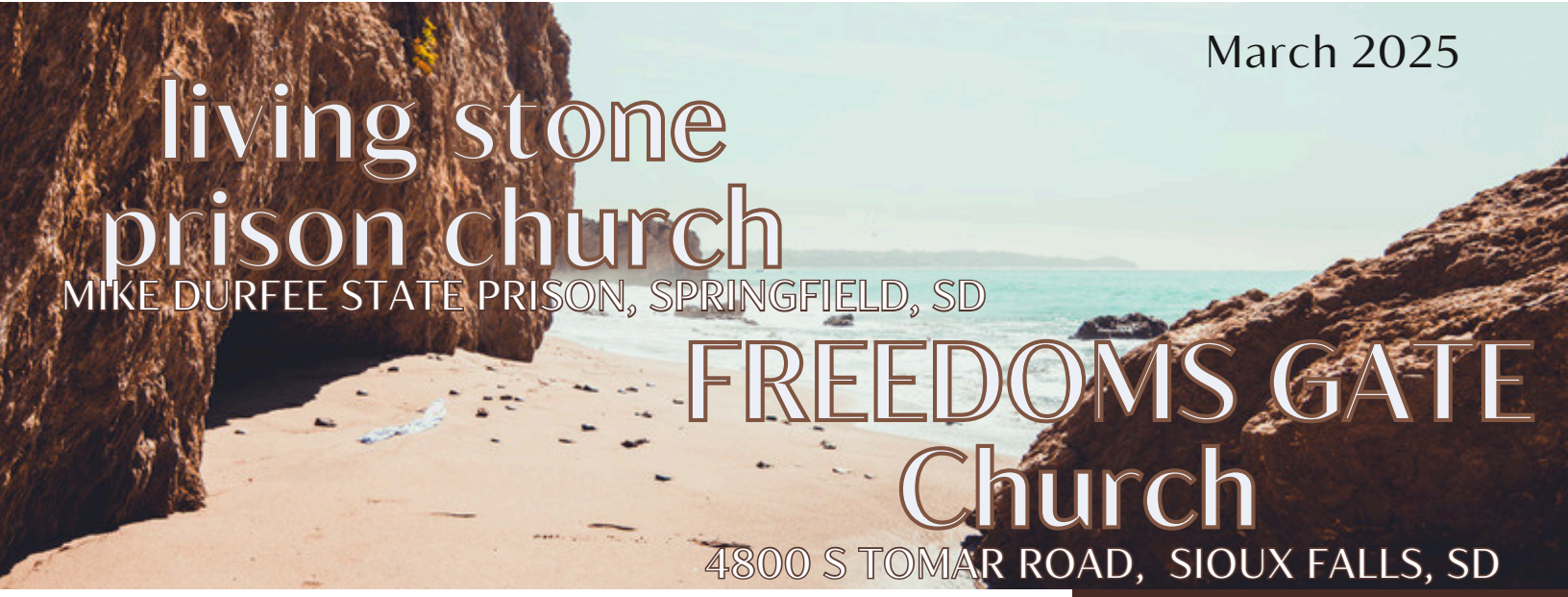


March 2025

living stone prison church

MIKE DURFEE STATE PRISON, SPRINGFIELD, SD

FREEDOMS GATE Church

4800 S TOMAR ROAD, SIOUX FALLS, SD

"Maintaining the Turn Around"

I (Pastor Jason) can find myself falling for the allure of watching short videos on Facebook or YouTube more than I'd want to admit. I especially like to watch animal videos, some of which feature shocking interactions with humans. Recently, I watched one where a man waved what looked like a piece of bark in front of a snapping turtle while taking a video. At first the turtle seemed uninterested, but when he did it a 2nd time the turtle snapped at him with such speed that he lost his balance and fell backwards as the video footage went all over the place. Turtles, of course, aren't known for their speed, but a quick google search revealed that the neck of a snapping turtle can reach a speed of around 200 MPH when lashing out at fish, or some dude holding an iPhone for that matter. When considering that sort of quickness, it is no wonder that things got chaotic when the open jaws of the shelled reptile popped out towards the fingers of the formerly brave, and now fearful camera man.

