

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11

MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARSⁱ

“I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!—I beg of you that when I am present I may not have to show boldness with such confidence as I count on showing against some who suspect us of walking according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

“Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ’s, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we. For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I will not be ashamed. I do not want to appear to be frightening you with my letters. For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.’ Let such a person understand that what we say by letter when absent, we do when present.”¹

We each face impossibilities—some of us face greater difficulties and some of our situations are more likely to qualify for the title of impossible than situations others may face. The impossible situations that I have in view for this message today are of such a nature that only divine intervention will resolve the conflict. If we’re not careful, we will view those seemingly impossible events or conditions strictly from the external perspective; when we do this, we will attempt to handle them ourselves—and that often leads to failure.

In the Tenth Chapter of the Second Corinthian Letter, we read the account of Paul, the writer of the letter, defending himself against those who attacked him because of what he had written and because of his ministry style. Those who were attacking him complained that his letters were weighty, but they argued that his presence was weak—all talk and no action, they argued. If he were the man he claimed to be, they argued, he would do this and say that. They had an agenda; and he didn’t live up to their expectations. Writing in his defence, the Apostle put his finger on the problem itself: “Look at what is before your eyes” [VERSE SEVEN].

One statement describes how most of us live, how most of us view conflicts and how most of us handle life; the statement is found in VERSE SEVEN: “You are only looking on the surface of things.”² We view matters externally; we see them as physical situations; we study them through the eyes of physical logic. So, we come to physical or logical conclusions and deal with them accordingly, only to fail, drawing upon none of the power of God’s Holy Spirit in us.

In the preceding verses, Paul has written: “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3, 4]. Underscore in your mind the particular words he has used—“in the flesh,” “according to the flesh” and “of the flesh.” Think of the phrase “before your eyes” from VERSE SEVEN as being virtually the same as the word “flesh” in VERSES THREE and FOUR.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² **The Holy Bible: New International Version** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI) 1984

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

As long as we are on this earth we have physical bodies, physical brains and a physical basis for thinking. Although we live out our lifestyle according to the fleshly point of view, our battles are really not in the realm of the flesh. Our battles are often against invisible forces, forces that go deeper than just the physical, meaning that we need another sort of armoury from which to draw weapons—we need a weapon that will handle that kind of non-flesh battle.

Paul says in **VERSE FOUR** that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh.” Our weapons do not consist of human logic, human strength, human decisions. Instead, the weapons of our warfare are divinely powerful. **THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE** says these weapons are “mighty before God.” **THE LIVING BIBLE** speaks of them as “God’s mighty weapons” and the **BERKELEY BIBLE** states that they are “powerful with God’s help.” Stop and consider that concept: the weapons of our warfare are powerful with God’s help—for what? Paul says these weapons are entrusted to us for the destruction of strongholds.

Are you chained inside an impossible situation at this time, unable to get out? Are you imprisoned by big, iron bars and massive gates which shut you in? Paul would say to you, “None of that is beyond the power of God. God is able to break you loose and to pull off a remarkable deliverance.” Underscore in your mind a singular truth—write it down to think about later: **LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE OUTWARD PERSPECTIVE BREEDS PANIC AND UNREST.**

Keep that in mind as we look at **ACTS TWELVE**—the account of a classic case in point. The Christians of the first century jumped from the frying pan into the fire. Things were tough eight years earlier when Stephen was stoned; but now, conditions had become almost impossible to bear. The Christians had experienced a long season of persecution, difficulty, misery and misunderstanding. They were being hounded to prison and to death, their words were distorted to make them appear as savages and they were hated by all people.

We who live in this generation and in this country know nothing of being persecuted for the Faith—that is, *really* persecuted. We will likely raise our families and see them raise their families (if the Lord tarries), and we will not lose them because of persecution arising from their relationship to Christ. That was not the situation in the first century. Don’t hurry so fast through the Bible that you miss the details God provides. As Dr. Luke begins this portion of the book, he starts with a situation relating to persecution of the believers—“about that time” [**ACTS 12:1**]. About what time? We read these words and pass over them as though they’re just understood by everyone. Yet, most people reading these words don’t know to what time Luke was referring.

