

Text: Heb. 13:3

Title: "Remember the prisoners"

Time: 8/21/2016 am

Place: NBBC

Intro - In the year 2000, two Virginia ladies moved to Vermont for the purpose of entering into a civil union. One of the ladies gave birth to a little girl through artificial insemination two years later. She named the baby girl Isabell. The following year, Isabell's birth-mother, named Lisa, trusted Christ as her Savior and repented of her homosexual lifestyle. She moved back to Virginia with her child, leaving her civil-union partner behind.

A Vermont judge ruled that the partner still living in that state was also the child's mother and ordered regular visitations, in spite of the fact that the child never knew her, in spite of the fact that Vermont law gave no parental rights to civil union partners, and in spite of the fact that civil unions are valid only between supposed homosexuals, which Lisa at least turned out not to be.

During the child-custody court battles that ensued, several experts and Isabella's birth-mother testified that the court-ordered visits were causing serious trauma in the child's life. Lisa began to refuse these ordered visits, and after the Vermont judge in 2009 transferred custody of Lisa's child to the Vermont woman, the mother sought help from a Mennonite pastor, Ken Miller.

Miller allegedly aided the mother and child to leave the country for the child's safety. The pastor was arrested on international kidnapping charges, and he began serving a 27-month prison sentence in the Petersburg, VA Federal Correctional Complex last March. You can learn more

about this brother and donate to help support his family while he serves his prison sentence at www.millercase.org.

Pastor Miller's legal troubles are not yet over. The U. S. Attorney's office in Buffalo, NY is calling him to testify at the trial of a fellow-believer who has also been charged in this case. The pastor refused to testify in one such case before, and he served a 40-day jail sentence for his refusal. He now faces the threat that his current 27-month sentence will be lengthened if he refuses to testify against his brother in Christ.

In his most recent letter from prison dated August 11, Pastor Miller spoke of the encouragement he felt when a young boy remembered him with a card. He wrote: "In a world of empty promises, delusionary dreams, transient relationships, we have a Rock that can't be taken away. Tears filled my eyes recently when a young boy sent me a card with these words scrawled on the inside:

"Oft upon the Rock I stand
Faint of heart and weak of knee,
But the Blessed Rock of Ages
Never trembles under me.

"Those who've found the Rock testify that yes, to leave all in exchange for that Rock is a reasonable option; in fact, it's the only option" (www.millercase.org).

Well, praise the Lord for salvation from the sin of homosexuality, praise the Lord for a mother who wants to protect her daughter, praise the Lord for the courage of Pastor Miller, and praise the Lord for that young boy that blessed his brother's heart when he remembered him.

That is what our passage is about this morning, remembering the prisoners, and though knowledge of people imprisoned for the faith is far less common in our land than it was in the days of these Hebrew believers, it is becoming more so. The question this verse asks of us is, “Are our hearts and lives ready to remember the prisoners?”

I. Remember the prisoners, because it is easy to forget them (*Be remembering*).

Ill: The horse Secretariat won the Triple Crown in 1973. He came into the Kentucky Derby of that year having been voted “Horse of the Year” in the prior year. Some doubts lingered about how well the horse would perform on the much longer tracks of the Triple Crown. When Secretariat ran the 1.25 mile Kentucky Derby, he set a new track record. What racing experts remember most about that race, however, was the fact that with each quarter mile, Secretariat got faster and faster. He did the first quarter mile in 25.2 seconds, the second in 24 seconds, the third in 23.8 seconds, the fourth in 23.4 seconds, and the final quarter mile in 23 seconds. No horse had ever done that before.

Appl: What Secretariat did is a model for how Christian growth in grace is supposed to work. Ideally, we should grow faster and faster with each new step of Christian maturity that we take in the Lord’s grace. We should be more excited about reading our Bibles than we were at the beginning, more open in our witness for Christ than we were at the first, and more faithful at our prayer life and worship assembly times than we have ever been before. These Hebrew Christians, however, had run into a quarter mile of the believer’s race in which they were moving much slower than they used to. This was especially true when it came to remembering prisoners (see 10:32-39). Our author asks

these believers not only to remember prisoners, but also to do so the way they used to.

The New Testament church was born in Jerusalem in the fiery furnace of the religious persecution of a hostile orthodox Judaism. There had been a time when these Hebrew believers had been faithful under these conditions. But now, they had to be told again – “remember,” “call to remembrance the former days,” “cast not away your confidence,” “we are not of them who draw back, but believe.” There were yet prisoners to remember, yet a work to be done, yet souls to be saved, yet a church to edify, yet a faith to pass along to those who follow. None of that had changed. What had changed was their willingness to do these things.

