

The Testimony of Joshua Cinsnanmang, my student

The Encounter

I, Joshua Cinsnanmang, was excited because it was Thursday, the last day of canvassing for the week. My team was working a predominantly non-Christian area called Kuantan, about three hours east of Kuala Lumpur. And as I said, I was excited that it was Thursday, our last work day for the week. Not that I don't like canvassing but just that I love Sabbaths.

After having our late lunch we continued working from 3 pm. As we only had four hours more to go I was full of energy and happiness.

Once we reached our destination Peter (my team leader) stopped beside a row of businesses and asked Timothy to hop out first. Timothy was situated between Marcella and me and that made it difficult for him to get out of the vehicle. So Peter changed his mind and asked me to hop out first instead since I was sitting by the door.

After canvassing for a while I finally reached the last shop, a café. As usual I spoke to the counter and after that asked if I could speak to the customers. They kindly said "no" so as I was making my way out a man called to me. I went over to him and he said, "I know you all; you've been going around Kuantan selling books right?" And I answered, "Yes" with hope in my heart because I thought he was going to buy my books because we work hard and are persistent. But the first words he said were, "I'm going to put you in prison," not something I expected to hear.

Turns out he was a local political elder called a "YB", which is an acronym for a Malay word that means "respected one". He was a man with authority and power; a man with influence that had political powers too. He told me that lately a few of his people had complained to him that there are some people going around in Kuantan who claim to be students. They thought we were con-artists selling books and collecting donations by telling lies. I told him I was a student and he straightaway asked me for my student ID.

Well, the training centre I attend is an underground program. It isn't technically a tertiary school in the formal sense. So we don't have the standard formal student ID's. And when I tried to explain this, that just confirmed to him that I was lying. He then asked me for a permit to collect donations and again I told him we don't have one (since we are asking help for our training expenses, not for some charity). Then he asked for my personal ID.

Now you should know that I am a refugee from Myanmar and need to get my refugee status updated each year. Consequently, my passport and UN card were at the UN Office. So I didn't have them either, and thus... he called the police immediately.

Well, almost immediately. But before that, he first called the reporters. He wanted to make some

statement, it seems, about being hard on crime, or something.

When I think back, what's amazing is the peace I had throughout that time. When all that was going on, when the man was on the phone, Psalm 27:1 just kept ringing in my head and I had peace that whole time because I knew that I was not a liar taking advantage of the people and stealing their money.

When he was making those calls he went out of the café and if had I wanted to run, I could have easily escaped. I could have easily outrun him and his friends. But I never thought of doing anything like that. I had peace the whole time. It felt like all things would soon be settled.

Soon the police arrived, and they handcuffed Peter and I and took us to the police station. There we had nothing to do so we were singing and praying together. We thought things would soon be settled and we would be released that very night, but it was not so. They told us that we would be put in the lock up because they had to do an investigation on our case. (During this time I was able to communicate with Mr. Prewitt who was in America and with several other persons who wanted to help us.)

So into lockup we went. And God is so good; I got to experience the quote in Ministry of Healing, page 248.2, in reality. We were asked to memorize this quote in the class and I got to experience it. It says, "Those who surrender their lives to His guidance and to His service will never be placed in a position for which He has not made provision." Amen.

I must admit that God had already prepared and made provisions for us; He who knows the beginning from the end already had prepared the way for us. I say that because everyone was good to us. By the way we conducted ourselves the guards and police could tell that we were not criminals and so we gained favour in their eyes through the grace of God.

In fact the Police, before transferring us to the lockup, bought us drinks and food! It was late, around 10:00 pm in the evening, so they didn't want us to go to the lockup with empty stomachs! They got us chicken burgers but we don't eat chicken so we thanked them and told them that we are vegetarians and thankfully declined the food. But I could tell that they cared and I hope we were a witness to them through our life.

By the way, all the police found it funny and were surprised when they found out that we were being locked up for finding ways to pay our tuition fees.

They put us in the lock up and I still had peace but soon when the next day came, my faith was on the balance. The devil began to tell me all the possibilities of what could happen, things like I would be put in prison or get deported back to Myanmar and separated from my dear family. And as a refugee the last thing you want to do is get deported back to Myanmar. There were carvings in the lockup walls by people who missed their family. Words about how they missed their mom, dad,

brothers and even their children. I didn't want to even look at those carvings because I didn't want to miss my family. The devil began suggesting every reason to get discouraged and I was so tempted to ask God, why? Why me? Couldn't it have been Timothy? I reasoned that "he's a citizen and it would be a lot easier for him than for me, a refugee without any proper document and identity." Verses like Romans 8:28 were hard to accept when I had those feelings. It was hard to "count it all joy" or to "rejoice evermore" and give thanks in all things. Experiencing it in your head and in reality is totally different; knowing is so different from experiencing it.

Believe it or not, God who is so good already prepared me for this trial. In dreams and when I would just sit by myself and meditate; God would ask me, "if you were put in a prison how would you react." In my dreams and imaginations I told to Mr Prewitt who is my teacher, "Please don't pray so that I can get out but rather pray for me that I stay faithful." But let me tell you experiencing it is totally different, probably because I was naïve and inexperienced.

All I could do was to cling to this promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusted in Thee."

God Speaks

The first days were tough; the devil was torturing me with all the possibilities and negative things that could happen. I would try to exercise and sing and meditate upon bible promises so that I don't get depressed. I even prayed for everyone that I knew so to draw attention away from myself to the people I loved. I prayed for my family, friends and teachers. But amidst these trials, "God is love", that's all I can say. He does not allow us to be tempted above what we can bear. The reason he allows trials to come is because he knows that we can get through them. If it was going to break us rather than fix us he would avert them as a protective parent would. He was with me comforting me.

When I prayed, "God please be with me through this." He replied, "I am with you even to the ends of the world, I have never left you nor forsaken you." I had to repent of by feelings because he was always with me and yet I had doubted his presence.

When the devil told me that my future was done and there is no hope for me, God would speak to me through Jeremiah 29:11. God would send his sparrows into the cell and one sat right beside me at arm's length, and I was reminded of the love of God found in Matthew 10:29-31.

There was even a time when I prayed a prayer of repentance and was in doubt whether God would forgive me and his reply to me was Isaiah 43:18, 19. That literally moved me to tears. God spoke to me and it was always through His Word and if there's one thing that I learned in my time there it is that I should memorize more of the Bible. I thank God for Scripture songs; they were a source of encouragement to me during my time there. Also, songs like He's Able, God Will Make a Way, etc. means a lot more in situations like these. You sing them with all your heart.

Whenever God spoke to me it was always through His Word.

“The study of the Scriptures is the means divinely ordained to bring men into closer connection with their Creator and to give them a clearer knowledge of His will. It is the medium of communication between God and man.” {GC 69.2}

I began to have a peace that surpasses understanding when I trusted in him. (Isaiah 26:3)

God's Presence

A cell-mate named Atan became our friend. Later he told me that the moment he first saw us he could tell that we were different. He said, “I looked at your faces and you were not like the others, there was something different about you all.” I believe it was the presence of God that made him notice the difference in us, I'm sure it wasn't us but God in the working. Atan continued to say that he knew that our religion was real and that he could tell we had been trained up since we “were kids.” That we had been brought up with good and He could see that we were devoted and trusted in God.

People noticed the difference in us and wanted to be our friends. One boy even told the police that he lonely in hope that I would be put in the same cell with him.

I told Atan that we are Adventists and began finding common grounds with him; like we don't eat pork, we don't smoke, we don't drink alcoholic beverages; we like the Muslims believe in Jesus' return. We became very good friends. He told me that he had heard of Adventists and this is the first time he is seeing Adventists in person. He was arrested for the use of drugs when he failed the urine test. He told me that this was the third time he's in the lockup and all three time it was because of drugs. He has two daughters who are still very young. I don't remember their ages. But they are still too young to go to school.

I asked him how he was feeling; he replied he was feeling nervous. We prayed with him and for him. We even sang songs for him, hoping he would have peace. We sang I surrender all and I noticed that while we were singing for him he fell asleep. I hope the reason he could fall asleep was because he had peace and not because our voices were out of tune.

The day he was taken out of the lockup to be transferred into the prison he came over to my cell to say goodbye. I was sleeping at that time and he came and called me by my name; being surprised I woke up to find it was Atan. He came to say goodbye to me and I could see that he was happy to see me and to be able to say goodbye.