This period to which Luke refers was a time of intense persecution for our spiritual forebears. About the same time that the saints had gone into Antioch and had begun to experience a new work of God, there was a backlash of pain, conflict, murder and death. Also, something happened in Jerusalem that was tough to handle, and it related to a man mentioned in **VERSE ONE**: “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church.” How many readers could answer the question, “Which Herod?” That’s like saying, “The most difficult time in Canadian history was during the government of the Prime Minister.” Which one? We’ve had a number of them. “Herod” was a surname; it was like “Caesar” for a title. It was like the title “Prime Minister” or “General” or “Commander.”

The world of first century Palestine was a Roman world. Even though they had their own vassal government, Judea really was under the authority of Rome. The Roman Empire was ruled by one man—*the Caesar*. Think of the structure of this government as an umbrella having a metal point sticking out the top—that point would be *the Caesar*. One of the spines of the Roman umbrella was Palestine, governed over an extended period by a series of rulers known as *Herods*.

The Caesar at the time of which Luke is writing in **ACTS CHAPTER TWELVE** was Claudius. Every person on earth (at least those living within that ancient civilised world) answered one way or another to this one man, Claudius. When he declared taxation, taxes were collected from the people. When he declared death, executions were carried out. When he declared life, people were spared. He was the sole authority. He, being Roman, magnanimously allowed the Jews to have their own puppet government ruled by the Herods.

Herod Agrippa I—that's the Herod mentioned in **ACTS 12:1, 2**; and what a ruler he was! Both he and his predecessors were jealous, petty, cruel tyrants; the Herods were men of conspiracy, many of them trying to ride the fence with one foot planted firmly in the Roman world and the other foot planted firmly in the Jewish world. Orthodox Jews viewed the Herods as half-breeds. Josephus says that Herod Agrippa I was a man who was vain and who scrupulously observed the Jewish rites. The noted Baptist scholar, A. T. Roberson, states that Herod "was anxious to placate his Jewish subjects, while retaining the favour of the Romans."³ Herod was trying to scratch both backs. He built theatres and held games for the Romans and the Greeks; and he killed the Christians to please the Jews. He rode the fence. "He was ... selfishly ambitious and fond of popularity."⁴ There can be little doubt that Herod Agrippa I possessed personal magnetism. He was no dummy. He was cruel and murderous; but he was smart. He was conniving and cunning; and he used his intelligence to curry favour with the people he ruled, placating them even if they didn't particularly love him.

These other writers agree with Luke, who wrote that he "laid violent hands on some." When he had put James to death, he saw that this despicable act pleased the Jews. Remember, Peter, James and John were the three disciples who were closest to Jesus. That's the James here—not the writer of the book; this was the close disciple of the Lord Jesus. Herod Agrippa I had murdered James; and "when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also" [**VERSE THREE**]. He was a man-pleaser; he wanted very much to gain favour with the Jews, even if it meant that he would have to be unjust or be required to act unrighteously.

Do you remember the truth to which I just called your attention in **SECOND CORINTHIANS: LOOKING AT LIFE FROM THE OUTWARD PERSPECTIVE BREEDS PANIC AND UNREST**? Believe it, these Jewish Christians were terrorised by James' brutal murder. Remember, it wasn't all that long before this murder these believers had witnessed the death of Stephen; and they were now faced with an awful decision. Their close friend, a recognised leader within their assembly, Peter, was imprisoned and facing death. They had a decision to make. If they looked at the matter from the outward perspective, they would see three events conspiring to threaten the continuation of the Faith.

First, ***Peter was imprisoned.*** **VERSE THREE** states that "he proceeded to arrest Peter also." Jail was not a new experience for Peter. "Why," you say, "he's been in jail before?" In fact, this is Peter's third imprisonment [**ACTS FOUR, FIVE and TWELVE**]. He had quite a rap sheet! The jailers almost knew him by his first name—he'd been in jail so often; he practically had his own cell.

