



*<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)*

### **The Prison of the World and Sin**

We are all kept either in the PRISON of the World, or by the FORTRESS of the GOD of Heaven. The world disguises its prison as a fortress, but its chains are made of sin, and its destination is Hell. The Prison of the World resembles a fortress in many, but not all, points:

1. It is a strong and secure establishment;
2. The walls are high and insurmountable;
3. There is a Warden who is the keeper of the occupants (Satan);
4. No one enters freely unless they are bound in chains;
5. No one escapes unless they have paid the penalty for sin (death);
6. The occupants are treated without love;
7. It is a place of hopelessness unless the government is changed, or a pardon is proclaimed;
8. It is designed to keep the prisoner in, not the world out.

All who are confined in the Prison of the World deserve to be there. They are all sinners by nature and by choice; and they have chosen this prison for their own habitation. *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;"* (Romans 3:23) *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23) Those who may escape for a time under their own power (self-righteousness) will be arrested and brought again into the prison since every man's righteousness is as filthy rags. It is only by the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ that we may be justified and considered righteous by Heaven. *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. <sup>7</sup> And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities."* (Isaiah 64:6-7)

No one in prison has the key to the iron-barred door. No man can free himself who is in the prison of sin. The Governor of Heaven has the key. He will grant pardon to all who will receive it. But there are terms for that grant of grace. The prisoner must evidence a change of heart by repenting of his past sins. He must apply for the pardon,

but this is not his own action, but the grace of God drawing him to it. No one in prison loves another prisoner, and is incapable of loving in his natural state. But God, in His wisdom, providence, and foreordination, always draws the one who will respond to that love of God by echoing the same in his heart. *"We love him, because he first loved us."* 1 John 4:19 That magnetic love of God draws the repentant sinner to Himself. Since the sinner is already dead in trespasses and sins, he cannot come to God as a dead man. But that love of God quickens his dead heart and draws him forth from the tomb into the freedom of Light and Grace. So it is only God who is able to grant a pardon to the prisoner and set him free. Not only that, but the criminal record of the prisoner is erased forever.

### **The Fortress of God**

Once we are set free from our sins and prison by the grace of God, we must be given sanctuary from the pursuing demons of the world's prison. Where shall we find that Sanctuary City? Is it not the City and Fortress of God? *"The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."* (Psalm 18:2 (KJV))

While living on the high desert of old Persia (Iran), I flew often in the environs of the central city of Esfahan (elevation 5,000+ ft). To the east and west of the city were very high mountains. Some peaks of the mountains surrounding the city were very steep and almost vertical reaching a sharp peak several hundred feet above the desert floor. It seemed impossible to have scaled that rocky faced steep, but atop many were watchtowers built upon the rock. They were signal towers to alert the city of approaching enemies. They were, in fact, little fortresses. Many of these were ancient to the days of Cyrus the Great. They have survived all of these centuries because they are situated on a ROCK and immune from the enemies approach. That is what God is to His Elect.

*"<sup>2</sup> Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. <sup>3</sup> For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. <sup>4</sup> Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength."* (Psalm 31:2-4)

The Fortress of God is a safe sanctuary, but also a watchtower for the approach of the enemy. Though its walls are impregnable, it serves as a warning to those who are still in the world and its prison. The enemy of our souls is always a'prowl for souls to finally destroy them; but those who are yet in prison still have the hope of escape to the Sanctuary City ere Satan takes their lives finally. The Fortress of God can be seen from all directions for it is a City set upon a Hill. Its warning fires can easily be seen by those in prison. "Brightly Beams our Father's Mercy, from His Lighthouse evermore. But to us, He gives the keeping of the Lights along the shore."

The Fortress of God looks much like the Prison with profound exceptions:

1. It is a strong structure made of stone and built upon a stone. Its walls are high.
2. Its occupants are there by choice and not compulsion.
3. There is a Governor there who is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
4. It is impregnable to the enemy, but readily available for admission to the redeemed.

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5. The occupants of Heaven's Fortress are protected from the enemy without whereas the prison protects those without from those who are within.

6. Our residency and citizenship of the Fortress is eternal. "*3 Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress.*" (Psalm 71:3)
7. The Fortress of God is a secret place that the enemy cannot find. "*1 He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.*" (Psalm 91:1)
8. Not only is the Fortress kept secret from the enemy, its inhabitants are hidden as well from the enemies arrows. "*Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.*" (Psalm 119:114)
9. In a prison, all communications are restricted to the prison; in the Fortress of God, the message goes out to all surrounding horizons of the offer of pardon: "*To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.*" (Isaiah 42:7)
10. Those in prison are committed for what they are (*sinner*); but those safely abiding in the Fortress of God are there at the grace of the God by the sacrifice of Another (*Jesus Christ*).
11. Amazingly, the offer of pardon is broadly proclaimed to the prisoners, but most prefer to reject it. "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*" (John 8:34-36)

Though prisoners may be pardoned and freed from the World's Prison by offer of Grace, nothing can penetrate the defenses of the Fortress of God. "*upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*" (Matt 16:18) To which Rock does this text make reference? Is it to the chip of a stone which was Peter, or was it that Solid Rock that is Christ? ". . . for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." (1 Cor 10:4)

Are you drinking of that spiritual Rock that is Christ or are you chipping the granite stones of your prison? Best to turn your hope over to the Keeper of Souls whose grip never fails, whose purpose is never foiled and whose offer is of peace, love and joy.