

Open Prison Doors

Praising God is a mighty weapon in the journey of faith against the challenges and frustrations which a believer has to endure. To discover praise as a weapon of our warfare is a blessing and the scriptures teach that the struggles we go through are against powers and principalities in the heavenly places. In other words, they are spiritual. It is the ideas and theologies which leave us more divided and confused and unable to see the Lord as He is, simple and born of a poor woman who laid him in a manger at birth and who lived a demonstrated life of simplicity accessible to all desirous to know Him. When all is going well for us, we tend to just do the routine stuff of life until when we feel down and out and totally helpless. At that time, we may realize God is all we got and even when we so realize, we may find ourselves totally clueless on how best to pray or talk to God.

Twelve or thirteen years ago, while living back in Kenya, I traveled up country from the where I lived in the City of Nairobi to claim property a former business partner threatened to take from me illegally in the form of a maize (corn) crop at harvest time which he planned to expropriate from me in collusion with others without my prior approval. I traveled over 200 miles from the City to the farm and hired laborers to do the harvesting under tight security. I had to obtain governmental help to claim the property. I left home one day before the day scheduled for the harvest and slept the night in the town of Nakuru, near where the farm was located. On the day we arrived, most hotel rooms in the town were taken and my team was accommodated at two different hotels that were a mile or so apart.

That night was the scariest in my life because I was attacked by demonic forces at Night as I tried to sleep. Suddenly I was unable to breath and soon realized something sought to strangle me while lying on my bed half asleep. The attack came just when I was about to lose self awareness and sleep and I tried to cry out loud the name of Jesus but could not. I was able to think and cry in my heart for Jesus to come and help me; after which the pressure on my breathing system eased off. I was terrified and felt I could not possibly sleep there and in the middle of the night walked the mile or so to the Hotel where the rest of my team were sleeping in order to be with them. One of my team was my younger brother Shem, and so I went to his room and explained to him how I could not sleep in my hotel room and he invited me to spend the night in his own room. After a short while and on reflection, I refused to sleep in his room because I thought if I am scared now, it would be sensible to return home since the daunting tasks for the following day could not possibly be accomplished by one scared as I was. I determined to get back to my Hotel room and sleep it out whatever happens and I walked back the mile or so to my hotel room. Back in my room, I realized I needed to settle down in order to somehow be able to work the following day. I could not sleep at all and so made the decision to praise God and I sang the following chorus over and over again;

"..Praise the name of Jesus x2

*He is my rock, He is my fortress, he's my deliverer in him will I trust
Praise the name of Jesus."*

I counted on my fingers while I sang and I remember the count of 200 when I slept deeply until next morning just about the time for breakfast at 8.00AM. I had to check with my younger brother later when I asked him whether he remembered my previous nights visit to his room and he confirmed that I had been to his hotel room looking very scared. To me however, it was all like a dream because the Lord had given me such a good night's sleep, and I was feeling so fresh and energetic ready to start the day's work. As it turned out, the day was a very long one but everything went ahead perfectly and by late afternoon, I was headed back to Nairobi with everything back in my hands. I realized then first hand the power of praise of which the scriptures are replete with examples to be our lessons today:-

Joshua 6:15-21

15 But it came to pass on the seventh day that they rose early, about the dawning of the day, and marched around the city seven times in the same manner. On that day only they marched around the city seven times. **16** And the seventh time it happened, when the priests blew the trumpets that Joshua said to the people: "Shout, for the LORD has given you the city! **17** Now the city shall be doomed by the LORD to destruction, it and all who are in it. Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all who are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. **18** And you, by all means abstain from the accursed things, lest you become accursed when you take of the accursed things, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. **19** But all the silver and gold, and vessels of bronze and iron, are consecrated to the LORD; they shall come into the treasury of the LORD."

20 So the people shouted when the priests blew the trumpets. And it happened when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat. Then the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. **21** And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, man and woman, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.

Acts 16: 20-34

20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; **21** and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."...they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. **24** Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. **25** But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed. **27** And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. **28** But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

In the Old Testament lesson, Jericho resolves Israel shall not be its master and would not surrender to Israel although terrified by Israel's army but shuts itself up instead, being strongly fortified. It is in that respect they were foolish, and their hearts hardened to their own destruction. It is the miserable case of all that strengthen themselves against the Almighty God. In this case, God resolves Israel shall quickly be Jericho's master without even a war being fought. By the unusual method of besieging the city, the Lord honored the ark, as the symbol of His presence, and showed that all the victories were from Him. Wherever the ark went, the people went and the Priests by blowing the trumpet of the everlasting gospel, which proclaims liberty and victory, encourage the followers of Christ in their spiritual warfare. At last the people were to shout and they did so, and the walls fell. This was a shout of faith because they believed the walls of Jericho would fall. It was a shout of prayer and they cried to Heaven for help, and help came.

The New Testament teaches we are foolish to underestimate the schemes and the deceitful plans of evil. Satan will declare the most important truths in order to serve his purposes. Let us remember that much harm is done to the real servants of Christ and to the Church by false preachers of the gospel, who Satan loves to be confused by undiscerning observers. The real servants of Christ do good by drawing men from sin and because of doing so may expect to be ridiculed as trouble makers of the City. While they teach men to fear God, to believe in Christ, to forsake sin, and to live godly lives, they will often be accused of teaching bad customs. God never leaves nor forsakes His true servants though and God's consolations to His suffering servants are neither few nor small.

From the dark places or out of the depths, we are free to cry out to God and no place or time is inappropriate for prayer, if the heart be lifted up to God. Also, no trouble, however grievous, should hinder us from praise. True belief in Christ obliges us to be just to our own lives as Paul who cried aloud in order to make the jailer hear, and make him heed not to do himself harm. Man or woman; do not ruin yourself or hurt yourself. If you promise yourself not to harm yourself, then no one else can hurt you.

Those who are thoroughly convinced of sin, and truly concerned about their salvation, will give themselves up to Christ. Here is the sum of the whole gospel, the covenant of grace in a few words; Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house. The Lord so blessed the word, that the jailer was at once softened and humbled. He treated them with kindness and compassion, and, professing faith in Christ was baptized in that name, with his family. The Spirit of grace worked such a strong faith in them, as did away further doubt; Paul and Silas knew by the Spirit, that a work of God was wrought in them. When sinners are converted in such a manner, they will love and honor those whom they despised before and hated, and will seek to lessen the suffering they had desired to inflict and increase.