Peter's arrest and incarceration took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Perhaps you wonder why this detail is added. Some people think the Bible was sort of put together like verbal putty—there was a little space left blank here, so God stuck something in (i.e. a historical fact) that was not necessarily related to that which either precedes or follows. Don't you believe it! Every word, every phrase has been carefully thought through and is, in fact, inspired by God and put together so that it makes perfect sense—whether we see it or not.

³ A. T. Robertson, **Word Pictures in the New Testament** (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1933) **ACTS 12:1**

⁴ J. Williams, **Studies in the Book of Acts**, Second Edition (Thomas Whittaker, New York, NY 1888) 164

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

A case in point is the Feast of Unleavened Bread that is mentioned in **VERSE THREE**. In those days the Jewish people observed one particular feast in meticulous fashion—the Passover. The Passover Feast lasted eight days. During the eight-day period the feast was observed, the true Jew kept no yeast in his home—no leaven, because to the Jew, yeast was a reflection of sin. There was a political aspect during the Passover period as well—there were no trials or executions during the Feast of the Passover. That one fact saved Peter’s life.

Thus, by adding the information that “this was during the days of Unleavened Bread,” Luke was informing the readers that God permitted Peter’s arrest at just this time. It was not happenstance that Peter was in the Prison at that precise moment. Peter could not be executed at that time because Herod was a back-scratcher, remember? Herod was a man whose thoughts would tend toward this sort of thinking, “I’ve got to please the Jews, so it will bother them if I kill Peter at this time, so I’ll wait because I want to keep them on board.” You see, Peter was in prison right up until the last day of Passover.

The second point to note is that **Peter was surrounded**. Herod’s agents seized him, they put him in prison and they delivered “four squads of soldiers each to guard him” [**VERSE FOUR**]. It was uncommon for that to happen. One squad made sense, but not four squads. There were four men in a squad. One soldier kept watch from six in the evening till nine in the evening. The next soldier kept watch the next three-hour duration; and this pattern was followed through the night. Herod knew, however, that this man had been sprung from prison earlier in sort of a spooky manner (the record is found in **ACTS FIVE**). He didn’t want that to happen again, so he put four squads of soldiers with him so that there would be a whole squad around Peter each watch of the night. So, Peter was guarded on all sides. He was “bound with two chains” and “sentries before the door guarded the prison [**VERSE SIX**]. Peter couldn’t even bite his nails—he had a chain on each side, a soldier on all sides and guards right outside the prison bars. He would never get away. He was in prison. He was surrounded by armed guards and incarcerated in prison.

The third important point is that **Peter was doomed**. Remember, Herod is the man who murdered James, the brother of John. Murder was his style. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was just about to run its course. The account in Acts is focused on the night before Herod was to bring Peter to trial [**VERSE SIX**]. Things had come right down to the wire; from all outward appearances, escape was impossible and Peter would be dead before the next day was over.

Two matters of importance should be highlighted. First, **Peter was sleeping** [**VERSE SIX**]. Personally, I think Peter had resigned himself to the fact that death was imminent. He was to glorify God whether by life or death—so why waste a night’s sleep? Might as well die rested!

Second, **earnest prayer was made to God by the church** [**VERSE FIVE**]. The church was praying day and night. Why? Because “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds” [**2 CORINTHIANS 10:4**]. If Peter was to be delivered, God would need to intervene; and that’s precisely what the saints were requesting. In a context of grave threats the church was praying, Peter was sleeping and God was working.

It seems that God’s favourite kind of platform upon which He can work is impossibility. The more impossible, the more He appears to love it. Faced with the impossible, our tendency is to look at the outward conditions failing to see God at work in a divinely powerful manner. So it was that the church prayed and this impossible scene continued to play out.

Now, look at the intervention. It’s fabulous. Beginning at **VERSE SEVEN**, suddenly, the Lord appeared. That’s the way He operates. You go along, further, further, day-after-day, month-after-month, then suddenly at the very last minute, when it’s absolutely “panic city,” the Lord steps in!

There's Peter lying in a prison cell. He was asleep—I mean he was really asleep. The text states that a light shone in the cell (After all, he had to be able to find his sandals). He had to get out without stubbing his toe, so the Lord put a light on.

