

Christ Community Covenant Church
Beginnings: Living by Faith and the Sovereignty of God
Pastor Dave Scherrer - June 12, 2016

This is an interesting place. I'd like to live there I think.



It is called the Castle of Chillon, an island castle that is found on the north side of Lake Geneva in Switzerland, First built as a summer home in 1250.



Beautiful on the outside, but in 1570 it became a prison. Beneath the pretty outside was a dark wet underground chamber that became a political prison during the protestant revolution.



Here in the bowels of the castle the Monk François Bonivard was held as a political prisoner for 7 years. He was shackled to one of these pillars and the ring where he was shackled and the rut where he walked is still visible today. There have been lots of political prisoners through the years but Bonivard was made famous by the 18th century British poet Lord Byron:

**My very chains and I grew friends,
So much a long communion tends
To make us what we are: - even I
Regain'd my freedom with a sigh.**
~ *The Prisoner of Chillon*, Lord Byron

There is another political prisoner that we are familiar with. Jesus ran into the political structures of the occupying Romans and also the Jewish political/religious leaders in Jerusalem. He was brought before the high Priest of that time, Caiaphas. When in Jerusalem, Susan and I got to visit the ruins of Caiaphas's palace. It was there we learned that Caiaphas was known for his rough treatment of prisoners. It is thought that Jesus was scourged by Caiaphas and we know from the gospel accounts he was also beaten by temple guards in Caiaphas' charge. It is thought that Jesus was stripped, tied with a rope around his chest and lowered through this hole into an underground chamber where he was left to dangle for perhaps several hours in pain just hours before Caiaphas put him on trial.



As we gathered in that small round hole in the ground only large enough for perhaps 10 or 12 people at a time there was a small stone pulpit and it was a Bible opened to Psalm 88. We read it aloud in that small room looking up at the place in the ceiling where Christ would have been hanging, bleeding from wounds, rope biting at his arm and chest. Let me just read a few passages from this prophetic psalm;



Psalm 88:1-7

O LORD, God of my salvation; I cry out day and night before you.
² Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry!
³ For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.
⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength,
⁵ like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand.
⁶ You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep.
⁷ Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves.

Good people sometimes go to prison when bad people and bad systems depend on injustice and coercive power to hold under their authority. We will read in a moment that Joseph is one of these good people who is sent to prison really for being upright and righteous. For acting properly before God in the face of temptation he was rewarded with shackles and handcuffs. It is enough to make a person ask the question, "Why bother being good?"

Why bother being good?

Maybe you have been in one of those settings where bad behavior gets rewarded. When you know that people in your class are cheating and they will get better grades than you because you don't. When people around you don't work as hard and diligently as you but get promoted because they participate in shady sales or business practice. To be falsely accused and punished severely for a crime you didn't commit is the height of injustice. In this day, Pastors are under particular risk. The accusation alone of inappropriate touch can destroy a family and a church even though there is no weight to the claim.

It has happened before. Let's read about it . . .

Genesis 39:13-15, 19-20

¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house, ¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.
¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house."
¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, "This is the way your servant treated me," his anger was kindled. ²⁰ And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

What makes this tragic story so powerful is the absolute, unequivocal and utterly unfair nature of this outcome. It is the wife who is the evil one - how is it that she gets to get away with such deplorable and reprehensible conduct? And it was not only unfair but it was rough!

Psalm 105:18

His feet were hurt with fetters; his neck was put in a collar of iron;

When Biblical scholars read of this they see a life resemblance between Joseph and Jesus. It is this path of suffering, unfair suffering and the eventual victory in the face of that suffering that freedom and hope won for so many because of their obedience to God the Father. Right in here a person might quote a verse like Colossians 3:23-24 . . .

Colossians 3:23-24

²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

I believe that Joseph knew the score when it comes to God. Look at how he addresses Potiphar's wife;

Genesis 39:8-9

"Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge. ⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

His reply speaks of Character. He tries to speak reason to her first in her own value system by speaking of honor to her husband. Then he speaks to her in his own value system in his appeal to the love of God. It speaks of character, the power and importance of character. It is character that carries the day. It is character that defines the man and woman of Christ. Not our accomplishments, not our body type, not our health or lack of it, not our musical skills or our drinking skills. These things do not define us. We are defined by our obedience to the truth that we know from God. As I grow in the knowledge of Christ and of His life, as His disciple, I long to be like Him. Disciples follow their teachers so that they can be like their teachers, the highest form of flattery and honor. To be accused of being with and like Christ! When we live like Christ in the character of truth, it sets us free.

Two things happen in the context of suffering that Joseph knows is improving his character – transforming him from the inside out; he knows that 1. Suffering is used by God to mold character, and 2. Persecution allows the believer to demonstrate the supernatural power of God.

Suffering us used by God to mold character

Persecution allows the believer to demonstrate the supernatural power of Christ

Joseph has faith in the sovereignty of God. He is aware that suffering is the crucible through which God is revealed as the Deliverer and the Sustainer. He remembers the stories of his great grandfather Abraham coming from so far away to follow God's promise and plan. He remembers the stories of his grandfather Isaac facing death as a sacrifice to God only to be spared as Abraham faced this great test of faith. His father Jacob had told him of the night he wrestled with God and how His name changed that night. Joseph remembers that suffering is used by God to mold character and to reveal character.