Question---Does the Bible ever pop out at you like that?

What I mean by that is, does it jump out and surprise you with its teachings? On any given day, does a scripture pop out at you with surprising speed in a way you hadn't read it before? If so, there is no reason to be startled or afraid, but there is great reason to be encouraged and or inspired.

Not long ago I had a scripture pertaining directly to our ministry that popped out at me at around 200 MPH. The verses that contained fresh insight had nothing to do with turtles, but it does have a reference to another reptile. I read with fresh eyes a passage about John the Baptist found here in **Matthew 3:7–8; But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance**".

Considering these verses in context, there were people from the area who were coming to John the Baptist confessing their sins and being baptized in the Jordan River. Some members of the religious elite (Pharisees and Sadducees) showed up to check things out. John compared these men to a gang of snakes. He questioned their presence at the baptism ("Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?") You see, these religious leaders did a pretty good job of looking good in public, but their hearts were blackened with self-righteousness, and they enjoyed casting judgement on others as well. These were sins that they did not confess and felt no need to repent over.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR TO COME WORSHIP WITH US EVERY sUNDAY NIGHT AT 5:00 pm

Please call Lauri at 712.470.4165 to set up a date to come worship with the men at Mike Durfee State Prison! Visitors are always appreciated!

Would you be willing to make a meal and worship with us at Freedom's Gate? Please call or text Ruth at 605.366.3624 to find a date that works for you or check our MealTrain link on our website.

Check out our updated website for the calendar of open dates.

Your Invited-!

13th Annual - Living Stone Banquet

It will be a night filled with yummy food, great entertainment and fellowship!

Where: Bethany Reformed Church, Canton, SD
When: Thursday, March 20, 2025 at 6:30 pm

RSVP: Please let us know by March 16 if you can come, so we can plan on how much food to have. Call or text Ruth at 605.366.3624

Pastor Dan will be giving a ministry update on Living Stone's activities at the prison and Pastor Jason will give an update on Freedom's Gate. We will also hear from a few former inmates how God has used the ministry to encourage and strengthen their Christian journey.

Speaking of repentance, it was verse 8 that really popped out at me; John said to the "brood of vipers", Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. In other words, John the Baptist was saying, "You think you have things figured out? Why don't I see good things (fruit) coming out of your life??" To repent is to turn away from a life that is displeasing to God and head down the path labeled 'God's will'. The Pharisees and Sadducees thought they had that figured out. They strove to follow the law of Moses, but their efforts were all about rule following and not about blessing God and others. They were well manicured, fruitless trees.

When people come into prison, or are set free from said institution, the subject of rules is often on their mind. Prison has rules and consequences, and parole has rules and consequences. The repentant individual has a desire to follow regulations and be compliant whether they originate with the state rules, or with God's instructions for their life. However, if following rules is the sole focus, a person could still end up fruitless like the snake gang from 2,000 years ago.

The Aha moment for me pertaining to "bearing fruit in keeping with repentance" is that at Living Stone and Freedom's Gate churches, we have been encouraging this from the very beginning. We have never done ministry AT inmates and former inmates; we do ministry WITH inmates and former inmates. In other words, we give them opportunities to serve God and others in such a way that they not only can have the opportunity to walk away from their felonies and other sins of their past, but they instead are also given opportunities to bear fruit with their time and energy by serving the Church with us out of the overflow of their relationship with Jesus Christ!

You'll see it at Living Stone as an inmate prays for the message to be received, you'll see it at Freedom's Gate as a former inmate drives the van to pick up others for the church service. You'll hear about it as various individuals share at the upcoming Living Stone/Freedom's Gate banquet in March. According to John the Baptist if you want to walk away from your old life and embrace the new life God presents, fruit bearing will be a part of maintaining the turn around. We agree and are glad to recognize Matthew 3:8 as the perfect verse to back the way in which we invite our congregations to engage with us in ministry.

As always, thanks for all your prayers and support! Pastor Jason & Pastor Dan

All contributions can be made payable to Living Stone Prison Church
and sent to our treasurer:
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