

A CHANGED LIFE

By Jim Higgs

“Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons.”

II Corinthians 5:17 The Message

In the 18 years of preaching at the First Baptist Church of San Francisco I saw God change people through the power of the Word of God. As I am winding down in my public ministry I have been looking at some of the sermons I preached. Among those papers I found a testimony written by a mother who lived in the “Tenderloin” section of downtown. That area is where the S.F. Gospel Mission is located and is looked upon as the seedy part of the city. I offer this testimony from Carolyn S. as a sermon, a living message from a changed life. I suggested she write this letter and send it to the then famous radio program entitled “Unchained.” I don’t know if WMBI broadcasted it. But as I read it a few days ago I was transported back to the time when Carolyn and her daughter first visited our church and how she ignited us by her joyful and strong testimony. She virtually became an evangelist in the “Tenderloin.”

Her letter begins. “As I look back on my life and where it has taken me, I’m very pleased to say God was with me all the time, and even more pleased to say, He always will be. As a child I had a mother who loved me, but was mentally ill. She worked hard to provide for me but was never happy. As painful as it is for me to say, I never loved her. I don’t know why. I had problems with authority from as far back as the third grade. I started running away from home at the age of seven.

My first encounter with Jesus was when I lived with a family for six months at the age of eight. They told me that Jesus Christ was God. I don’t think I believed them. At the age of thirteen I was sent to a convent instead of a youth prison. I was nurtured and taught in Christ, yet I still didn’t believe. When I was released at the age of fourteen, I ran away and lived in the worst part of the city.

This was the first time I used drugs and tried prostitution. I married for the first time at the age of fifteen to a very violent man. At the age of sixteen I left him and

was emancipated by the juvenile court truly on my own. Then at the age of seventeen I met my first true love. I felt like I had finally found what I was looking for all my life. I had finally arrived. My husband taught me how to cash forged checks and many other criminal activities. No, this wasn't it either. But I was very good at it. We made thousands of dollars a day to cover the pain of knowing that I was lost. As time runs out on everything for an unsaved person, I started getting arrested. I was caught doing my deeds in Reno, NV. While waiting for my sentencing, I found out that I was pregnant. I had my daughter in prison. Two weeks before my due date I went to the prison priest and told him my baby had nowhere to go.

When she was born, God blessed me with a Christian family living two blocks from the prison. They brought my daughter Nicole to visit daily. I went to prison more times before I saw the light. I was blind as a bat. There are so many times that my Lord blessed me and tried to show Himself to me. I couldn't see a thing. On the last time to prison, I know I really had to find a better way. For my daughter's sake, I started going to the protestant services and Bible study. All I could think was, "Man if this dude is real, there may be a chance for me. "

One day I decided this whole story of Christ has got to be real. It all fits so perfectly. This name Jesus Christ...it just sings to me. I just have to meet Jesus. He's what I've been looking for. He's the answer for everything. Boy, for the first time in my life I was right about something. I was really starting to get excited. I was meeting Him a little each day. One night I went to Bible study. I felt different that night.

When the study was over I wanted to be the last one out. I walked across the prison yard all alone at night under the stars. I found myself looking in the sky, yelling to God, I said, "I know you're up there. I BELIEVE IT. I want to open my door. I want You to speak to my heart. I want to accept Your invitation. O please have me. I want nothing else in my life but You." I was crying. And I was tired. I climbed up on my bunk and went to sleep. When I woke up the next morning, I felt weird-kind of different.

“Man,” I was happy!” I looked in the mirror and I thought you look the same, but you are different. Then I knew. It was Christ. I flew out of my cell yelling, “It’s Christ. It’s Christ.” “He did it! It’s okay, I’m okay.” “My God, I’m saved.”

You would never imagine a person could be as happy in prison. A lot of the inmates thought I was crazy. How could I be happy in prison? Well, I told them all how. Most laughed. I laughed too. I know what was up...I was saved!!!

Carol S. 10-2-92