

Christ the Only Refuge

*“Thou art my refuge...Bring my soul
out of prison.”—Psalm 142:5, 7*

The Cold Reality of Prison

If you are reading this you are probably, like myself, in a prison somewhere in this world. The vast majority of us are in prison because we have broken the law of our country. We are in our present circumstances for various reasons—some are in prison for political reasons, some because of their own greed, others because of poverty, many because of our own evil toward other human beings. The list of reasons can go on and on! But one thing is a reality to each one of us—at this moment we are sitting in a prison cut off from the world and the ones we love the most. This is our reality today, and I would like you to just think a little on your life—what it is today, and what it will be tomorrow (if you are alive tomorrow). I am not interested in what you *seem* to be to those around you, but what you really *are* within your heart.

Prisons around the world are evil places, where human beings prey on each other in order to gain some form of advantage or pleasure. We all know that where we are living now is a hard and unforgiving place. Much of the time it goes by the rule of “survival of the hardest,” and all others are used and abused (whether this is physical or mental). Show the slightest bit of weakness and those around you pounce. This can be physical violence or, as is more common in many places, mental violence. This place is a jungle—and you have to be sharp to survive.

How many times have you felt like David when he was hiding from King Saul in a cave—“When my spirit was *overwhelmed* within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me” (Psalm 142:3)? How many times have we all felt overwhelmed within because we are continually on our guard in this place? We keep the hard exterior in place, but inside we are sick and tired of the continual watching, so that we don’t fall into the snare of those around us who are just waiting for this to happen. I have felt this many times in my life as I have served the years in prison, and I have been guilty of laying snares for others.

What Is Our Refuge?

David goes on in this Psalm: “I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul” (v.4). Where do you seek refuge from the reality of your life right this moment? Who acknowledges you as a human being and cares for your soul? The vast majority of prisoners couldn’t care less about you, and will use and abuse you as much as they can! (We have all experienced this time after time, have we not?). The authorities? Most of them see you as a number—and treat you as one. To many, you are sub-human, and they let you know

they see you as such. Others just couldn't care less one way or the other. And the ones who do treat you as a human being are rare breeds indeed. Who really does acknowledge us as human beings and cares for our souls? Maybe at times we have found a true friend who does this, but these are rare within prison.

So where is our refuge? Do I hear you say, "I don't need a refuge"? But we are not talking to others; no one is watching or listening—it is only you and your heart. What is your refuge? Is it escapism through books? Music? Drugs? Weight training? Pornography? Through unnatural sexual practices with those around you? In violent TV? In education and ungodly humanism, which our education systems teach is a means for man's redemption? Is it in religion? Where do you seek refuge? If you have sought refuge in any of these (or one of many others), have you come to the point where you know within your heart that your "refuge" has "failed" you?

Refuge or Prison?

David sought refuge in a cave because he thought that this hidden place would save him from Saul, who sought to kill him. Is this how you are thinking about your refuge? David learned that his refuge was in reality a prison for his soul, and that he was unable to escape this prison by himself. "Bring my soul out of prison" (v.7) is what he pleaded! He knew that the refuge that he had chosen for himself was a false refuge that had turned out to be a prison house instead. Have you come to see this? The Apostle Paul tells us that he hoped that all those who were still unsaved would come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26). Have you started to come to your senses about the prison you are in (which Satan has dressed up as a refuge)?

If you have, then you will see with David that our refuge is in Jesus Christ: "Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low...Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me" (vv. 5-7). If we want to find a true refuge in this life, it must be in Jesus Christ: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which they must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The Bible tells us this about this name—"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe" (Proverbs 18:10). If our refuge is not in the Lord Jesus Christ we are not safe! We have a false refuge which will only lead to destruction in hell.

How Do We Enter This Refuge?

