

INCARCERATION AND PEACE

³²Look, a time is coming—and has come—when you will be scattered, each one to his own home, and I will be left alone. Yet I am not alone, because my Father is with me. ³³I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world.” John 16

Incarceration is defined as “the act of imprisoning someone or the state of being imprisoned.” Though I have never been imprisoned behind the fence (other than for brief visits), I know that there are other types of incarceration. I just enjoyed a triple fusion in my lower back and was incarcerated for 3 nights in the hospital. Not too bad since it was thankfully a short sentence, though the effects of that incarceration still severely limit my liberty for a while. But I have made peace with the process because I know that the God who made me will never forsake me. There exists his promise for greater freedom ahead.

The last thing I want to do is to minimize the gravity of what my friends behind the bars face with the little inconvenience of my surgery. My little hospital adventure is no comparison to imprisonment. But in my experience with LIFE studies, I know that though many of these “inmates” suffer anguish with the loss of freedom, there are others who have found a freedom that cannot be taken or stolen from the heart because they know that bars of steel cannot restrain the presence of Immanuel and his Holy Spirit. The peace that has overcome the world cannot be shut out by any institution or tyrant.

I have been amazed and encouraged by the incarcerated men I’ve met through LIFE classes. They breathe the same holy air that the Master did when he was left alone, incarcerated, and murdered. But Jesus was never alone, and nor need we be,

One of my favorite heroes of the faith died in 1719 after being condemned and confined, but he was always at peace in his Father’s arms.

Francois Fenelon wrote:” Peace does not dwell in outward things but within the soul; we may preserve it in the midst of the bitterest pain, if our will remains firm and submissive. Peace in this life springs from acquiescence to, not an exemption from, suffering.”

And elsewhere, “ ...Dear Savior, you promise me that in humility I will find rest for my soul. What dismay!—how far astray I have gone from that kind of peace! I have searched for it in foolish and turbulent passions, and in the vain imaginations of my pride. But pride cannot coexist with peace. Pride always wants what it cannot have. It always wants to pass itself off as something it is not. It constantly rears its head, and constantly God resists it. He brings our pride low through the envy or contradiction of other people or through our own faults that we cannot help being aware of. Cursed pride, you will never enjoy the peace of God’s children who are simple and small in their own eyes!”

God offers his peace everywhere, but especially on hospital beds and in prison cells. It is only our pride, as Fenelon so eloquently stated, that destroys this offer of peace. It is humbling and encouraging to be able to seek the peace of the Kingdom of Heaven with those who suffer incarceration. It is most certain to me that God’s residence is at the end of our rope. That’s where I want to be found, holding firm to that anchor -and I want to share that peace with others! Steven Minnich