, even though Jesus Himself warns us of judgment and hell, let him answer the following question: *What about this little "maybe"? What if hell exists?*

*What if I get into an accident? or What if there will be a fire and my house burns down?* the person asks himself and because of this *What if?..* they spend hundreds and thousands of dollars on insurance. And at the same time, people try to live without the divine insurance. They try to insure themselves with their insurance company in case of fire, flood, accidents in this life... And at the same time they play roulette with their eternity. They are risking it twenty-four hours a day! Seems kind of silly, doesn't it?

If hell does not exist, then I lose nothing. On the contrary, I only win, because my life is filled with joy in the Lord at the thought of my sins being forgiven. Going to bed, I know that if I don't wake up in the morning, I will wake up in heaven and spend eternity with my Creator. What a blessing! I know that if I go out of the body, I will be *present with the Lord* (**2 Corinthians 5:8**).

Jesus taught about what awaits a person in hell. We may agree or argue about various aspects of this doctrine, but we must remember the following: the Lord Jesus Christ never joked when speaking of hell. He wept over entire cities and villages, knowing what end awaits them. He prayed with tears in his eyes in the garden of Gethsemane, knowing from what a terrible reality He came to deliver us with His death on the cross of Calvary.

(Continued on the 6th page)

your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us". He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment". Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them". "No, father Abraham", he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent". He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead".

In this story, the rich man went to hell (a place of torment and punishment), and Lazarus — to paradise. It is important to notice the fact that the rich man was in eternity without God, without hope... But his memory was not hindered because of this. He remembered poor Lazarus very well, remembered his previous life and that he has a family and brothers.

Often people reason the following way: *If my wife / husband died and went to hell, then I want to go to hell too, to be with her, or, If my parents (children) went to hell, then I want to be with them.*

I would like to warn such people: they do not want to see you there! The rich man, being in agony in hell, said: *I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.* As you can see, even the rich man was imbued, oddly enough, with the spirit of evangelism...

What answer did the rich man receive when, being in hell, he began to beg for mercy? He was told: *Son, remember that in your*

### Will people remember anything in hell?

The answer to this question can be found in the Gospel of Luke when reading the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

**Luke 16:19-31** — *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to*

(Ending.

**Beginning on the 5th page)**

We really hope that you will reflect on these issues once more and eventually open your heart and give your life to Jesus Christ.

Insure yourself just in case! If there is hell you lose nothing but, on the contrary, you gain eternal life. If there is no hell, then you also lose nothing. In both cases, you only win. So, hurry up make your choice now, while there is still time! Entrust your life to Christ!

**II. HEAVENLY PARADISE  
The Three Heavens**

Bible mentions three heavens in **2 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)**: *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a one was caught up to the third heaven.*

Proceeding from this, it is legitimate to assume that if there is

whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows — how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

**1 Corinthians 13:12 (NKJV)** — *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.*

The previous scriptures tell us that we cannot even imagine what awaits us in heaven. The Lord has prepared something wonderful for us. The following Bible verses can only partially shed light on what heaven will be like.

☉ **Heaven is a wonderful place (Revelation 21:1–22:7):**

**Revelation 21:1–4 (NKJV)** — *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her*

curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

☉ **Heaven is a place of eternal life:**

**John 14:4 (NKJV)** — *And where I go you know, and the way you know.*

**John 14:19 (NKJV)** — *A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.*

☉ **It's a place of service:**

**Revelation 22:3 (NKJV)** — *And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.*

☉ **It's place of worship:**

**Revelation 19:1–3 (NKJV)** — *After these things I heard a loud voice*

**TOPIC FOR REFLECTION****WHAT AWAITS US AFTER DEATH**

a third heaven, then the first and the second must exist, because a third heaven cannot exist without the first and second.

The first heaven is the atmosphere, the air we breathe and where the birds fly (firmament).

**Genesis 1:20 (KJV)** — *And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.*

The second heaven is the heaven in which the heavenly bodies are located (stars, moon, sun, comets, planets and so on and so forth).

**Genesis 1:14–18 (KJV)** — *And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good.*

The third heaven is the throne of God, which is associated with the spiritual world.

**Psalms 11:4 (NKJV)** — *The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord is on His heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; His eyes examine them.*

**Psalms 102:19 (NKJV)** — *The Lord has established His throne in heaven, And His kingdom rules over all.*

**Acts 7:49–50 (NKJV)** — *Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?*

**What awaits us in heaven?**

In **John 14:1–3 (NKJV)** the following words of Jesus are written: *Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

In **1 Corinthians 2:9 (NKJV)**, apostle Paul wrote: *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.*

**2 Corinthians 12:2–4 (NKJV)** — *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man —*

husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

The city of heaven is described in **Revelation 21:9–22:7**. He is also called in the Bible the New Jerusalem, Heavenly Jerusalem.

**Revelation 21:10–23 (NKJV)** — *And He carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysochryse, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.*

**Revelation 22:1–5 (NKJV)** — *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more*

of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her". Again they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!"

**What will happen to the former earth and sky?**

**Former heaven (sky) and earth will be destroyed:**

**2 Peter 3:10–13 (NKJV)** — *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

**Hebrews 12:25–29 (NKJV)** — *See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven". Now this, Yet once more, indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.

**Isaiah 66:22 (NKJV)** — *For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me", says the Lord, "So shall your descendants and your name remain".*

**Isaiah 65:17 (NKJV)** — *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

**Revelation 21:1 (NKJV)** — *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.*

The material for the newspaper "Prisoner" was kindly provided by the Bible Discussion Club, Montreal, Canada <http://www.cogmtl.net/Articles/035.htm>

**CHRISTIAN NEWS****"It Was a Miracle":  
Doctor's Near-Death Accident  
Brings Him to God**

Dr. Jeff Huxford was a successful family medical doctor when a life-altering car accident changed absolutely everything. On May 3, 2012, he drove into town to pick up some items at a local hardware store, but a series of shocking events along the way sent his life on a totally different trajectory — and it all unfolded in mere seconds.

Huxford, author of the new book, "Finding Normal: An Uninvited Change, An Unexpected Outcome", recently told "The Pure Flix Podcast" about how his near-death experience and the traumatic brain injury he suffered during the collision transformed his life and family.

"I stopped at the stop light, but a truck going the other way did not stop... [and] pushed my truck into a concrete pole", Huxford said. "My head went through the driver's side window and hit the pole... they had to cut me out with the jaws of life".

The very serious accident led paramedics to transport Huxford to Chicago, where he received treatment for his injuries.

"It was a miracle that I survived", he said, noting that the accident left him with "a severe traumatic brain injury" — an experience that forced changes throughout his entire life.

These changes were difficult and inevitably led him on an introspective journey he could have never imagined.

Huxford said he was initially determined to get back to normal — back to the same exact person he was before the accident. Unfortunately, the path through such a severe traumatic brain injury is anything but seamless.

"After a brain injury a person has to find their new normal... and I didn't really believe that at first", he said, noting that he thought that with "enough hard work and enough time and determination" he could get back to the person he was before.

But the accident forced Huxford to retire due to his complications with traumatic brain injury, leaving behind his decade-long career as a physician.

Although the brain injury took away his ability to practice medicine, Jeff learned a multitude of wonderful truths about God and found his value and purpose rooted in Christ.

Huxford soon realized that some of the changes he faced were permanent, and that he had to truly embrace his new normal.



"This brain injury might have taken a lot from me, but it has also given me a lot", he said, citing his Christian faith as the most profound benefit.

Despite growing up in a Christian home, Huxford said he came to a place before the accident of relative apathy — one in which his faith was relatively benign.

"I think over time I got really comfortable in my faith and it became more of a checklist type thing where I was making sure I was checking the right boxes", he said. "It wasn't about a relationship".

But after Huxford's accident, he heard a sermon that changed everything — a message about the importance of not being a "lukewarm" Christian. As Huxford listened, he came to an important realization.

"When I heard the verse this time I started seeing myself as being one of those lukewarm Christians", Huxford said, noting that he had always known that being lukewarm is something the Bible condemns.

In the end, that sermon helped bring his faith into a truer focus, waking him up from his apathetic spiritual slumber.

"I would never wish a traumatic brain injury on a person", he said. "But if that's what it took for me to find Jesus and learn about Jesus in the way I needed to then I would do it all again".

Despite Huxford's own struggles, he has persisted, and has an inspirational word for anyone facing difficult trials: "God never promised us an easy life or a life free of trouble, but he did promise to be with us during those times".

<https://www1.cbn.com>

Perhaps there is not a single person who, while in prison, would not want to be released. A prison is a place where a person begins to think about the meaning of life and digs deeper into himself, that is, to analyze and revise his past earthly path. It is not surprising that, in captivity, very many people ask themselves the same questions: "Why am I living?", "Why did this happen?", "What awaits me?", "How to live further?" And so on...

In most cases, why do people have the same questions? The answer is quite simple: this is because in prison all are equal, regardless of their social status. In places of deprivation of liberty, almost everyone faces the same problems, regardless of different individual needs. People, regardless of their previous social status, only think about how they can get out of prison as soon as possible, how to establish a connection with freedom, where to find the right witnesses, how best to speak in court, how to arrange their prison life and much much more. Everyone who, for one reason or another, ended up in prison are faced with the same problem. All these problems, as a rule, arise at the beginning of a prison stay. The questions, which I cited as an example above, one asks mainly after one receives a sentence. Indeed, at the beginning, everyone who finds themselves in places of captivity goes through a process of self-preservation and self-justification. Everyone else is counting on a miracle: to avoid punishment. Then, when a person really acquired the stigma of a prisoner, he begins the process of rethinking and searching within himself. Hence, many people have asked themselves similar questions. For life continues to take its course, and it is necessary for one to understand how to be and what to do next. Here, freedom for all becomes one

dream, all want to leave these hated prison walls. It turns out that the problems for everyone in captivity are almost the same, dreams are the same, but for some reason goals are different.

Why do many prisoners go back to prison? Because these people's goals were mostly mercantile and they didn't find an answer to their own

those present who listened to His Sermon on the Mount: **"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"** (Matthew 7:13-14).

simply be waited with open arms only because they became believers in prison. This is not true. If one in prison does nothing for God while considering himself a believer, they are unlikely to want to do anything for Him while free. Few are waiting for such self-centered people to be released. Therefore, it turns out that after leaving prison,

can I do?" After all, the Scripture says unequivocally: **"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"** (James 2:26).

From the foregoing, it follows that all of us believers must one way or another work for the Lord, and we can always do this work for our neighbor. For by doing good deeds for people, we thereby serve the Lord. The Bible says: **"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"** (Matthew 25:40). Therefore, even though we are currently imprisoned, we have no obstacles to serving the Lord by serving our neighbor. If we learn how to do good deeds for our neighbor, then upon leaving the prison none of us will be lost in what the Lord is asking of us and what to do next. In order to learn this, you must first work on yourself: eradicating bad habits, weaknesses, envy, irritation, anger, and, of course, hypocrisy and falsehood. You also need to ask the Lord to endow you with love and wisdom, which we all lack so much. Apostle James gives good advice on this occasion: **"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him"** (James 1:5).

I believe that it is very important for everyone to seek for themselves an answer to the question: "Why am I living?" In fact, the meaning of this question is very deep, but there is still an answer to it. As I stated previously, for each person there is only one main choice as well as one main goal, which is achieved by our deeds and actions throughout life. And today, more than ever I understand that I really want to achieve this main goal. What do you say to that?!

I. GORIK.



question: "Why am I living?" Many ask this question but only few find the answer to it. This, perhaps, is one of the most important and basic questions that every person must seek an answer for to understand one's purpose in life.

Let me tell you about myself: when I realized the essence and depth of this question often asked by people, I found an answer to it and I had a goal, which now prevents me from turning either to the left or to the right, because my goal can only be reached by a narrow path, which I, in fact, chose for myself. This path is Jesus Christ. As stated in the gospel, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6).

In this narrow path, I now strive to enter eternal life within a certain time period. The Lord Himself said to all

In this life we all make a choice, on which our whole life depends on. We make a choice in everything. However, there is the most important and main choice — this is life with or without God. There are also temporary goals that a person sets for himself, and there is one goal, which is achieved unlike other goals throughout earthly life, because this goal ends only beyond the threshold of earthly existence.

Today, many inmates start seeking God but forget to ask themselves how worth it is to choose this narrow path. After all, every Christian who has already made his choice in life should have one main goal.

Few know what awaits them in freedom and how to live in order to serve God while free. For many, this topic is blurry and unclear, so it seems to them that beyond the threshold of the prison they will

choosing to live for themselves takes them on the very broad path of trials and temptations, which will certainly lead a person to perdition. For the old life begins again and, as a rule, soon the next term begins and so on in a circle. But for all who return to their previous, sinful lives, the Holy Scriptures unequivocally say: **"For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit', and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'"** (2 Peter 2:21-22).

Therefore, while there is time to ponder, every believer should ask the question: "What have I personally done for the Lord and what else

Before Easter when remembering the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, we may ask ourselves the following question: why and for what purpose did He go to the cross? For many, this is the death of a martyr for a just cause. For some, it's just another injustice in the series of global injustices, the killing of a good person who fell into the whirlpool of political and religious conflicts of that time. For some, an example of patience in the face of persecution. This is not to say that all this is wrong. But to call Jesus simply the great teacher of morality, or simply a martyr for a just cause, means not agreeing on something that's most important.

In the third chapter of Genesis, the devil, tempting the first people, promises that having tasted the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil they will not die. It's a lie. The wages of sin is death, and it is absolutely inevitable. The same tempter encourages us to make a claim in this regard to God. Indeed, well is it difficult for Him to somehow take and circumvent His own law if He loves us?

Imagine that I committed a crime, for example, robbed a shop. I have a friend — a good, honest person who sincerely loves me as a brother. I ask my faithful reliable friend to provide me with an alibi: he can testify that at the time of the crime, he and I were playing chess. However, he refuses to do so. He is my friend who loves me, but he will not bear false witness: he has moral principles. I can be very unhappy, what kind of friend is he?! He doesn't want to save me from prison when it costs him nothing! This is called friendship? Really, he would be happy to save me but does not want to give false testimony — precisely because he is a good and honest person. He will help me once I'm let out, but it's better not to ask him to lie.

## WHAT CHRIST DIED FOR



It's also better not to ask God to act on a lie. This does not mean that He does nothing for our salvation. He does, but not what we expect Him to do. He became a man and died for our sins. It is difficult to swallow human pride; it turns out that we are guilty, bad, spoiled people, whose whole hope is that the innocent and the immaculate die for us? Exactly.

For example, you are drunk and set a fire, but are saved by a fireman who ends up dying in the fire you have set, you will feel deeply ashamed afterwards and not want to accept the salvation. You can keep your pride when you are undeservedly humiliated, but you can not keep it when you are given undeserved beneficence. It's hard to lift your

nose, knowing that the innocent died for your sins. That is why this message is so hard to accept. But the proclamation of the apostles is just this: **For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust (1 Pet. 3:18)**. All our hope — and there is no other hope — that the Innocent died for us. The Holy Word confronts us with this fact.

The gospel emphasizes this, testifying that the first person to go to heaven was a robber, a bandit who turned to the Lord, already dying, **Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"** (Luke 23:42). He could not make amends for his past crimes. He simply asked for mercy, for a gift, and received this gift.

But there are no free gifts. If they are free to the recipient, it just means that someone else paid for them. If friends treat you to dinner, it is because they paid for the food or spent time cooking. If we are given something (small or large) — for us it is free, but donors had to pay for it. We do not pay for our sins, we receive forgiveness for nothing, because the Giver paid for it. As He proclaims, **this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matt. 26:27-28)**. The remission of sins is acquired at the cost of His blood — His painful struggle in Gethsemane, His flagellation, His Cross, His abandonment, His terrible death. There is no cheap grace. All grace is paid on the Cross. We gain forgiveness and eternal life because, as the apostle says, **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. 15:3-4)**.

History reminds us of this truth — the truth that will transform our life if we take it seriously. The king of the universe, **was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities (Is. 53:5)**, He asks: **If you love Me, keep My commandments (John 14:15)**.

Sergey HUDIEV,  
www.foma.ru

### THE LAW AND THE LAWLESS

The Gospel talks about the judgment of Christ shortly and concisely. One thing is made clear from the gospel — the judgment of the Jews over Jesus was lawlessness. However, what was clear to the evangelists and early Christians is not at all obvious to us.

### THE LAW...

From the Gospel it is known how religious leaders of Judea hated Jesus, how many attempts were made to deal with him. In Him they saw a dangerous rebel, destroyer of foundations, an impostor and a blasphemer. And from the day when he publicly resurrected Lazarus from the dead, the decision to destroy Jesus took action. For this purpose the Sanhedrin was specially assembled with the high priest at the head, who is the religious head of Israel. And *from that day they put to kill him (John 11:53)*. However, this was not so simple.

Two thousand years ago, judicial proceedings in Judea did not take place according to the laws of the jungle. Especially when the question was about life and death. It was necessary to institute criminal proceedings against the suspect and bring it to the end. And Jewish law was so different from the famous Roman law that, to make it legally, to sentence an innocent person to death was very difficult, almost impossible.

The Romans conducted a very cautious policy towards the conquered countries, allowing them to largely preserve their identity and cultural and religious traditions. In Judea, the conquerors did not enforce Roman law, but left their traditional legal proceedings to the Jews. According to the Talmud, a judiciary called the Small Sanhedrin existed in every Israeli city with more than 120 citizens. It consisted of 23 judges. Above all these small Sanhedrin stood the supreme court of Israel — the Great Sanhedrin. According to Jewish tradition, started back in Moses times, when God ordered him to take seventy elders to help him rule the people (**Numbers 11:16–17**).

We know from Jewish sources that the Great Sanhedrin included 72 people. In fact, it was the highest legislative, administrative and judicial institution of the country. However, at the time of the Roman conquest, its former greatness had greatly dimmed. And the Romans destroyed the moral rout of the Great Sanhedrin, robbing him of the right to execute death sentences.

However, the Great Sanhedrin continued to sentence to death. Moreover, according to Israeli laws, this was exclusively its right. But any such sentence was to be confirmed by the Roman governor in Judea. And this was not an empty formality. The governor could conduct his own investigation, review or reverse the sentence of the Jews.

But back to the Israeli legal proceedings. The suspect, who was threatened with execution, did not immediately fall into the supreme court. First the suspect needed to pass the middle court. The chairman of the small Sanhedrin questioned the suspect. And if the chairman decided that the suspect really deserved execution, then a meeting of the Great Sanhedrin was going to decide the fate of the defendant.

The criminal proceedings of the Jews were very different from the Roman. No business could be initiated by the authorities themselves. The process was initiated exclusively by statements of witnesses. And there should have been at least two statements. Witnesses could only be direct witnesses to the crime. Statements such as *I heard from someone...* were not accepted. The law required witnesses that stood before the court to be people well known for their high morality. Relatives of both the judges and the accused could not be witnesses.

The testimony of witnesses is a special topic. It was required that they coincide not only in the main, but also in all the secondary details. Witnesses were interrogated separately from each other, and the slightest discrepancy, even in something secondary, was enough to destroy all the evidence. If one of the witnesses spoke in favor of the accused, then he could no longer speak against him, although it was allowed. But even if all the previous conditions were met, and the testimonies of both witnesses coincided in absolutely all details, the judges still tried to save the defendant. And here the second difference between the Hebrew law and the Roman law is manifested. According to the latter, ignorance of the law does not exempt from liability. It was not so with the ancient Jews. The judges asked the witnesses a series of questions, for example,

whether the accused knew about the impending punishment or whether they tried to avert him from the crime. If these questions were answered in a negative sense, the punishment of the suspect was subsequently mitigated.

Then came the lengthy debate of the judges. Candidates for membership in the Great Sanhedrin could also take part in them, but only if their opinion was in favor of the accused. After all the judges spoke out, a vote followed. And it began with the youngest members of the Sanhedrin. Thus, the opinion of senior and more respected judges could not affect the younger ones. The verdict was passed by a majority of the vote. For the final decision in favor of the suspect, just one vote could make a difference, then for the decision against the suspect — two votes. Suppose, out of 23 judges, 12 delivered an acquittal and 11 a guilty verdict. The suspect was immediately released and went home. The opposite situation, 12 people are against, and 11 are in favor. In this case, candidates were allowed into the ranks of voters. This continued until the defendant either made excuses or was not charged.

If the Romans sentenced someone to death, the defendant was executed immediately. In Judea, after the Great

These laws are permeated with the ideas of mercy and the presumption of innocence of the defendant. They are much softer and more humane than the famous Roman law from which the legislation of modern Europe grew.

### IF YOU LIE...

In the Talmud there is a speech by the chairman of the Great Sanhedrin, which he delivered before witnesses who were ready to speak for or against the defendant. And it is entirely possible that Caiaphas spoke these words to the false witnesses that his servants had just found on the streets of Jerusalem at night: *Do not be ignorant that one thing is a money lawsuit and another is a court in which the question of life is decided. First, if your testimony is false, the whole thing can be fixed with money. But if you lie in a court deciding the question of life, the blood of the accused and the blood of his seed until the end of the century will be replaced by you... A person with one seal of his ring can make many prints, but only completely similar to each other, and He, the King of kings of the highest, He, Holy and Blessed, from His image — the first man — took the images of all people, but so that there is not a single person completely similar to another...*

## JUDGMENT OF CHRIST



Crucify him!  
Painter  
Ivan  
Glazunov

Sanhedrin sentenced someone to death, a day later they gathered again in the same criminal process. During this time, court members could once again weigh and ponder their decision. Moreover, the meeting had only one purpose — to favor the defendant, because those judges who had already spoken in favor of the accused, that is, acquitted him, could no longer change their decision. But on the contrary, it was allowed.

And only if the Great Sanhedrin remained unconvinced, the criminal was led to execution. But even here, Jewish criminal proceedings retained the possibility of acquitting the defendant. The procession was accompanied by a special person who walked exactly to the place from which one could see the doors of the court. Next, the procession was accompanied by another person who, in turn, moved to the place from where you could see the first and so on. A man was also standing at the door of the court, and if at the last moment someone came to the Sanhedrin and announced new circumstances that could justify the offender, the person standing at the door gave the go-ahead — the procession returned and the court resumed.

And the last thing to say about the Hebrew legal proceedings. The Great Sanhedrin could sit only in the daytime. In no case could sessions be held at night or on holidays. And since there should have been a day between the first and second meetings, the process could not start on the eve of the holidays or Saturday (Saturday is a day of rest, when, according to Jewish laws, practically nothing can be done).

This was the criminal justice of the Jews of the time of Christ. They acted according to the principle: it is better to release ten guilty than to punish one innocent. Reading all these laws (recorded in the Talmud), you clearly see that they grew out of the Bible and are literally saturated with its content.

### ...AND LAWLESS

Today, reading the gospel about the judgment of Christ, we are surprised and do not understand much of what happened. But the evangelists had no idea that they need to explain all this. After all, they are Jews and knew their laws perfectly, or, rather, understood the lawlessness that happened in the Great Sanhedrin on the night of Thursday to Friday, the 14th day of Nisan, a few hours before the death of Christ. Let us be transported to that night.

After the arrest of the Savior, they were taken along the sleeping streets of Jerusalem to the house of the father-in-law of the high priest Caiaphas, named Anna (Anan). He was a very influential person, the founder of the clan, from which the high priests came out, who ruled in Judea for more than fifty years.

As already mentioned, the suspect could not appear before the Great Sanhedrin without passing the small one. Perhaps Anan was the chairman of the local Jerusalem Sanhedrin. They decided to institute criminal proceedings against Jesus. Only witnesses of Jesus's "crime" could do this. However, there are no witnesses in Anan's house. And he independently tries to initiate the process by asking Christ about His disciples and doctrine. Interpreters of the Gospel unanimously say that the cunning Anan wanted to provoke Jesus to say words that could catch on and, following all of the formalities, initiate a criminal case.

In fact the absence of witnesses indicates a violation of the procedural law, that is, the process could not even be started. The Lord points to the absence of any eyewitnesses of His "criminal acts" when answering Anan: *I spoke clearly to the world; I always taught in the synagogue and in the temple, where the Jews always converge, and secretly did not say anything. What are you asking me? Ask those who heard what I told them (John 18:20–21)*.

In response, a new violation of the law

occurred. One of Anan's servants hit Jesus on the cheek, although Jewish law categorically forbade hitting the suspects, giving them complete freedom of speech. Having achieved nothing, Anan sends the Savior to his son-in-law, the high priest Caiaphas. Despite the deep night, the Great Sanhedrin gathered in the house of Caiaphas (although by law the court could not meet at such a time). Jesus entered the room where the judges sat in a semicircle. In the center of the semicircle is the chairman of the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas. Two secretaries took their usual places: one closer to the right side of the semicircle to record evidence in favor of the defendant, and the other closer to the left to record accusatory evidence. Everything was as usual. The judges' clothes were also usual: talit — a white silk veil thrown over a black mantle — togas. Unusual was only the identity of the defendant and the sentence that had already been handed down in advance. Now, by all means, the Great Sanhedrin needed to do this formally.

Before the judges passed a line of witnesses, or rather false witnesses. The Gospel mentions that their testimonies were not enough. We remember how reverently Jewish proceedings related to witness testimony. It can be assumed that not even two people were found who said the same thing. According to the law, Jesus should have been immediately released, but this was not the plans of the Sanhedrin. Realizing that with the help of false witnesses, quickly gathered on the streets of a sleeping city, he would not achieve anything, Caiaphas decided to act on his own. He rises from his place and approaches Christ with the words: *Why don't you answer anything? What do they testify against you?* Jesus was silent.

Both the Lord and Caiaphas knew very well that, according to Jewish laws, the accused cannot speak against himself. Even if the defendant began to talk in his favor, no one would listen to him and such a testimony would mean absolutely nothing. Only direct witnesses could testify against the suspect and prove the suspect guilty. If the accused admits himself guilty then why do we need a law on two witnesses?

But Caiaphas did not stop there. And he says the words: *I curse you with the living God, tell us, Are you the Christ, the Son of God?* For any Jew, a curse in the name of God was sacred. But in criminal trials, it was applied only to witnesses who refused to speak. This did not apply to the defendant. So the law took care of the suspects themselves. Imagine a person who faces death. But he knows that, having made a false oath in the name of God, he will be released. Of course, not everyone will decide to do that, but still... And so as not to add the sin of oath to the crime of the criminal, Jewish law did not apply a curse on the defendant.

In response to the curse, Jesus confesses Himself as the Son of God, and the high priest rips his toga from his chin to his waist, as a sign that he hears blasphemy, which, according to Jewish laws, was a serious crime. The Sanhedrin passes judgment: guilty of death. And again, contrary to the law, the second meeting of the Sanhedrin is not gathered in a day, but after only a few hours. But the second gathering, of course, does not change anything in the fate of the defendant. By the way, in a day the judges would not be able to get together, because Easter was approaching, which lasted a whole week among the Jews.

Thus ended this criminal process. Jesus was led to Pilate to confirm the death sentence. And when the Roman official heard from the Jewish crowd that Jesus must die because he made himself the Son of God, he was frightened and demanded explanation from Jesus, saying that he had the power to crucify him or let him go. To this the Lord answered: *You would not have any power over Me if it were not given to you from above; therefore more sin is on the one who betrayed Me.*

These words mean that the Savior stood before the Great Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate only because He himself planned for this to happen. God voluntarily gave Himself into the hands of people who decided His fate. He knew what the decision would be, a cross. This decision remains on their conscience. And for Christians without the Cross there would never have been Easter joy. Christ is risen! At first was spoken quietly and insecurely by the disciples of the Savior, but then in a firm statement that He really rose again, giving people life with God.

## TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

When ordinary people talk about miracles, they usually imagine something incredible violating the laws of the physical world. Things like moving a mountain from right to left, or putting his or her hand in an old pocket to discover a packet of cash. It is clear why such miracles do not happen: so, what is the point of indulging in silly fantasies?!

Usually, these people do not notice genuine miracles. Because these miracles are not in the material projection: "neither eat, nor drink, nor kiss". It was such a miracle that changed the lives of Vladimir and Marina Lupentsov. True, it is worth noting that any church has stories about how the Word of God transforms people, dozens, if not hundreds. You listen to them and understand what Jesus had in mind when he said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Matthew 9:12). In fact, the miracle of spiritual healing is the foundation of the church living according to the precepts of Christ.

finances to hold and keep a separate church building especially in the winters when you have to heat everything up.

"We decided to gather in homes. This Sunday we will gather at the Ivanov's house, next Sunday we will gather with the Anoshin's family, and then at the Silkin's. And that's how we serve one another".

In a village as large as Znamenskoye, people are closer to each other. And they truly value genuine interest, love and care more than the most wonderful and bright words. So missionary work is inextricably linked to helping the low-income families, the elderly and orphans.

Vladimir shares, "We have two clown costumes. Marina and I dress up and go to the orphanage and give presentations to the kiddos. We visit the elderly with presents and spend time with troubled teenagers".

His eyes light up when he talks about this direction of his

She prayed and fasted. She asked her church to pray and fast for her husband so that he would repent and let Jesus into his heart. "I remember the day when he called and asked me to mail him a Bible. This was a testimony to me that God is a living God and He hears our prayers".

Vladimir was moved from a prison where he could freely buy phones and drugs to a "strict" prison. "There they put me in a punishment cell for what I did not do. They just needed a negative person who could take the blame. I was beaten for three days, practically being killed. I started to part with my life when I turned to God in thought, 'Lord, if you exist how my wife believes, I ask you to change my life!'

The police officials stated, 'We know that it wasn't you. You are pardoned'. Right then and there I knew that just like Christ suffered and was resurrected on the third day, I was destined to suffer to then be free from the chains of sin.

**Vladimir and Marina LUPENTSOV:****"GOD CHANGED OUR LIFE!"****New Life**

"The residents of our village got the news that our rehabilitation center has HIV — infected drug addicts in addition to regular drug addicts. And for them it was like a plague. This was a disaster for them — they turned to the police, the sanitary and epidemiological station, firefighters... Everyone took up arms against us and demanded that the 'AIDS nursery' be closed. They were afraid: suddenly someone would run away and infect the population. The head of administration vowed to expel us from the district within twenty-four hours and scheduled a meeting at which the rehabilitation center was supposed to get 'slammed'.

...And what about me? I was young and didn't know the Constitution or any laws. Yet, I decided that I needed to pray because it was beyond human power to withstand such opposition — I must give this situation into God's hands. We sent out text messages to churches requesting their prayers.

On the appointed day all the services gathered in the auditorium: doctors, orderlies, firemen, police... Full house. Everyone was waiting for the head of the administration. He finally appeared. He went to the podium, silently took out the accordion (he is a button accordion player) and began to play. One song, the second, the third... He poured out his emotions. He put the accordion away and gloomily stated, 'Everyone is dismissed! There will be no meeting!'

I don't know what happened. Maybe the smart authorities told the head of the administration that he was not the king of the mountain and could not repeal Russian laws in his particular region. Or something else happened. But our common prayer worked — that's for sure! For me, this was a testament to how God responds to our sincere requests. Nobody has thrown us out of the village, we still serve. And then the head of the administration was locked up — for theft and bribes..."

Vladimir Lupentsov shares about his ministry in a taiga village, 350 miles north of Omsk, with a smile. How he and his wife arrived at the Znamenskoye Village and they were unable to rent an apartment for a week — they spent the night in a dressing room for a week.

He laughs, "The mosquitoes were like sparrows — very tough! They would devour us at night. We once decided to outfit them. We turned the lights off where we stayed and turned them on next door. They all flew toward the light and we quickly shut the door after them".

He says that such inconveniences did not matter too much.

"That was my schooling, so to say. I could care less where and how I slept. I was always certain that God was looking after us. I was only concerned about my wife. How is she? Then they finally prepared a room for us in the rehab center and we moved there. The administration gave us an abandoned school building without windows or doors — everything was destroyed".

Marina recalls those first days with horror, "The mosquitoes were so fat! It seemed like they were everywhere! Even the bathroom had mosquitoes. And nothing helped! No sprays, no ointments, no mosquito traps! They were not afraid of anything! These were the first challenges we faced. Now, I deal with it perfectly fine but then it was a different story".

She remembers that they prepared a year for this mission. They prayed.

"Seven other people were supposed to join in to help build the rehab center and all of them backed out. We were left alone. A fellow brother joined us last minute. God led him to us in prayer. Even the sisters in our church tried to talk me out of it, 'You have everything here in Omsk — an apartment and work, why would you go somewhere desolate?'".

The rehab center is up and running now. Vladimir says that the locals suffer from alcoholism. There is no work in the village, no "life potential" and so these people just drink. It's almost considered a norm for their village. There are few drug-addicts. The rehab center is mostly full of visitors from Omsk.

"Far away from the city and its temptations. The taiga and mud are all around us. What else do you need to see the face of God?!"

The local Protestant church isn't big. Prayer meetings are usually held at home and by turn. There aren't any

life. Vladimir Lupentsov is the coordinator of the evangelical ministry "Hope in Every Home" in Omsk and Tyumen.

"In my Christian life, my soul lies in evangelism. I am ready to go to preach the gospel even to the ends of the earth! Meet people, tell them about Jesus, teach other believers the ability to communicate. We now have only one hundred and thirty volunteers in the Omsk region! Forty-five churches are involved in the "Hope in Every Home" ministry!

...The villagers usually meet us very well. It's people in the city who are incredulous, sometimes angry — they can scold, and even attack us with fists. And in the village if you come, then you are viewed as a guest — they try to feed you and they drink tea with you. And we do not campaign for any church denomination — we do not try to impose any doctrines. We just talk about Jesus, about his life and teaching. And people listen, they are responsive to the Word of God!"

Marina and Vladimir have served in the taiga for five years. This new life is full of enormous purpose.

Vladimir brings up the most recent story when they drove to an evangelism event. They drove by the Aleksandrovskaya Village.

"The road is horrible and the car is old. We could've been stuck with only two houses on different sides of the village. It seemed smarter to drive around this village but the Holy Spirit led us directly to this village.

One house was locked. We were greeted in the second house. The house seemed poor and we could tell that they might have some needs. We spoke to the lady of the house, left her some food, basic daily necessities, a Bible, booklets. When we were parting we asked her if she has any other requests that we could pray for. 'No', she responded, 'everything is good. Everything is okay...'

'Maybe you want us to pray for your health?' we asked. 'Yes', she said. 'Pray for health! My husband is dying in the room next door...'

We quickly went in. There was a man in his 70s laying. He could not speak but he could understand and hear everything. I told him about Jesus and asked if he wanted to make peace with God and pray the prayer of repentance. He so desperately nodded. I saw that his eyes were full of tears as he silently prayed. I understood that this man accepted Christ. Two days later we learned that he left for eternity. A saved man".

And Vladimir's eyes withheld tears. He cannot believe that only ten years ago he was a different person...

**The Old Life**

Ten years ago, Vladimir Lupentsov was a drug addict and thief. He was barred three times. He was a person who didn't seem to have any trace of goodness and a person nobody believed. His mother would tell him that he was a "finished creature" who would spend the rest of his days in prison.

There was only one person on this entire planet who knew that Vladimir would change and become a different man. This was Marina. She did not know how it would happen but she firmly believed that this would certainly happen.

"We lived in the same community", she shares, "where everyone knew everything about everyone. I knew everything about his family. I knew everything about him. My friends and parents tried to talk me out — you'll be miserable with him; only his grave will fix him. I would respond with a, 'No! He will definitely be different!' I did not have the slightest doubt".

But there was still so much to go through for that change to occur. Vladimir got convicted and imprisoned for theft — a good five years locked up. Marina decided to do the unexplainable — commit her life to him... officially. "I never dreamed about a wedding in prison with lawyers and guards".

Life outside of prison was going about its course — falling captive to the continuous fight between good and evil. Two of Marina's older brothers became drug addicts. Now she was fighting for them too. Her oldest brother repented in a rehab center. Now he is a pastor. The second brother healed afterwards. He now serves in the children's ministry. Marina followed her brothers' example and started attending church. She knew that the only One who had the power to change her husband was Jesus.



I left the punishment cell and joined the Christian brothers to pray a prayer of repentance. This happened on February 12, 2011. My spiritual birthday.

I changed in an instant. I refused to smoke, curse, and all bad habits. I was shattered. My heart broke apart into bits and pieces and was cleansed when God came into it. I started to read the Bible and paraphrase it to other inmates however I could. Many thought I've gone mad — he used to run the criminal ways, was a decent dude and now he put on 'new shoes...' and socializes with Christians. But I could care less. The most important thing was that I had freedom from sin and a true relationship with brothers".

"Vladimir called me 6 months before he was let go and said, 'Honey, I'm free!' I got all excited and yelled, 'You're free? Where are you? Wait a bit and I'll come and meet you!'

'No', he responded. 'I am free from the chains of sin. I repented and took Jesus into my heart'".

"It did not matter what side of the fence I was on. God set me free and I had freedom in Jesus Christ! It was October when I left prison and we went to church the very next day. I understood that this is my home. These are my dear brothers and sisters with whom I'm ready to spend the rest of my life with. In January I left to a missionary school and got baptized".

**A Little Bit of Happiness**

Marina shares, "Two weeks ago, my friend called me. This friend knew us from when we were teenagers. She said, 'I'm sorry but I have to tell you something. When you and Vladimir started living together and then you got married to him, we all thought that you were crazy. We could not understand what you were doing. Now I look at your pictures and think to myself, 'she is so happy!' My life isn't like that. I got divorced. We thought you two would be doomed but it turned out the other way around'. I responded, 'God changed our life!'

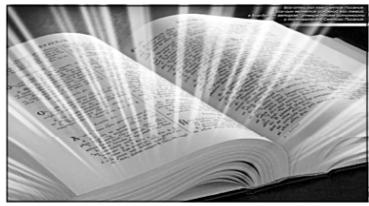
Now, I can say with great confidence that I dreamed my whole life for a husband like Vladimir! When he's around I feel comfort and warmth. He is so reliable! I love when he is home. When he is near".

"I call my wife a blessing. She prayed for me, she walks this life path with me, she shares my views. I am deeply happy that I have purpose and a dream. Dreamers are those people who, in my understanding, go after their dream. They achieve it every day. They don't lay around on a sofa dreaming about something. When I go to a store or stand at a bus stop, I always have the goal of introducing at least one person to Christ. The Bible says that we are a testimony of Christ and we must share of His Glory. Once he changed my life.

And regarding the type of church the person will choose to attend — I think that the Holy Spirit will guide them. I am just happy when I see that he or she had a chance to accept Salvation. This is the greatest joy to me".

## PASTOR'S WORD

## PEACE OF MIND



Today, I want to raise the issue of such a phenomenon as peace of the heart and mind. The peace of mind is not just the absence of fears, worries, anxieties, or painful remorse, but a state of inner harmony between the spirit and the soul of a person with a pure, sanctified conscience.

The first people created by God were in harmony with God and with themselves. They had a heartfelt peace and pure thinking. They did not know such sinful feelings as laziness, greed, selfishness, pride. They didn't even know how they manifested. All this appeared later after the disobedience of the first people to God and obedience to the devil in the garden of Eden. After the fall, man became directly associated with the devil and lost the peace of the heart and inner harmony. Now often the natural state of mind of adults is dissatisfaction, anxiety, worries, fear of the future. This is a condition that encourages people to search for ghostly happiness in vain and eventually forces many to use means that lead away from reality, such as alcohol, drugs and all sorts of antidepressants. Only the carefree state of small happy children is a vague reminder of the bliss lost by humanity. To achieve what is lost, many turn to psychologists and various religious teachers to balance their inner peace, but unfortunately without noticeable results.

This is what the Bible says about it:

**Eccl. 3:11** — *He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

**Eccl. 7:29** — *Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.*

**Is. 48:22** — *There is no peace says the Lord, for the wicked.*

For this reason, many well-off people are unhappy when they have everything.

I remember a time when a religious man in an American city restored the mansion of a certain rich lady. After some time spent in this rich house, when he met his hostess, he could not help saying: "The mistress of such a magnificent palace should be happy". These words aroused strange feelings in this elderly lady, and she pointedly invited him to go into her bedroom, where she pulled out a drawer from the table and showed a loaded pistol. After that, she asked with sadness: "Do you know how many times I wanted to commit suicide?" This brother was just shocked: he did not expect to hear this.

Yes, the absence of peace with God deprives a person of peace of heart, makes them deeply unhappy and pushes him to unreasonable steps.

According to statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO), every 40 seconds in the world there is an act of suicide. And this figure is the highest in high-income countries, at 11.5 per 100,000 people. In high-income countries, men are almost three times more likely to commit suicide than women, while in low- and middle-income countries, the rates for both genders are roughly equal. Among young people aged 15–29, suicide is the second leading cause of death after the auto accidents (information taken from the 2016 WHO report).

**Is. 57:20–21** — *...but the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace for the wicked".*

**Rom. 2:9** — *...tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil...*

### Some of the statements what the heart peace is about:

☉ The absence of sin that divides us from God and the absence from condemnation of conscience.

☉ The state of inner harmony of a person at a time when he has a direct relationship with God.

☉ No fears, worries, or agonizing experiences.

☉ A state of deep peace that has a beneficial effect even on the physical health of the person.

☉ The inner state of the heart and mind, for which many people are willing to pay anything to have.

☉ A state of inner harmony, the value of which can only be estimated by the one who received it.

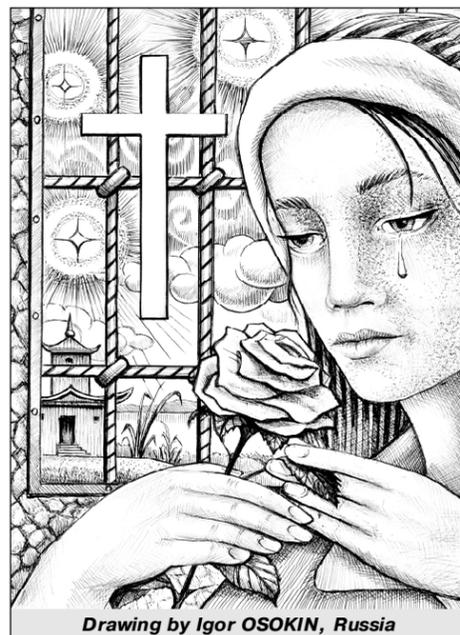
Interestingly, the Bible calls the Creator of the Universe the God of love and peace. It is a source of heartfelt joy and deep inner peace.

**2 Cor. 13:11** — *Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Only He can really give the heart peace lost by mankind, restore deep peace of mind and fill life with meaning and joy! God can make us able to keep our soul at rest in the midst of all kinds of trials, difficulties, and suspense. How valuable is this deep inner peace, under the influence of which a person can make the right life decisions! How necessary it is for God and men to have souls capable of possessing this peace and preserving it under any conditions! By reconciling with God, man finds this peace.

To have the peace of God is the purpose and great advantage of people who believe in God.

**Col. 3:15** — *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called...*



Drawing by Igor OSOKIN, Russia

### What does a person need to acquire this peace?

Repentance for your sins and reconciliation with the source of peace (Christ) is the main condition for receiving and keeping the peace of the heart. Only a person who is reconciled to God can understand the difference between a life without God and a full, peaceful life with Him. And it is not so difficult to get it. You only need to turn to God with a sincere heart and you will be heard.