What about you and I? Do we need to call to remembrance the former days of prayer and perseverance when God was using us for His glory? Have we grieved or quenched His Spirit? Do we care to ask? Do we need to remember how to grow in grace again, because it has been easy for us to forget? Have you hit a quarter mile in the race where you feel like your feet are stuck in the mud? What is to be done? Can you hear the Word of the Lord this morning, “Remember, cast not away your confidence, do not draw back, be faithful again”? If you hear that in your heart, respond with “Yes, Lord, I will remember; forgive me and cleanse me in the blood of your Son, my Savior; I will be faithful again.”

II. Remember the prisoners, because their suffering is lonely (*as with them*).

III: Certainly, were I in prison with Pastor Miller, it would be easier to remember him. The apostle Paul is called many things in the New Testament. We know him as “Paul, apostle to the Gentiles”; “Paul, the servant of Jesus Christ”; even “Paul, the chief of sinners saved by grace.” We read a pas-

sage this morning from Acts (23:18) in which he is called, "Paul, the prisoner." You may remember that Paul spent a lot of time alone in those chapters of Acts as "Paul, the prisoner."

The book of Acts ends with Paul still in prison. One chronology I saw said that Paul was put in prison after the riot in Jerusalem in May of A.D. 57, and he stayed a prisoner except for a brief release not recorded in Acts until his execution in the Spring of A.D. 68. Luke, whom I believe wrote this exhortation to remember prisoners, was with Paul the prisoner during all that time as his personal physician. He saw firsthand the loneliness someone like that suffered, and he did what he could to minister to it as imprisoned with him. We know that to be the case in part because of what Paul says about Luke at the end of 2 Timothy (4:9-18).

Appl: Perhaps one of the most difficult things about suffering for the cause of Christ is how you begin to see that there are not a whole lot of people who want to suffer with you. It can be a lonely thing to suffer for Christ, and the remedy for that are believers who are willing to suffer together.

But even if we have to stand alone, what was true for Paul will always be true for us (vv. 17-18). One stands with His suffering ones who shall deliver them from every evil deed. Paul was beheaded shortly after writing those words, and when that happened he was delivered from every evil deed by his Lord. He had shed his last tear. He would never feel abandoned and alone again. He no longer needed the armor of warfare. He had prayed his last prayer of faith. He had felt his last bodily pain. He was delivered. We are not there yet, but we will be. In the meantime, may we be like Luke and not like Demas. May we stand with those who suffer for Christ, not run with those who love this present world.

III. Remember the prisoners, because we share the same body (as in the body).

III: Oregon bakers, Aaron and Melissa Klein, were ordered to pay more than \$135,000 in damages to a lesbian couple because they refused to bake a cake for their wedding. The fine carried with it a 9% interest penalty had it not been paid on time. A few days prior to Christmas, the Oregon Labor Commissioner ordered that the Klein's family bank accounts be seized. They took \$7000.

Appl: The Kleins fit into an ever growing category in our country, which our author calls *them which suffer adversity*. We are told to remember them *as those who are in the body*. The grammar of that phrase clearly refers to the truth that we as mortals with physical limitations can remember with more sympathy those who are suffering. We know what it is like to work hard and sacrifice to develop a business and can imagine the heartbreak of then losing everything you worked for. We know how important our bank account is just before Christmas as we prepare for Christmas shopping, and we can imagine what it would be like for a government official to seize what we had saved. Angels have no bodily limitations like this, so they would have a hard time remembering them which suffer adversity the way we can.

And yet, we are actually not very good at this remembrance either, are we? The One who truly feels as in the body the suffering of His people with them when they are persecuted is the incarnate Son of God. He too took a body. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). Jesus asked Saul of Tarsus regarding his persecution of the church, "Saul, Saul,

why are you persecuting Me?" That is the Saul that became Paul, and so he who was the greatest persecutor of the church became full of empathy like his Lord for the persecuted church. By the time he wrote 2 Corinthians, He could rightly claim, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?" (2 Cor. 11:29). Paul had learned the lesson he wrote down in 1 Cor. 12:26, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." We must remember them that are afflicted as those in that body. When they suffer, we do too. 1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Do we care for one another as those who are in the body? Are we living for self, or laying down our lives for the brethren, especially those who are prisoners?

Conclusion: Pastor Miller closed his letter dated August 11th this way: "As you can see, my life here isn't so difficult. I'm reading through the Martyrs Mirror right now and am almost ashamed at how nice I have it compared to people in prison back then and many around the world right now. On pg. 570-571 there's a touching account of a young man, Algerius, who was executed for his faith by being scalded with hot oil, then burned to ashes at the stake. From his dismal prison dungeon, he wrote a letter to his fellow brethren before he died. He testified of the unspeakable joy Christ brought to him in that terrible place. He closed the letter with: 'Written in the most delightful pleasure garden of the prison, called Leonia, the 12th of July, A.D. 1557.'

"May the Christ he died for be the Christ we live for!" We began with a question this morning – are our hearts and lives ready to remember the prisoners? Pastor Miller

give us the answer: only if the Christ they suffer for is the Christ that we are willing to live for each and every day. Now is the time for choosing. Will we remember the prisoners, or continue to live for self and the things of this world?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching