



# A Christmas Gift In Prison

## A TRUE STORY

Some years ago, while conducting a series of meetings in Michigan City, I was asked to preach to the convicts in the state prison. I sat on the platform with the governor and watched the prisoners march in — 700 men, young and old. At the word of command they sat down. Among that number there were 76 “lifers,” men who had been committed to prison for life for the crime of murder.

After the singing I got up to preach, but could hardly speak for weeping. Disregarding all the rules of the prison in my earnestness to help the poor, fallen men, I left the platform and walked among them, taking one, and then another by the hand and praying for them. At the end of the row of men who were lifers sat a man who, more

so than the others, seemed marked by sin's curse. His face was seamed and rigid with scars and marks of vice and sin. I placed my hand upon his shoulder and wept and prayed with him and for him.

When the service was over the governor said to me, "Well, you know you broke the prison rules by leaving the platform." "Yes, Governor," I replied, "but I never can keep any rule while I'm preaching. And I did want to get up close to the poor fellows and pray for them, and tell them of the love of Jesus. *"This man (Jesus) receiveth sinners, and eateth with them"* (Luke 15:2).

"Do you remember," asked the governor, "the man at the end of the line in the lifers' row? Would you like to hear his story?" "Yes," I answered. "Well, Tom Galson was sent here eight years ago for murder. He was without doubt, one of the most vicious characters we had ever received, and, as was expected, he gave us a great deal of trouble."

"One Christmas Eve about six years ago I had to spend the night at the prison instead of at home. Early the next morning while it was still dark, I left the prison for home, with my pockets full of presents for my little girl. It was a bitter cold morning and as I hurried along,

I thought I saw somebody in the shadow of the prison wall. I stopped and looked a little more closely, and then I saw a little girl, pitifully clothed in a thin dress; on her feet were a pair of old, shabby shoes. In her hand she held a small paper package."

"What do you want?" I asked. "Are you the governor of the prison, sir?" "Yes. Who are you and why aren't you at home?" "Please, sir, I don't have a home; Mama died in the poorhouse two weeks ago, an' she told me just before she died that Papa (Tom Galson) was in this prison. Please, can I see my Papa? Today is Christmas, and I want to give him a present."

"No," I replied gruffly. "You'll have to wait until visitor's day." I started to walk away but I hadn't gone many steps when I felt a pull at my coat and a pleading voice said, "Please, don't go." I stopped once more and looked into her small, pinched face. Big tears were in her eyes, while her little chin quivered with emotion."

"Mister," she said, "if your little girl was me, and your little girl's mama had died in the poorhouse an' her papa was in prison an' she had no place to go an' no one to love her, don't you think she would want to see her

papa? If I was governor of this prison and it was Christmas and your little girl came to see me, an' asked me to please let her see her papa to give him a Christmas present, don't you — don't you think I would say yes?"

"By this time a big lump was in my throat, and my eyes were swimming in tears. I answered, 'Yes, my little girl, I think you would, and you shall see your papa.' And taking her hand, I hurried back to the prison, thinking of my own little girl at home. Arriving in my office, I told her to sit near the warm stove while I sent a guard to bring No. 37 from his cell. As soon as he came in and saw the little girl, his face clouded with an angry frown, and in a gruff, savage tone he snapped out, 'Nellie, what are you doing here; what do you want? Go back to your mother.' 'Please, Papa,' sobbed the little girl, 'Mama's dead. She died two weeks ago, an' before she died she told me to take care of little Jimmy 'cause you loved him so much; an' told me to tell you she loved you, too. But Papa,' and her voice broke in sobs and tears, 'Jimmy died, too, last week, and now I'm alone, Papa, an' today's Christmas, an' I thought maybe as you loved Jimmy you would like a little Christmas present from him.'"

"Here she unrolled the little package until she came to a little bit of tissue paper from which she took out a little curl of hair. She put it in her father's hand, saying as she did so, 'I cut it from dear little Jimmy's head, Papa, just afore they buried him.'"

"By this time No. 37 was sobbing like a child and so was I. Stooping down, No. 37 picked up the little girl and pressed her convulsively to his chest, while his big body shook with emotion."

"The scene was too sacred for me to look upon, so I softly opened the door and left them alone."

"I returned in about an hour. No. 37 sat near the stove with his little daughter on his knee. He looked at me sheepishly for a moment, and then said, 'Governor, I don't have any money . . .' Then he suddenly stripped off his prison jacket and said, 'For God's sake, don't let my little girl go back out in this bitter cold with only that thin dress! Please, Governor, let me cover her with this coat.' Tears were streaming down the face of the hardened man."

"'No, Galson,' I said, 'keep your coat; your little girl will not suffer. I'll take her home with me and see what my wife can do for her.'

'God bless you,' sobbed Galson."

"I took the little girl into my home and she remained with us a number of years, and became a true Christian by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tom Galson also became a Christian, and he never gave us any more trouble."

Several years later, when I visited the prison again, the governor asked me, "Would you like to see Tom Galson, whose story I told you a few years ago?" "Yes, I would" I answered. The governor took me down a quiet street where he stopped at a neat home and knocked at the door. A cheerful young woman opened the door.

We went in and the governor introduced me to Nellie and her father, who, because of his reformation, had received a pardon, and was now living an upright Christian life with his daughter, whose little Christmas gift had broken his hard heart.

***". . . Christ died for the ungodly"***  
(Romans 5:6).

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