



Oasis

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The Least of These

By Eitan Shishkoff

The New Mexico State Penitentiary was an intimidating place. Each time I entered the facility the huge steel gate clanged shut behind me. Then, with each further penetration of the highly secured prison, another heavy door closed, as I was taken deeper and deeper into the institution. Finally I arrived at the chapel where I led an evening Bible fellowship.

One thing about prison ministry is that you cannot con a con. These guys were sharp. Well, not sharp enough to stay out of prison, but sharp in the “street smarts” sense of the word. I felt like they could look right through me. Consequently, I decided early on to approach them as equals - which, of course, they were. If it wasn't for what God had done in my life, I could have just as easily been doing time in there with them.

Much of Yeshua's teaching deals with the human tendency to elevate ourselves above others. The account of Lazarus the beggar and the rich man (Luke 16) demolishes our external approach to assessing a person's worth. Lazarus, though pitiful on this earth, was welcomed into heaven. While the rich man “had it all” on earth, he was consigned to the furnace of hell in the next life. Yeshua's point was not to glorify poverty, but to challenge our categorization of people.

As I spent time each week with the men, the Lord taught me the centrality of honoring them as human beings for whom He gave His life. His sacrifice was for them no less than it was for me. The first meeting, one or two guys came out. Steadily, a few more came each week. In the end we had an active group of 8 or 10 inmates. I brought a guitar, led in a few praise choruses and then opened the word of God, studying one book at a time. How beautiful to see these guys take hold of God's gracious love and become His sons! The power of repentance and forgiveness is SO incredible.

Honor Opens Hard Hearts

What I want to emphasize is that the hearts of convicted felons opened to me and, more importantly, to Yeshua, because they felt honored, valued, and respected as equals. I did not look down on them or castigate them as criminals. The Apostle Peter said simply “**Honor all men.**” (1Peter 2:17) But why should we? What if some men and women are bad - pathological, harmful, dangerous, perverted, selfish, irritating? Even these we honor because they were created in the image of God. Every man, woman and child on this earth bears the divine imprint. “**He has put Eternity in their hearts.**” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

I'm not for a moment excusing sins or crimes, but much of the bitterness and anger in the world comes from people feeling dishonored. Very few know how to truly honor others. Or, more accurately, very few are secure enough to convey to those around them that they are valuable, even if they are grossly flawed.



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Kids from Eitan's Bible club, back in the day

Not far from that State Penitentiary are villages inhabited by Spanish-speaking families, descendants of Spaniards who came to the New World hundreds of years ago. These towns were relatively isolated even in the late 70's when I ventured into them, praying for open doors to bring Yeshua's love. One town had experienced heavy drugs and fatal violence among their youth. The need was real. The adults were not open to some non-Spanish guy coming out from nearby Santa Fe to talk about Jesus. But the kids were.

Digging Ditches and Drawing Cartoons

We began with simple drawings, illustrating Bible truths. That evolved into full-scale Bible clubs. Using puppets, art, skits and songs, we steadily built a following of children and teens who really listened and who gave their hearts to the Lord. Then, we had the attention of the grownups. Around town we also did a little plumbing repair, dug ditches, weeded gardens. Eventually, in a town previously closed to our witness, we were able to show a gospel film publicly. We had gained favor by reaching out to "the least of these."

Yeshua uses this phrase repeatedly in Matthew 25. He's speaking about caring for those without food or clothing, those in prison, sick or homeless. Why does this emphasis come right after the cataclysmic signs of chapter 24? Two reasons. 1: "**Men will be lovers of themselves.**" (2 Timothy 3:2-4). Since there will be such controlling

self-centeredness, the Messiah wants us to relate to the world in the opposite way - by taking care of those who are helpless or neglected by society. This will be the mark of His disciples in the end times.

The result leads to point 2: "**Men will see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**" (Matthew 5:16) As His return draws near and people are desperate to find peace, the light is going to shine through the servants of the Lord who have become faithful to do good to "**the least of these, my brethren.**" The addition of "my brethren" highlights Israel, while certainly not withholding our works of mercy from the nations.

