

Only Christ . . . and Him Crucified
 Pastor Sam Richards
 17 September 2023
 Text: 1 Cor. 1:2; Ephesians 2:1-6

I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

What towering wisdom there is in Paul's determination! He determined to know only the most essential, and necessary thing in the entire span of history and existence. Jesus, the very Son of very God, came into our reality, our historical/existence to make manifest and known God. And He ran straight into this dilemma: we were, in our sinful state, quite incapable of knowing God. Before we could receive the truth, the truth of truths that He embodies, before, we have to be spiritually freed (redeemed, ransomed, saved?) from the prison house of sin, from the bondage, burden and captivity of sin. Now, before I get into bondage, burden and prison house, I need to state ***it is actually delusional to even imagine that we can know truth, the truth about anything actually, apart from spiritual recreation***—the being made **alive in Christ**, as addressed by Paul in Ephesians 2:1-6:

But you He hath quickened (made alive) who were dead in trespasses and sins;

More on that to follow. First let's define bondage, burden and captivity (or imprisonment). Bondage has to do with our enslavement to the world, the flesh and the Devil; it is spiritual bondage. And, apart from Christ, or apart from our existence **in Christ**, bondage is real, and our actual state of being. We are slaves. Secondly, this bondage is burdensome. There are restrictions on our life, our liberties. This is generally due to guilt, fear and shame—a heavy yoke of rejection. More personally, we might speak of the burden as feeling unloved, unwanted, and blamed as the cause of trouble, chaos or destruction. *If it weren't for you, we'd be fine, happy, prosperous!* Thirdly, we have sin as a prison house, an experience of “incarcerated life,” or captivity, or living a life that appears punishing where consequences exist that cannot be escaped.

Bondage, burden and prison house. These serviceable terms of spiritual captivity should, perhaps, preoccupy us more than they do—in our prayers for the imprisoned in particular and the lost in general. And here is a chief reason why: we have been duped into thinking that we are freer than we actually are especially those who are lost—“born free,” as it were. We are in no such liberty at all. Sinners definitely are not free; they are captives and enslaved captives at that.

The impassioned, romantic cry, “Man is born free, but everywhere is in chains” is at least disingenuous. Because: 1. the expression suggests an original goodness, or innocence which simply put does not come by natural birth. We

are born *chained to Satan* and to both the demonic and secular branches of his world dominion!

Spiritually speaking, we are born untutored, naive, yes, ignorant also; but not innocent. And 2. our “chains,” as usually imagined by Romantics, are of social causation: society, social laws and customs (including law, ethics and morality) are framed negatively and are actually derivative; they are not original. Our original, *actual* chains are spiritual—our hearts being compromised, imbued with sin and ever inclined towards evil. The truth of these latter assertions—that our hearts are compromised, imbued with sin and inclined towards evil—express, essentially, our fallenness, our corruption. This perspective is known as “Christian realism.” Let us remember the original temptation, as expressed to Eve, was that **you should be as gods knowing good and evil!** (Gen. 3:5) The serpent didn’t say we should obtain discernment so as to discern good from evil—no, his promise was *knowledge of good and evil*. Through *ingestion*, through eating the forbidden fruit!, we would come into knowledge of good and evil?! I can’t help pointing out that this sounds drug-related; it sounds like a biochemical reaction which induces an altered state of consciousness. It, a potion, or elixir, is an odd, unorthodox mode of knowledge acquisition—which usually includes hearing, seeing, study, linguistics and mental application . . . and the text might suggest that *the contamination* implied resembles food poisoning much more than academic achievement: some substance, powerful, toxic and, yes, lethal. No wonder we were forbidden to consume of the fruit of that tree.

Jesus’ mission is to save lost sinners (us), to release us from bondage, free us from our burden of guilt and shame, and to release us from the prison house, shackled by fear and tormented by doubts. In short he is our savior!

This *redemptive perspective*, setting captives free(!), is *implicitly* borne out by the *explicitly* redemptive mission of the Son of God¹. It’s no mystery that He came to die, to lay down His life as a sacrifice for our sins. He came to free us from bondage, lift our burdens and cancel the power of sin to imprison us! **He made atonement for our sins through the shedding of His blood.** This is better than posting bail; this is acquittal. We have this on the best authority: not only did Jesus Christ declare this to be the case, those who followed Him, and were saved by faith in His finished work, reaffirmed His mission, His calling and declared purpose! Paul, believing this, **determined not to know anything amongst you (the Corinthians) save Jesus, the Christ, and Him crucified.** This is the most important truth of all!

¹ The reaction of demons to the approach of Jesus (“What have we to do with you, Jesus of Nazareth? Are you come to destroy us ahead of our time?”) underscores the order of deliverance first, now, and judgment, or condemnation subsequently borne out by the biblical narrative

Did Paul have this right, correct? I think so. The greatest need we face, as human beings, is that of having the evil drop of sin squeezed out of our hearts—displaced, or pressed out by the Holy Spirit through the saving actions of divine grace. Then we will enter into real life, true life . . . freed from the bondage, burden and prison house of sin! Sin is meant to be left behind, like empty shackles hanging down in the dungeon cell! Or, like the open door in our past, which opening preceded our escape from our former captivity.

Therefore we can sing faithfully Charles Wesley's stirring lines: "Long my imprisoned spirit lay (there it is: bound, burdened and imprisoned) Fast bound in sin and nature's night (nature is assumed, from a man-centered point of view, to be scientifically a source of truth, light and knowledge—but actually it is all night!); Thine eye diffused a quickening ray (we must recall whose eye this is—the Lord's eye diffuses light, not the eye of the captive soul; whose eye is dark!), I woke (from sin's stupor and the sleep of the flesh), I woke, the dungeon flamed with light (of course it did, for He is the light of the world and when He comes into the darkened chamber of runners heart, the flaming is no wonder. It is dawn in the soul, the night is ended). My chains fell off (just like Peter's, or those of Paul and Silas in the Philippians jail! Declared righteous, absolved of guilt, acquitted—free indeed) my heart was free (freed by the intervention of Christ, by redemption, not by nature freed, or by one's essential core of goodness!), I rose (as one rising from the dead, casting off the shroud of condemnation), went forth (from the place of captivity, and of spiritual deadness) and followed Thee (as did many of those healed by Jesus!). Amazing love and it truly is that our God has died for us and now lives and reigns for us forever.

Jesus stepped past the wishes of both Jews (for a sign) and Greeks (for wisdom); He walked right by the cravings of twisted men—choosing to please God rather than to appease them. His power demolished the power of our Enemy and all his afflicting minions. Devils and demons, one and all fled at His appearing and even fallen angels will bow down and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! That was the sign of Jonah—He was crucified and He rose triumphant from the dead! **Jesus Christ and Him crucified says** it all.

And as for wisdom it is in Him: all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden. Jesus is the wisdom that the Greeks sought. Remember the Greeks who came to Philip and said, **Sir, we would see Jesus**. They were wise and successful. Yes, wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption are all in Him! Therefore we declare that the basis of all social, economic, political, judicial reform—all well-being—is found in the incarnation, in the person and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The particular, and time sensitive nature of our ever evolving ethics and emergent morality should never be confused with the foundational truth of the gospel. Better principles are yet to be derived than those we have so far conceived! Perfection may exceed our reach, but improvement never does—the source remains constant, it's the outcomes that differ! And the Jesus who freed us on the cross continues to free us from even

those freedoms that can, over time, become constrictive, confining, limiting even as present glory outshines former glory and both glories pale before the glory yet to come!!.

And better loves succeed the previous loves in the upward course of the kingdom which we reign in perfect love forever. **Amen.**