The angel struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said. Think about this. Don't make it so biblical that you miss what is happening; if you leave it biblical, you likely won't see the significance of it. "Wake up, Peter!" It's just like trying to waken one of your children, or your spouse, and they just cannot wake up. That's what happened to Peter. "Wake up, Peter! Wake up! Get up quickly!"

The text says the chains fell off Peter's wrists. He looked, and he had no chains on. The angel then said, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals" [VERSE EIGHT].

"Get dressed, Peter. You can't go out in the streets looking like that!" He probably had on his undertunic. So he looked around for his sandals and put them on—maybe on the wrong feet for all we know. The angel continued. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." He put on his coat trying to figure out where he was.

"Wake up, Peter!"

"Who? Me? Why? I don't have to..."

"Put on your sandals. Wrap yourself with this cloak."

So he put on his cloak and he walked out of the cell where he had been imprisoned.

VERSE TEN says, "They ... passed the first and second guard." Isn't that great? Peter walked by the guards—"See you later, Aristobulus, Sopitar. Been nice knowing you all."

I don't know what the guards saw. Nobody else does, either, by the way. I suppose it is possible that Peter could have been in the fourth dimension. Isn't that spooky? The whole thing could have been pulled off as the Lord just kind of slipped him into another dimension.

Here's our problem with God—we attempt confine Him to our dimensions! However, the Lord our God is not limited to our dimensions! There's a whole world beyond what we witness, an entire world that is invisible to this present world.

Whatever happened, the guards never knew it. With the angel leading Peter walked out past those two guards. Then, VERSE TEN records another impossible event leading to freedom; "They came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened for them of its own accord." Isn't that wild? "Open up!" Swoosh. "Thanks." The angel of the Lord led Peter right out.

They were outside. Look at this. I love it! The text says, "Suddenly the angel left him" [VERSE TEN, HCSB]. Peter came to himself. Can you imagine? He went to sleep in prison. The last thing he remembered was kicking off his sandals and leaning on the shoulder of this soldier. The next thing he knew, he was outside. Suddenly it dawned on him—God had intervened.

We dare not miss a glorious truth in this account. **THERE'S NOT A LOCK IN OUR LIVES THAT GOD CAN'T PICK; AND OFTEN HE DOES THE VERY BEST WORK WITHOUT ANY HELP.** You can be asleep and He's working. That's why it says in PSALM 127:2, "He gives to His beloved sleep." Isn't that great? You can lie down and rest tonight and you can relax knowing that the sovereign God who specialises in miracles is pulling something off while you're asleep. The Psalmist has testified, "He who keeps [you] will neither slumber nor sleep" [PSALM 121:3]. Let me give you yet another precious promise from the Word that will permit you to rest. "No weapon fashioned against you shall succeed ... This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD" [ISAIAH 54:17].

Peter woke up and he was free.

Elizabeth Browning has written, *God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers, and thrusts the thing we have prayed for in our faces.*⁵ Isn't that beautiful?

⁵ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh"

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

The very answer hit Peter right in the face, at the last minute. What did he do? Well, he shared it. First, he mused, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting” [ACTS 12:11].

When he realised that a miracle had happened and that he was free, Peter felt the need to go tell the brothers and sisters who were supporting him in prayer. Now, watch those prayer warriors; it’s one of the funniest sections in the entire **BOOK OF ACTS**. “He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying” [ACTS 12:12]. This is that Mark who wrote the Gospel; what an interesting heritage he had. John Mark’s mother had a home where prayer meetings were held for the early church.

VERSE THIRTEEN begins with Peter knocking at the outer entrance; he was knocking at the gate which was outside the door area. Rhoda, a little girl who was probably tired of praying, came to answer. She listened and heard Peter’s voice. Doctor Luke tells us that she recognised his voice. Furthermore, the divine author is careful to state that she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it [VERSE FOURTEEN]. Isn’t that just like a child? “Hey, that’s Peter. Peter is here! I’ve got to go tell the others who are praying!” And Peter was out there thinking, “Where did Rhoda go? Why doesn’t she open the gate?”