Our heart attitude toward homeless people, people with physical and mental abnormalities, victims of disasters and wars, orphans, widows and the abused are of primary concern to our God. No, we are certainly not saved by our works of goodness. Anything good or compassionate that we do, comes from His grace through us and is no cause for boasting whatsoever. At the same time, as James says, our faith is made visible by the works that we do and is dead without them (James 2:17). A world that is in twisted rebellion against God is not easily reached with words. Cynical people who think they've already heard it all are not initially interested in another presentation. They are, however, nearly always touched by acts of kindness. Going out of our way even a little, can gain valuable attention for the eternally valuable information we carry inside of us as Yeshua's messengers.

CONS and KIDS

Convicts and kids. What do they have in common? Often within the same week I was doing outreach in the State Pen with hardened criminals and in the villages with young children. I discovered something that I've never forgotten. The two groups were strikingly similar. They both demanded authenticity. You could not fake it. Children are intuitively discerning. They size you up not on the externals: what you're wearing, how skillfully you talk, what your equipment or your car looks like. They see into your motives, your inner person. They

usually know who you really are, and so do convicts. Those men were alert to religious devices. They'd seen 'em. The kids didn't want to be bought off either. If our Bible clubs were saccharine and irrelevant they could just leave. It wasn't anything their parents were making them do. Neither were the prisoners required to attend my Bible studies. It was totally voluntary.

What does it mean to honor someone? This question intrigues me, as I see the Lord examining how we assess others - deep inside. Of course I can't communicate anyone's value to them unless I know my own through Messiah. So, I want to encourage you to lay hold of the infinite value the Redeemer ascribed to you when He became your kapparrah, your atoning sacrifice. Then, I encourage us all to lay aside everything that blocks us from reaching out to "**the least of these.**" For some, that will take place in familiar settings. For others it will involve leaving your territory and launching out to "foreign" places and "strange" settings that will require flexibility and creativity. In either case, may we walk in the light of Yeshua before a darkening world. One unexpected act of compassion can draw a hardened, lonely soul into the waiting arms of the Father. ✨

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Our Vision:

Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.

WATCHING, Working and Waiting... for Laborers

By Marty Shoub



Guy Cohen is a man on a mission. Thrust into leadership at a relatively young age, he has been uniquely selected to lead a Messianic work in Akko that had been dormant for centuries. Akko has always played a strategic role in Israel's history - Guy understands that this strategic significance extends beyond Akko's natural harbor and trade route location to the spirit realm. A spiritual breakthrough in Akko would signal an important spiritual beachhead for all of Northern Israel. There has been progress - Tents of Mercy daughter congregation, Katzir Asher (Harvest of Asher) has grown to a community of 100, a building has been purchased, there are ministries to youth, women at risk, a pro-life office and humanitarian aid outreach. But Guy is restless - he can see so many opportunities yet to be grasped, "there is so much work and God is saying, 'be ready, get prepared for the days ahead.'"

"What days?" I asked Guy point blank. He gave me a knowing look and shook his head as if to say, "please don't ask." I pressed him and eventually Guy confided that he is convinced that days of extreme difficulty and war are coming. Guy explained, "In the end we will be victorious but we need to be prepared on a spiritual and physical level, there will be much suffering. We need to intercede according to Ps 83:1, '**Do not hold your peace, and do not be still, O God!**' This means constant intercession that God will act, that He will not allow the enemy's taunts to go unchallenged." Though Katzir Asher has been faithfully interceding for Akko and for the region for years, Guy's sense of urgency compels him to do more. For some time now Guy has had a vision for 24/7 prayer in Akko but the manpower required to field that sort of consistent ongoing intercession is a challenge to a group the size of Katzir Asher. Guy summed up the situation this way, "We need more laborers."

Intercession is key but wise leaders also prepare in the "years of plenty" for the days of difficulty ahead. Katzir of Asher has a number of humanitarian aid projects in the city. They have a long standing association with the Akko Community Center for the Blind and continue to support this agency with funds and practical helps. Two years ago Katzir Asher opened a Pro-Life counseling office (See, Oasis, July 09, "A Voice for Those Who Cannot Speak" <http://www.tikkunministries.org/newsletters/ms-jul09.asp>). Guy informed me that since the office opened, almost 40 babies have been brought to term that would have otherwise been aborted.