Billy Graham loved to tell the story of one of his friends who went through the great depression and lost his home, his job, his wife and fortune. He was a believer but his life was marked by sadness and anger not peace and hope. One day this friend stopped to watch some builders do stone work on a huge church in the city. One stone worker was passionately chiseling on a triangular piece of stone. He asked one man, "What are you doing with that piece?" Stopping for a minute the stone worker motioned over his shoulder to the top of the church. "You see that little opening at the top of that spire. This piece goes in there. I'm shaping it down here so it will fit up there."

And not only that, our faithful perseverance in persecution - our habit of glorifying God in the time of trial - allows the believer to demonstrate the supernatural power of Christ. Our painful circumstances may not change, often they don't. But the God who said he would travel with us through the valley of the shadow of death, the God who said He would never leave us nor forsake us, demonstrates His power and might and sovereignty through us. We must not underestimate the power and truth that is testified to by what others see in us when we experience trials and persecutions and suffer well in Christ. Our character is on display and that means that God's character is on display when we suffer well.

1 Peter 1: 6-7

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Some of us, we know things here. But the true test of our assent to that head knowledge is where our heart compels us to obey even when it hurts. Truth that inhabits our head and our heart truly sets us free.

Truth sets us free

John 8:31-32

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

And True Truth – Truth with a capital "T" is found only in Christ.

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Joseph made choices for Righteousness' sake.

For Righteousness' Sake

Joseph understood that there is a difference between being imprisoned because you had *betrayed a King* and being imprisoned *falsely* when you had *obeyed* a king. He knew what Jesus knew, that . . .

Matthew 5:10-12

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the second century after Christ, the noted Christian author from Carthage in Africa, a Roman who had given up much to follow Christ was asked a question. It seems a man who had come to belief in Christ as concerned as his business practices from before his conversion fought with his newly awakened conscience in Christ. He felt that his practices were wrong, but to give them up would have been devastating to his business success and his lifestyle. He came to Tertullian looking for advice and looking for solace.

**Business man: "What can I do? I must live."
Tertullian: "Must you?"**

I pray God's comfort over you and I pray perseverance and obedience. I pray truth over you and I pray over you the confidence and hope that comes from knowing the love of God in your heart and your mind and your soul.

Genesis 50:19-20

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Discussion questions:

Do you know someone who has been imprisoned? Make a list of consequences that may come from being arrested and jailed (social, spiritual, financial, physical, emotional, etc.)

Now imagine the additional consequences that may come from being falsely imprisoned. Is it a significantly different list? Which is worse?

Have you ever known someone who was falsely accused (at school, at work, in your neighborhood, etc.)? How does a person present *compelling evidence* that they are "not guilty?"

Some have said ¹"You can't prove a negative." How does a person go about proving something *didn't happen*?

In Joseph's story, I have a hard time believing that Potiphar really believed his wife when she accused Joseph of betrayal. Potiphar was no doubt a smart man and my guess is that his wife had shown her true colors before. Supposing this is true, why would he imprison Joseph and not confront his wife?

Dave asked the question in church on Sunday "*Why bother being good?*" What is your answer to that? Can you back that answer up with Scripture?

If you were Joseph going through all the hardships he went through, would your faith in God be as strong and sure? What is it that makes our faith strong then . . . How can we get more of it?

Dave made the point that suffering is part of what make faith stronger. He said suffering does two things;

- 1. Suffering is used by God to mold character and . . .**
- 2. Persecution allows the believer to demonstrate the supernatural power of Christ**

How have these things been true in your life?

Dave also noted on Sunday that there are some who have lived long in Christ that are simply victorious in Spirit regardless of their human circumstances. Who have you met who is like that? What is it that some get 'bitter' when there are difficult circumstances and some get 'better'?

How can we encourage one another better in our suffering? We help each other in the overall church family if we are not transparent and honest with each other in the good times and bad. What keeps us from living transparently with each other?

How can we do that better here in the Community Live group?

¹Proving a negative (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evidence_of_absence)

In 1992 during a presentation at Caltech, skeptic James Randi said "you can't prove a negative". He claims that he cannot prove a negative (such as that telepathy does not exist), but he argues that an individual who claims telepathy exists must prove it. He discusses that induction is often used as a mode of proving a thesis, but if an individual assumes that something is or is not, then the person must prove so. Further, he says, he does not take an advocacy position, as a lawyer would. He says that he cannot

prove that a negative is true, but he could attempt to use evidence and induction to support a claim that he is biased toward, such as a claim that something does not exist.^[9]

Philosopher Steven Hales argues that typically one can logically be as confident with the negation of an affirmation. Hales says that if one's standards of certainty leads them to say "there is never 'proof' of non-existence", then they must also say that "there is never 'proof' of *existence* either". Hales argues that there are many cases where we may be able to prove something does not exist with as much certainty as proving something does exist.^[9]