Rhoda ran back inside, exclaiming, “Hey, I heard Peter’s voice!” Look at these great prayer warriors. They responded to her much as we would respond under those circumstances, “Shhh, be quiet. You’re out of your mind. Be quiet; John’s praying.”

“Heavenly Father, deliver our brother Peter...”

“Don’t interrupt him; he’s praying.”

“But Peter’s out...”

“Don’t bother him. Be quiet. Let John finish praying.”

“Listen, Peter is outside knock...”

“Rhoda, stop interrupting! We are praying! This is serious business.”

That is so much like us! “Don’t bother me with the answer; I’m trying to bring the request.”

Now, this was a pretty sharp girl; she wasn’t intimidated. **VERSE FIFTEEN** informs us that she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, “It is his angel!” The centre reference in my Bible refers me to **MATTHEW 18:10**, which is an excellent verse teaching us about guardian angels.

Wait a minute! Is that what this is about? I checked **MATTHEW 18:10** which says, “Their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” I reviewed **PSALM 91:11**, which informs us that “He will command His angels concerning you.” I note **LUKE 16:22** where it says, “The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.” I read **HEBREWS 1:14** which states that angels are “ministering spirits.” Every place guardian angels are mentioned, it is plural. That isn’t just a nit-picking little detail. Why did they say *angel* (singular) when referring to Peter? Guardian angels are plural, not just one; they’re never shown to be one.

These prayer warriors were not thinking of a guardian angel, but of the death angel. It was believed, going back to the time of Moses, that when a person died, an angel (*singular*) came and assisted in the departure of the soul. “He’s dead,” they said. “Rhoda, the only thing we can say is that he’s dead. He’s gone.” Let the wailing begin!

All the while, Peter was still knocking outside the gate. “And when they opened, they saw him.” Like all great people of faith they exclaimed, “We can’t believe it!” Those who had been praying for Peter had pleaded, “Lord, get Peter free!” And when Peter was freed, their response was, “I can’t believe it.”

“Look at that, John!” “I know. I’m amazed.”

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

I find **VERSE SEVENTEEN** to be delightful. The prayer warriors were all dancing around; they were so excited, so thrilled that Peter has to calm them down, “Wait, you guys. Wait. Silence! Listen up!” Then he described to them how the Lord (look who gets the glory) led him out of the impossible situation.

Next he says, “Tell these things to James and to the brothers.” With that, the Word says “he departed and went to another place.” Peter didn’t hang around as a miracle worker might do in this present day; he just said, “Go strengthen their faith. Tell them what happened. The Lord did it. Go tell people that He did it.”

That tells me that when God intervenes in an impossible situation, we are to tell it. It is to strengthen other people’s faith as well as our own that God acts.

Without distorting the text, I am able to discover two great lessons from this account. **WE ARE ALL FACED WITH A SERIES OF GREAT OPPORTUNITIES BRILLIANTLY DISGUISED AS IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS.** I began by saying that we are all facing some kind of impossibility. Our tendency is to look at the situation externally and say, “This can never happen. These chains are binding it. That door is locked. These bars are up. That gate is closed; it’ll never open. Nothing is going to change!” Yet, here we find a man who slept through the whole thing. What looked like an impossibility was just a platform from which God’s great power was revealed.

A second lesson that is immediately obvious when reading this particular record is this, **IF THERE IS TO BE A SOLUTION, IT WILL TAKE DIVINE INTERVENTION.** If something is going to happen to spring us loose, God will have to intervene. He may use a person—He may use a friend or even an enemy. God may use a circumstance—He may use a tragedy, He may use a disappointment, He may use something that’s never been used before in your life. But you may be assured that He will amaze you. In impossible situations, God is the master.

Our heavenly Father is One who is more powerful than prison bars. His work is not limited to the first century or to prisons or to apostles or to biblical characters. He is alive and working today.

Some of you who are listening are chained—chained to strong soldiers called sin and unbelief—and you’ve been held captive for a long time. Perhaps the Lord is stepping into your cell even now and He is speaking to you through the words spoken to Peter on that dark night, “Get up. Get dressed.”