**Matt. 11:28** — *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...*

**Rom. 14:17** — *...for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**Jn. 14:27** — *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

**1 Cor. 6:17** — *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.*

### The trials of life

In the life of every adult, there are many things that can take away not only the peace of the heart, but also sleep. There are such hopeless situations in life that are very depressing for a person, for example: disability, life imprisonment, cancer, paralysis. This is a state where every day that comes causes suffering. Melancholy, despondency, hopelessness do not allow a person to live and breathe in peace. What to do in such situations?

A crucial role in such situations is played by a person's faith and communication with God, as well as trust in the Word of God, which reveals the meaning of what is happening to us. You may ask: "But how can communication with God help a person who is on his deathbed or in prison for life? Especially when circumstances don't change. As a person was ill, so he is ill, as he was in prison, they remain in the same conditions". We know many cases in which God still heals the seriously ill and even brings some back to life. It happens that prisoners are released early due to a change in legislation or an Amnesty. But even if nothing like this happens in the life of a person who has turned to God, his attitude to the circumstances in which he finds himself changes radically: from hopelessness and

despondency to joy and hope. Being in a close relationship with God moves a person to a completely different atmosphere, to a zone of peace in which all human "whys" disappear and a new perception opens up. A person who loves the Lord more than he loves himself usually says, "Lord, if you think it would be better for me to be ill or in prison, then Your will be done". With such an internal change in a person, daily suffering ceases to be such, but unprecedented horizons of opportunities for serving God and people open up. I was a witness myself when I visited a paralyzed (from the waist down) woman and a believer who had been in this state for more than 40 years, and found in her, instead of despondency and thirst for comfort, the ability to encourage others.

**Rom. 8:28** — *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

**2 Cor. 4:17–18** — *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

By the way, a life with difficulties is usually more productive than a life spent in bliss. The Apostle Paul shared an interesting thought that he experienced many sufferings in order to be able to understand and help others in similar circumstances (**2 Cor. 1:3–6**). And this is true: people who have gone through sorrows, difficulties, and illnesses are more compassionate to others.

Nor should we forget that our brief temporary life here on earth is only a preparation for a life that will last forever. Therefore, it is not worthwhile to be sad if in our life things are not the way we would like them to be.

### How to protect the inner peace of your heart?

How to overcome difficult periods of our life, while maintaining peace? What is needed for this? It should be noted that the following tips will work for people who believe in God and have given their lives to the Lord for His guidance and management. To them, Christ offers to place all the needs, cares, and anxieties that arise on Him, because He will gladly take care of them.

The peace of the heart is maintained by faith. Trusting God in all life's problems is a condition for keeping the peace of the heart.

The Bible advises the following:

**Ps. 55:22** — *Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never let the righteous man be moved.*

**Matt. 6:34** — *...therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things: sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

What do I need to do? It is to simply believe in the truthfulness of the words spoken by Christ and really put all your worries on Him, and direct all the released energy to the search for the Kingdom of God and the fulfillment of His truth. Or, in other words, to know and fulfill the will of God throughout your life and thereby serve God and people. Only trusting in God, believing that He controls everything and will never leave, will help us keep calm.

**Is. 26:3** — *You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You: because he trusts in You.*

The basis of calm and the maintenance of peace is dependent on placing our concerns in His hands in a childish way. The Apostle Peter can be such an example for us. He was arrested and put in prison. The night before he was to be taken out and executed, he slept peacefully. He was able to entrust his life to the Heavenly master, and therefore, filled with the peace of God, he slept peacefully. It was Peter's trust in God as the Master of his life that allowed God to perform the miracle of deliverance, which is described in the 12th chapter of Acts.

How many people are sick today, physically and mentally, because they are experiencing a lot in life and cannot entrust their worries to God! Even more than that, they prevent God from helping them with their fears and worries.

**1 Pet. 5:7** — *...casting all your cares on Him, for He cares for you.*

The word lay is an imperative verb and means a specific action is required from a person. The literal meaning is: you need to take all the worries, raise them high, approach

the Lord, put them on his shoulders, and then (very importantly) unclench your hands. How does this happen?

☉ Check the state of your heart: do not share anything with the Lord, because God does not listen to sinners (**Jn. 9:31**)?

☉ Pray in faith about a problem or need until you receive an internal testimony from the Lord that your prayer is heard and the answer is sent.

☉ After receiving a heartfelt testimony, give thanks to the Lord and close the door of your mind for further discussion and agitation on this topic, since God is already dealing with it, and we can only prevent him with our worries.

☉ Expect in faith (**Lament. 3:26** — *...it is good for those who wait patiently for salvation from the Lord*).

**Is. 26:12** — *Lord! You give us peace; for you also arrange all our affairs for us.*

**Phil. 4:6–7** — *...do not worry about anything, but always in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving open your desires before God, and the peace of God, which is above all mind, will keep your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.*

God himself wants people to have peace with Him and with each other.

**Matt. 5:9** — *...blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God.*

**1 Pet. 3:11** — *...turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and strive for it...*

**Rom. 14:19** — *...so let us seek that which serves for peace and mutual edification.*

**1 Thess. 5:23** — *The God of peace Himself shall sanctify you in all your fullness, and your spirit and soul and body in all their integrity shall be preserved without blemish at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Mk. 9:50** — *Salt is a good thing; but if salt is not salty, how will you correct it? Have salt in you, and have peace among yourselves.*

### A few additional tips for keeping the peace

☉ **Humble ourselves**

**Luk. 14:11** — *...for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

**Jam. 4:6** — *God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*

☉ **Learn to weed out troublesome thoughts**

**Prov. 23:19** — *Hear, my son, and be wise; And guide your heart in the way.*

**Prov. 2:1–5** — *...my Son! if you... bend your heart to think... then... you will find knowledge of God.*

**Is. 55:7** — *Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*

**Zach. 7:9–10** — *Execute true justice, Show mercy and compassion Everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, The alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart Against his brother.*

**Zach. 8:17** — *"Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate", Says the Lord.*

**Phil. 4:8** — *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things...*

**Col. 3:1–2** — *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.*

☉ **Stay in the study of the Bible and the fulfillment of the commandments of Christ in practice**

The peace of God goes out of the heart of the Christian who loses his love for the Word of God and his thirst for communion with it.

**Is. 48:18** — *Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, waves of the sea.*

**Ps. 119:165** — *Great peace have those who love Your law.*

☉ **Thank God for everything**

With praise, worries and worldly anxieties disappear. The devil is afraid of our gratitude to God. When God is thanked, demonic strongholds are destroyed and emotional healing occurs.

**Ps. 33:1** — *Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful.*

**1 Thess. 5:18** — *...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

**Heb. 13:15** — *Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

The Bible is an amazing book. It has been the most demanded work by mankind for more than two thousand years. Interest in the Holy Scriptures does not fade even though it does not have any advertising. There is still lots concern in the Holy Spirit.

We have collected 50 most interesting facts about the Holy Bible for our readers, and we hope that they will be not only entertaining for you but also useful.

#### 1. THE BIBLE DOES NOT HAVE A NAME

The word Bible comes from the ancient Greek *βιβλος* — *papyrus, book*. The vast majority of books have titles: *Three Comrades, Tale of Bygone Years, Odyssey*, etc. However, the Bible does not need a name. All people, on Earth, simply say: The Book. It is enough for their interlocutors immediately understand that discourse is over a Book of Books.

#### 2. THE BIGGEST EDITION

As of 2013, more than six million Bibles or individual Bible books have already been published in the world. This number is more than six times the number of copies of the next most popular book. Thirty-two thousand five hundred new Bibles are printed every day in the world.

#### 3. PROGRESS OF PRINTING

Printing machines were invented and improved primarily for the publication of the Bible! The cost of a handwritten book was equal to the cost of a castle at the beginning of the 13th century. In the 15th century, the printed edition had a cost as a team of thoroughbred horses. In the 17th century, the cost was dropped down to a pair of good shoes. By the 19th century, the value of the Bible reached the price of several dozen eggs, and scripture became available to everyone.

#### 4. AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE

Over forty people worked on the texts of the Holy Scripture for more than a thousand years from the 15th century until the birth of Christ to the 1st century after the birth of Christ. Many of them did not even know each other. However, there are no apparent contradictions or inconsistencies in the Bible.

#### 5. TRANSLATIONS

According to the German Bible Society at the beginning of 2005, the Bible is fully or partially translated into two thousand three hundred seventy-seven languages and dialects, and fully published already in four hundred twenty two languages. Even the blind can read the Holy Book in eighty-four different Braille languages. Audio versions of the Bible are issued for illiterate and busy people.

#### 6. BOOK OF TALES

Some people question the inspiration of scripture. However, the Bible is a book created by a huge number of authors who have had vast experience in completely different fields; therefore, it cannot be a collection of silly

fairy tales. Among the biblical writers were kings Solomon and David, a shepherd Amos, a doctor Luke, fishermen Peter and John, prophets Moses, Isaiah and Daniel, general Joshua, artisan apostle Paul, official Apostle Matthew and so on. Some of them were not Jews but Greeks or even Roman citizens.