This leads us to ask the question: How do we enter this refuge? Jesus tells us Himself, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Repentance means that we see our own sinfulness before God, and we know that our refuge from sin, and God's righteous wrath upon it, is a false one. We see sin as the prison it really is, and we know that we must turn away from it if we hope to be saved. "Whoever committeth sin transgresseth the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Here is the Biblical definition of sin. Sin is a breaking of God's law, and we are all guilty of this in our lives. The

Lord tells us in John 16:7-11, that the first work of the Holy Spirit in a sinner's heart is to "reprove [convict]...of sin"! You cannot be saved without the revelation that you are a sinner under the wrath of God. Unless you realize this, you can never be saved, for Christ came to save those who saw themselves as sinners in need of salvation. This is the first step which leads to repentance.

Repentance follows conviction of sin, and repentance is, in the words of A. W. Pink—

"a supernatural and inward revelation from God, giving a deep consciousness of what I am in His sight, which causes me to loathe and condemn myself, resulting in a bitter sorrow for sin, a holy horror and hatred for sin, a turning away from or forsaking of sin."

This holy horror of sin leads us to mourn over our disobedience to God's law, as our Lord declares, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). This mourning is not a mourning over physical death (for many mourn over this who never receive the comfort of Christ, because they never seek it), but it is a grief over *our own sin*. Paul describes it in this way—

"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner...For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of [i.e., regretted]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death" (2 Corinthians 7:9-10).

Paul follows his Lord here and describes the true nature of repentance. It is a sorrow, or grief, over our own sinfulness (as Pink described), which leads us to seek God's mercy and forgiveness. It is not being sorry for your sin in a human sense, for this can never lead to true repentance! It is a supernaturally imparted sorrow which leads us to cast sin aside, turning unto the Lord and seeking to follow Him instead of sin. As Paul puts it in Romans 6:16-18:

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made *free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*.

This is what repentance is! Our whole lives change because we have turned away from following sin to following the Lord God Jehovah: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). We turn *away from* sin and the refuge we have tried to hide in, *to* the Lord Jesus Christ, serving Him instead—*We repent!*

What is it to *believe* the Gospel? It is to believe in Jesus Christ for our whole salvation. We believe that "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), and that if we come to Jesus in repentance, asking Him to save us, we will be saved because of what He has done *for us* on the Cross. We put our trust in Jesus Christ alone, and take our refuge in His name, person and

work for sinners! We do not trust ourselves, nor do we trust others, nor do we trust in mere religion. We trust only, and fully, in the Lord Jesus Christ!! “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath *through him*” (Romans 5:9).

A head (or intellectual) knowledge about Jesus Christ is not good enough to save you. You could believe intellectually every single word that the Bible says about Jesus Christ and still be lost. James warns us: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19)! Even the demons believe in Jesus Christ. So it’s obvious that an intellectual knowledge about Christ is not enough to save us! Jesus even goes further than this in Matthew 7:21-23, when He tells us that “many” will even go so far as to call Him “Lord,” doing many signs and wonders in His name, yet He will reply to them, “I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity [practice lawlessness].”

Here are two sobering warnings from the mouth of God! It is not good enough to believe *in your head* that Jesus Christ is Lord, and claim Him as such. You must have faith in Him as your own personal Saviour, and this must be from the heart—

“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt *believe in thine heart* that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For *with the heart man believeth unto righteousness* ; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10).

It is only when you abandon all confidence in your own (or anyone else’s) ability to save you, and cast your lot upon Jesus, that you will be saved. Having faith in Jesus means that you know that He is the only one who can save you, and that faith in anything else is folly which leads to hell—“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” He said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (Acts 4:12; John 15:5). This is what faith is. It is believing that without Christ there is no hope of salvation, but with Him salvation is guaranteed—for the Scripture says, “Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Romans 10:11).

So we must consider this vital question: Where is my refuge? Is it in myself? Is it in something I have made as a refuge? Is it in others? Or can we declare with David about the Lord, “Thou art my refuge”? Any other refuge is really a prison for our souls, but Jesus tells us that He came, “to preach deliverance to the captives...to set at liberty them that are bruised [oppressed]” (Luke 4:18), and this is why David is able to say to the Lord—“Bring my soul out of prison!”

*This tract was written while I was serving a life
sentence at H.M.P Maghaberry in Northern Ireland.
I since have been released and am now serving
the Lord as a free man.—Billy Morrison*



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