Don’t leave this whole passage forgotten in the life of Peter as though it is ancient history and nothing more. God has included this account for your sake, for my sake, for our sake. Repeatedly, the Word tells us that the things that have been written were “written for our sake” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:10]. The accounts of events in days long past are included in the Word of God “as examples for us” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:6]. Whatever the circumstance that you’ve written off as out of the question or as impossible, stop looking at it outwardly! God has entrusted to you powerful weaponry, and with your divinely powerful weapon called prayer, turn your attitude, your habit, your circumstance over to Him. He will take charge. He will accept responsibility to deliver you. With the Psalmist, I encourage you to learn to say,

“I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, ‘You are my God.’
My times are in your hand;
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!”

[PSALM 31:14, 15]

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

Perhaps you think it is impossible that God could save you after the life you have led. You need to know that He specialises in impossible situations. God saved the Apostle Paul. Paul's particular situation appeared to be impossible. "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life" [1 TIMOTHY 1:12-16].

Perhaps you are struggling to forgive someone who wounded you deeply. I know that God can give the grace to set you free from your prison of bitterness and bring you into the freedom that accompanies forgiveness. Some of you face imprisonment that accompanies the fear of death, or prolonged illness, or some dreadful disease or even growing older. God delights to set His child at liberty from every fear. This is the message of God in PSALM 34:6.

"This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him
and saved him out of all his troubles."

Perhaps you believe you are simply a failure at what really matters in life. I remind you that, as someone has aptly said, God is not a junk dealer—He works to produce what is permanent and glorious in the life of His people. He is in the business of transforming that which the world casts off as worthless, as useless or as mere garbage, changing that which is disdained into that which is precious, desirable and of infinite value. It never ceases to amaze me that when God acted to provide for redemption, He offered that which was of infinite worth—His own Son. Imagine that! God expended the life of His own Son for rebels, for people under condemnation, for eternal refuse that is destined for eternal death!

Peter, perhaps understanding this better than most Christians, wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" [1 PETER 1:3-9]. Isn't that great?

I recall a young man who was trapped in a prison of deep bitterness—bitterness that was created as result of abandonment and cruelty. That prison in which he floundered grew darker still as he embraced the wicked philosophy of Marxist-Leninism. Embittered, that angry young man was prepared to destroy his family, his future, his heritage.

Unbeknownst to that young man, his father was praying for him. His godly grandmother prayed mightily for his salvation. However, it was impossible that anything would change in his life since he had grown so bitter over such a long period of time. While he slumbered in the darkness of his dreadful prison, God was working.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:1-11
MORE POWERFUL THAN PRISON BARS

The few things which seemed to matter were taken from him in an auto accident. A trailer holding all his possessions was smashed on a busy highway highway and all his material goods were removed in a stroke. He travelled on to his destination, managing to obtain work with his hands, but before he was able to earn his first paycheque his only child became ill with an unexplained fever. When his wife took their child to a medical clinic, she was turned away because the family didn't have enough money to pay for medical services.

Disappointed and driven to despair, he accepted an invitation to attend a revival meeting in a little Baptist Church. That night, his wife was saved; and he was startled to discover that for the first time ever he was aware of a strange emptiness. Within the week he was seriously injured at work and unable to provide any longer for his wife and child. Through all this, God was working in the dark.

Within a month, that young man became a Christian. No one is born a Christian, but rather each child of God is born again into the Kingdom of God through faith in the Son of God. That young man was born again when he realised that he was a sinful man and that God had given His life as a sacrifice in the place of his sin. I am able to tell that story, because I was that young man. Now much older, I am able to testify that God can set anyone free from whatever prison in which she or he may be held fast. I can testify that God is well able to deliver each of us into the glorious light of His freedom. This is the way God works.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13].

You need not remain imprisoned, held fast by the bars of prejudice or fear or bitterness. You, too, can be free to revel in the glory of God's grace through Christ the Lord. Amen.

ⁱ The original source of this sermon was a message delivered by Charles Swindoll. Unfortunately, the source has been lost and I am unable to credit Pastor Swindoll properly. I began working on the message well over a decade ago; and it has lain dormant in my seed plot for many years.