#### 7. MOTHER OF DIVINE

As of today, the proportion of literate and educated people among Christians is higher than among atheists and representatives of other religions; eighty eight percent is out of total for men and

over the course of rewriting.

#### 13. GRANDFATHER OF MANKIND

The oldest person described in the Bible is Methuselah. He was representing the eight generation after Adam. He died at the age of 969. Most people lived for about 900 years in those days. The Lord reduced the lives of people to the modern 80 to 120 years due to lawlessness in humanity.

#### 14. WORDS IN THE BIBLE

Words *do not be afraid* appear in the Bible three hundred sixty five times as

in biblical texts most often after the name of Jesus Christ: 1118 times.

#### 20. THE SMALLEST BIBLE

The smallest Bible (New Testament) was printed by using the photomechanical reduction method at the end of the 19th century. As a result, the book turned out to be 1.9 x 1.6 cm in size and less than 1 cm thick. A small magnifying glass was put on the cover of each Bible to read the text.

#### 21. MUSLIMS

The founder of Islam Muhammad was familiar with the

#### 25. BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE LORD

The gospel mentions about the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. Some Christians believe that they were the children of Mary and Joseph, who were born after the birth of Jesus Christ. Others believe that they were cousins, children of Joseph from his first marriage. The fact is that the Lord had both brothers and sisters no matter which opinion is expressed by Christians of various religions. By the way, the brothers of the Jesus became His apostles later. Jacob was one of them. He led the first Christian community in Jerusalem.

#### 26. THE SINAI CODEX

The oldest complete list of the New Testament is part of the Sinai Bible Codex dated to 4th century. The parts are stored in Russia, Great Britain, Germany and the Sinai.

#### 27. CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Alexandrian Pope Athanasius the Great was the first of the most authoritative authors who listed all the canonical books of the New Testament. The canon was fixed at the local Laodicean Cathedral in 360 and finally confirmed at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 680. It is interesting that all four Gospels that fell into the canon were distributed by a huge number of handwritten copies among Christians of the 1st and 2nd centuries and were universally accepted as true.

#### 28. PROHIBITED

The Bible is the most prohibited book. History shows that laws were passed against the Bible. The violation led the death penalty. For example, death is a penalty for reading the Bible in North Korea. In the Soviet Union, Bibles were forcibly seized from the population. People who had copies could be subjected to repression.

#### 29. ANCIENT DISCOVERIES

The most ancient Bible verses belong to the **Book of Numbers 6:22–27**. They are engraved on two silver objects which were found under the Scottish Church in Jerusalem in 1979. Engraving date is from the beginning of the 6th century BC.

#### 30. WORDS AND LETTERS

The scripture counts 3,566,480 letters, grouped into 773,692 or 773,746 words, depending on the method of calculation.

#### 31. THE SHORTEST VERSE

The shortest verse of the Bible is found in the **Gospel of John 11:35: *Jesus wept.***

#### 32. THE LONGEST VERSE

The longest verse of the Bible belongs to the Book of Esther. This is the ninth verse of the eighth chapter. It is consisted of ninety words and describes the empire of the Persians.

(Continued on the 12th page)

## 50 MOST INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

eighty one percent for women. Previously, some unenlightened people received together with Christianity their own written language, literature and history. This cultural rise was associated with the need to master literacy and get a good education for reading the Bible and understanding own faith.

#### 8. PROPHECIES

Texts of the Old Testament contain prophecies that were performed hundreds of years later. Prophecies also exist in the New Testament. Many of them have been executed in history. It further indicates the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures.

#### 9. CANONICAL AND NON-CANONICAL BOOKS

The Bible consists of two large sections: The Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament contains thirty-nine canonical books that are recognized by the church. The New Testament contains twenty-seven books. Additional eleven books of the Old Testament are not included in the church canon.

#### 10. CHAPTERS AND VERSES

The chapters of the Bible were divided by Canterbury bishop Stephen Langton in the 13th century. The verses were divided by French poet Robert Etienne in the 16th century. After this the Bible acquired a modern look and ease in citation such as book, chapter and verse.

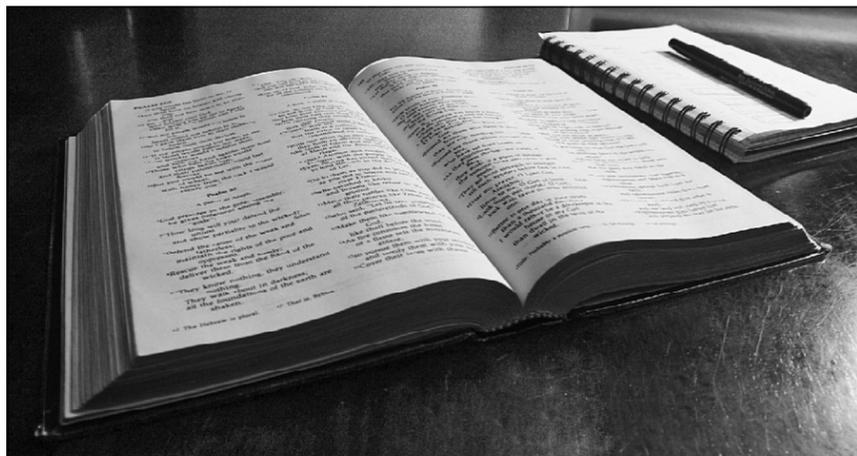
#### 11. A NEED

According to law enforcement, the Bible is stolen more often than other books...

#### 12. AMAZINGLY ACCURATE BOOK

In 1947, the Qumran Bible scrolls dating to the 1st century were discovered. When comparing with the Bibles of the 10th century, scientists have found that over a thousand years the Bible has not undergone any major changes that would affect its content. Many other works have changed

the number of days in a year. The word *Christian* appears only three times. In the Hebrew text, the verb *create from nothing* occurs three times: during the creation of



the world, the creation of living beings and the creation of man.

#### 15. COMMENTS AND QUOTES

Scripture is the most quoted and commented book in the world. Only the collection of one First Epistle of the Apostle John occupies a room of two hundred fifteen sq. ft. in the Bodleian Library of the Oxford University.

#### 16. READING TIME

It takes at least thirty-eight hours to read the Old Testament, and eleven hours to read the New Testament. Therefore, the entire Bible can be read in at least forty-nine hours. The numbers provided for a non-stop reading.

#### 17. SCOTLAND'S COURIER

The Bible is not fully translated into Scottish. However, there is a Scottish translation of the New Testament by William Lorimer. It is noteworthy that the speech of Satan is translated in plain English.

#### 18. BIBLE NAMES

The longest name found in the Bible is Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. The Lord told the prophet Isaiah to call this name his son who was born by the prophetess. It means *quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil* (Isaiah 8:1).

#### 19. KING AND PROPHET DAVID

The creator of the Psalms King David was very loved by God. His name is mentioned

texts of the Holy Scriptures and used them when writing the Koran. Muslims honor the Old Testament forefathers and Jesus Christ, whom they consider one of the prophets.

#### 22. VOW ON THE BIBLE

The tradition of swearing on the Bible is contrary to the text of the scripture: *Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn". But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No"; anything more than this comes from evil* (Matthew 5:33–37).

#### 23. MOST EXPENSIVE BIBLE

The most expensive Bible was published in 1456 by the first German printer Johannes Gutenberg. Gutenberg printed hundred and eighty copies. Only twenty-one books have been preserved. Various copies are estimated from twenty-five to thirty five million dollars. Even more expensive was the Sinai Bible Code. It belonged to the Russian imperial house and was sold by the Bolsheviks to Great Britain for five hundred and ten million dollars.

#### 24. BIBLE'S KINGS

The longest ruler was the King of Manasseh. He had been on the throne for fifty-five years (2 Kings 21:1). On the contrary, King Zimri was the ruler for only seven days (1 Kings 16:15).

# 50 MOST INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

(Ending. Beginning on the 11th page)

## 33. CHILDREN'S BIBLE

Children's editions are based on biblical events and richly equipped with vivid illustrations. They appeared relatively recently, in the second half of the 19th century, and quickly gained popularity. The most famous editions were compiled by Borislav Arapovich and Vera Mattemlyaki. They were published by the Stockholm Institute of Bible Translation in thirty languages with a total circulation of approximately eight million copies.

## 34. RUSSIAN BIBLE SOCIETY

The Russian Bible Society was founded in 1813. It is known for the replication and dissemination of Holy Scripture among Russian people. By 1826, the society managed to translate the Bible into twenty six languages and issued more than half a million editions. It was closed after. The Russian Bible Society revived in 1990 and released a completed Bible in a modern Russian translation in 2011.

## 35. FIRST AND LAST WORDS

The first words of the Bible are *In the beginning*. The last word is *Amen* which means *truth* in Hebrew.