The Pro-Life ministry has since expanded into a safe home for women at risk. Last year, Katzir Asher opened an apartment in the city with a capacity to house two women in need. The home is there for women who need a place to stay for the duration of their pregnancy or a shelter for women escaping domestic violence. This much needed resource emerged out of a partnership between Katzir Asher and a church in Japan. The volunteer house manager is a Japanese student studying at an Israeli university. The Japanese church has generously agreed to staff and support this ministry for two years - Guy wonders what will happen when the time expires (Dec 2011). He told me, "There are many things we could do, but we do not have the capacity to hire an Israeli to staff these positions. I would like to see a local woman take over the safe house. I also have a local man who could easily manage a large warehouse but I cannot hire him without paying him a salary - people need to support their families."

As our time together was winding down Guy wanted to show me two other projects. He took me into the small storage locker behind the Pro-Life office. Katzir Asher had just finished a humanitarian aid project and the shelves were pretty sparse. Guy wanted me to take a picture of a cupboard with more empty space in it than either of us would have liked. Guy was wistful, "we need to keep these shelves filled." Next it was off to a soup kitchen downtown. The soup kitchen is run by Orthodox Jews. Katzir Asher has renovated the dining room and washroom facilities at the soup kitchen and provides ongoing financial assistance to the organization.

There is a well established history of Orthodox Jews receiving support from Evangelical Christians but there is very little history of Orthodox and Messianic Jewish partnership. Yet, here was Guy,



Ingredients for hot meals supplied by Katzir Asher



Guy discussing the work with the soup kitchen manager



The renovated dining room at the soup kitchen

truly a son of this city, connecting with the Orthodox manager in a way no Evangelical Christian could ever do. As Guy and the manager joked together in Hebrew I could see the familiarity and identification that flows out of someone like Guy, born in Akko and raised in the Orthodox Jewish culture. There may be theological differences between these two men, but it was obvious to me that they were brothers. For all of Guy's lamenting about not being able to do as much as he would like, here he was doing something well beyond what most of us could ever do. Despite his dissatisfaction about not having the ministry in the place he wanted it, I could see he was exactly in the right place at the right time. The Lord is building the house and Guy, His laborer, is not working in vain.

As we were leaving, Guy once again spoke to me about wanting to do more and not knowing how to get beyond their current level of spiritual and physical outreach. As we talked, he recalled how impossible it seemed for Katzir Asher to purchase their own ministry center and yet within a year of the vision, God had done well beyond what Guy could have imagined (See, "Harvest of Asher, Oasis, June 08, <http://www.tikkunministries.org/newsletters/ms-jun08.asp>)

To live in Israel is to live with the constant threat of those who seek our harm. To be a leader in Israel is to live with the weight of the responsibility of preparing others to face that threat with courage, faith and a helping hand in the midst of suffering. Guy is a forerunner of the next generation of native Messianic Israelis. He may not have the resources of leaders in North America, Europe, Korea or Japan, but in God's hands he has something far more valuable - an ease and familiarity in the culture and among his Israeli peers.

Please pray for Guy and Katzir Asher - Guy asked specifically if you could agree with him that God would raise up the funds necessary to hire a warehouse manager. In the end it is not Guy Cohen or any other leader that shoulders the burden. Our Messiah King calls us to be faithful. He is our defense; He is the one who builds the house lest our labor is all in vain. He raises up the laborers for His harvest according to His word and His good pleasure, **"That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth."** (Psalm 83:18) ✨



Eitan Shishkoff's USA Summer Itinerary

- July 23:** AM Service at Shomair Yisrael Messianic Congregation in Knoxville, TN
- July 24:** AM Services at Grace Fellowship Church in Nashua, NH
- July 26:** PM Service at Grace Fellowship Church in Nashua, NH
- July 27:** PM Service at Christian Life Center in Tinley Park, IL
- July 31:** AM Service at LifeGate Church in El Paso, TX
- Aug 6:** AM Service at Congregation Yeshuat Tsion in Denver, CO
- Aug 6:** PM Service at Resurrection Fellowship in Loveland, CO
- Aug 7:** AM Services at Resurrection Fellowship in Loveland, CO
- Aug 10:** PM Service at New Hope Church in Abilene, TX
- Aug 13:** AM Service at Congregation Beth Messiah in Houston, TX
- Aug 14:** AM Services at Beltway Park Baptist Church in Abilene, TX