## 36. EARTH AND GRAVITY

Scientists began to understand the laws of gravity and the fact that the earth is in the shape of a ball in the epoch of the Enlightenment, the 15th century after the birth of Christ, but the Bible reported this ten centuries before birth of Christ (Isaiah 40:22 and Job 26:7).

## 37. HARMONY OF THE BIBLE

There are 1189 chapters in the Bible: 929 in the Old Testament and 260 in the New Testament. The middle of the Bible is psalm 117. At the same time, the psalm 117 is the shortest, and the psalm 119 is the longest (some versions have different statistics).

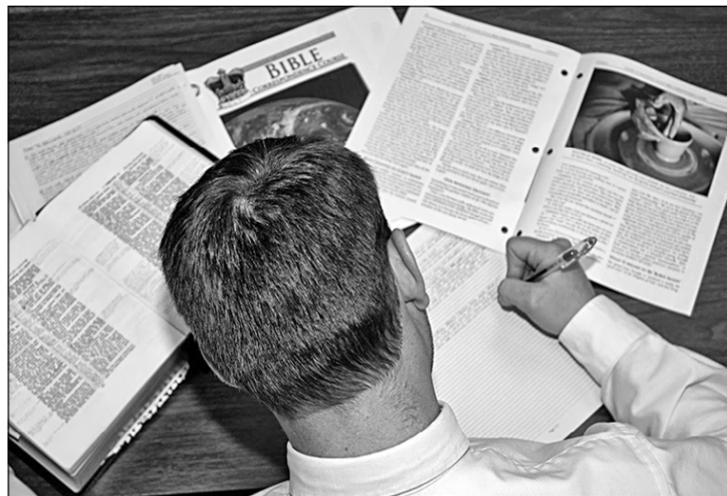
## 38. THE GIFTED

According to the Bible, the wisest man in the world was

the Jewish king Solomon. The strongest person was Samson, who solo pulled out the fortress gates and brought them up to the mountain. The most victorious was Gideon; he killed 135,000 Midianites with a squad of two hundred Jewish soldiers.

## 39. ILLUSTRATIONS

The first Bible illustrations were invented by Jews living in Alexandria around the 3rd century BC. Most modern illustrated publications use paintings of famous French



artist Gustave Doret from the 19th century. They are widely recognized as the most successful.

## 40. THE LARGEST BIBLE

The largest Bible in the world was made by a carpenter Luis Weinai from Los Angeles, CA in two years. He used a prefabricated homemade printing press for his copy of the King James Bible. The height of the book was 110.5 centimeters, the width in open form was 249 centimeters, and the weight was 496 kilograms.

## 41. BIBLE IN ZION

In antiquity, special volumes of the Bible were stored in depository which was often made in the form of a church or chapel. The volumes were placed in special openings — *Zion*.

## 42. THE BIBLE SAVES LIVES

The Bible is instructing the truths revealed by God. It not only saves human souls from eternal death, but often and it literally saves the lives of its carriers, stopping bullets and

bomb fragments. For example, a German soldier Kurt Geller was saved from the bomb fragment which fell in a dugout while he was reading the Bible during the First World War. All his colleagues died while a piece intended for him was stuck in the Book of Books. There are many such cases.

## 43. VOICE OF THE MARTYRS

A special organization named the Voice of the Martyrs exists in the world. Its mission

is the distribution of the Bible where the book is prohibited by law. The founder Richard Wurmbrand was saving Jewish children from the ghettos and preached in German bomb shelters during the Second World War. He distributed more than a million Gospels to Soviet soldiers in Europe, masking books as Soviet propaganda from 1945 to 1947.

## 44. RAINBOW

According to the Bible, a rainbow appeared for a reason. This beautiful atmospheric phenomenon has become a symbol of the covenant between God and the Noah family that humanity will never be destroyed by flood again.

## 45. SOVIET BIBLE

The world famous children's writer Korney Chukovsky was a believer and spent his whole life thinking about how to introduce the Bible to Soviet children. Under the supervision of censorship, he had to mask biblical stories as ancient legends. He also had to replace the word *God* with

the *Wizard of Yahweh*. However, the authorities were irritated anyway. His released book *The Tower of Babel and other released ancient legends* were almost completely withdrawn from circulation and destroyed in 1968.

## 46. THE BIBLE OF JOSEPH BHOPAL

Indian enthusiast Joseph Bhopal rewrote by hand all the verses of the New Testament in hundred and twenty three days. He continued his work and created the world's largest Bible manuscript of sixteen thousand pages. The calligrapher edition weighs sixty one kilograms.

## 47. STUDIES

A scientific discipline studying the Bible from various angles is called biblical studies. It was founded around the 16th century and is actively developing in most of the largest universities in the world. Sweden, the USA, Israel, Great Britain, Germany and Spain became the modern centers of biblical studies.

## 48. BIBLE'S HISTORY

The historicity of the Holy Scriptures is recognized by scientists only partially. The starting point is from the era of Ancient Israel 8th and 7th centuries BC and later. However, the earlier events such as the Flood and the exodus of Jews from Egypt are continually confirmed by the discoveries of biblical archaeology, geology and other scientific disciplines.

## 49. SYNODAL BIBLE

This is the name of one of the most authoritative Russian editions of the Bible. It was published in the 19th century by the Holy Synod. This translation was close to prose poems as it had special emotionalism and rhythm. After its publication, Bible study groups began to appear in large numbers among Russian peasants.

## 50. BIBLE LANGUAGES

Most Bible was written in Hebrew. Some books were written in Aramaic. Majority of the New Testament such as the Gospel, Acts of the Apostles and their epistles were written in Greek. The first of the most authoritative translations were translated in Greek: Septuagint is translation of seventy and Latin of Saint Jerome from Stridon.

A selection of  
**Andrey SEGEDA,**  
<https://pravoslavie.fm>

## Dear readers of "Prisoner"!

The publication office requests that you enclose your postal address with your material (testimonies, sermons, articles, etc.) for publication in "Prisoner". If you enclose photos with your material, we will be glad to publish them.

And for those of you just on the way to God, it's time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer:

*"Lord Jesus, I believe you are God's Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!"*



## PRISONER

### INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

Certificate of State registration of the print media series KV № 20170-9970PR from 15.08.2013

#### Dear readers!

"Prisoner" is distributed free of charge in America (USA, Canada), Germany, Iceland, Czech Republic, Estonia, Moldova, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Publication of this newspaper depends on donations. Send your material and financially support the publication of this important newspaper for society.

*God bless you all!*

Current Account for donations:  
"PRIVATBANK"

s/a 5168742708428044. For transfers from a bank card to a bank card, dollar account in the name of **Dolgushina Irina Nikolayevna: 4731219122681756 (Visa card)**. For postal orders: **Dolgushina Irina Nikolayevna**, box 60/15, Severodonetsk, Lugansk region, Ukraine, 93406. For transfers via **Western Union — Dolgushina Irina Nikolayevna**. For transfers via **MoneyGram — Postilga Maria Igorevna**.

#### Our contacts:

redakciya.uznik@yahoo.com  
tel.: +380645225707  
+380661395801

#### Mailing address in U.S. for the newspaper "Prisoner":

Hope of Freedom, P.O. Box 4053 Everett, WA 98204

Editor **Trubitsin Igor Evgenyevich** (pseudonym **Igor Gorik**)

Responsible for the issue **Irina Dolgushina**.

Design and Desktop Publishing **Pavel Vladimirov**.

#### Translation services

Translation of the articles was provided by: **Oksana Kravchun, Inessa Berdnik, Anne Yermolov, Anna Krasniy, Igol German, Andre Rybin, Tim Borisenko, Yelena Borisenko, Natasha Andrushchenko**, and edited by **Michael Borisenko**.

Circulation 10000 cop. Order # 10101.

Correspondence with readers only in the newspaper. Authors' thoughts do not always coincide with the point of view of the editorial staff. Creative works published in source language. The accuracy of the material is provided by the author. The editors reserve the right to edit and shorten the texts. Manuscripts and photographs will not be returned.

## ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper «Prisoner» has the status of the two languages: Russian and English. «Prisoner» is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, the newspaper is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of «Prisoner» all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper «Prisoner» and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

**Hope of Freedom**  
P.O. Box 4053  
Everett, WA 98208



**Hope of Freedom**

*That you may say to the prisoners, «Go forth», To those who are in darkness, «Show yourselves» (Is. 49:9).*

#### MY DONATION:

For prison ministry  For the publication of this newsletter (Prisoner)

Amount: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions:

Peter: (425) 346-4945, [petyawa@gmail.com](mailto:petyawa@gmail.com)  
Dasha: (206) 604-4594, [dasha1@uw.edu](mailto:dasha1@uw.edu)

You may also donate online through PayPal at our website [www.hopeoffreedom.org](http://www.hopeoffreedom.org)

We are now a federally-recognized 501(c)3 organization, so you can deduct your donations to us from your taxes!