A Good Friend

The day after we were put in the lockup a new man joined us. His name is Suehaidie. He, like others, was brought in because of drugs. About 99% of the people that come in the lockup are

because of drug use. Suehaidie was a good man and we became friends quickly. He cared for me as his child because he was almost the same age as my dad. Since we don't have pillows or blankets in the lockup what he did for me was he removed his shirt and made a pillow out of his shirt for me. It was cold during the nights but he would sleep shirtless because he insisted I use his shirt as a pillow. He sacrificed feeling cold just because he cared for me. When it was cold in the night he would cuddle me so I felt warm.

During lunch and dinner we were always served watermelon so he would give me his watermelon. Not that he didn't like them; it's just that he cared for me. This man was always at peace; most of the time he would sleep and was always happy and calm. He never prayed or did anything at the prayer times. The reason he was calm was because he thought his parents would get him out. He thought his parents could get him out by bribing the lawyers. He would say with a big smile I'm going out on this date.

His attitude was a rebuke to me sometimes; here is a man that trusts in his parents is so peaceful and I who have a Father in Heaven am not as happy as he is. I would encourage myself through songs and bible verses. To not get depressed I would pray for every single person I knew, my family, my teachers, my friends, my cell mates etc. so that I don't focus on my condition. Finally, as expected the day came for Uncle Sue to be released. We said goodbye and he left. But something happened and he returned to the lockup again. His parents couldn't get the job done so he was rather sentenced to 5 years in prison with 2 years on probation. He requested to the police that if he could stay in the same cell as me. He told them he had a friend and they agreed.

So we were reunited; but this time I noticed something different. He started to pray; every time before we ate breakfast, lunch or dinner he would join us to say grace for the food. Sometimes he would wait for us just to pray, he'd say, "Let's pray."

I told him that the "reason God brought you back is because He missed you. He wants you to talk to him that's why He has brought you back," and I began to share with him the story of Adam and Eve, the fall of man, the love of God, 1 John 1:9, the Ten Commandments, the Sunday law and so on. He learned and listened.

You know, we don't get down on our knees until the burdens we carry are too heavy for us to carry that we are forced to get down on our knees. I was not an exception; I prayed like I never did before during my time in that cell.

We Found Favour as did Daniel and Joseph

God was with us and he helped us find favour in the eyes of the police. From the first day we requested if we could get vegetarian food and our request was granted. Not only that we were also given water, so we didn't have to drink water from the toilet. As I said earlier God was helping us. I even got promoted to serve food for the cell mates. Yes, I was asked to help in serving food. They trusted me so they even asked me to sweep and mop their office and corridor. Nothing was in vain,

they bought me food and even offered me cigarettes. I told them I don't smoke and shared that I am an Adventist and we follow whatever the Bible says.

Jeremiah 33:3

During my time in the prison I was clinging to this promise found in Jeremiah 33:3. The investigative officer told us that he would investigate our case; he said that they suspected that we were either con-artists using the name of being students to get money or that we could be puppets in the hands of others and that we are being used. Our case even reached to the court and we were summoned to the court. It didn't sound hopeful, it looked like we might be put in prison because we didn't have anything solid to show to them or to prove to them that we are not liars so I was getting more worried but I would always pray this prayer in Jeremiah 33:3.

I can't explain it but I kind of felt that God is going to show me great and mighty thing that I have never seen before; there was something that felt like God had answered my prayer and I had peace. All along there were evidences that God was with me and when I put the puzzle all together I felt like God was going to show me something mighty.

Sure enough something happened. Me and Peter were called and were told that we had visitors. It was the YB (respected one)! Yes, the man that put us into the lockup was there with pastor Janssen and my dad and friends. They had come to visit us. The YB apologised to us because he found out that we were not lying. He confessed that he's been a Christian for 20 years and he deeply regretted and repented that he was fighting against God's messengers. He closed the case and the whole case was settled and my friend Peter was released the next day.

But I was not, because I had some issues with my identity. They had to confirm whether I was a refugee or not and there was a possibility that if I was not confirmed to be a refugee I could either be put in prison or fined or get deported back to Myanmar. It didn't feel so nice to be left behind but I was really happy for my friend because it meant that the charges were dropped and I didn't have to worry too much. Now the only issue I had was with my refugee status and that was a relief.

John 3:16

During the time when I was asked to clean the office I found a 5 cent coin lying on the floor as I was sweeping the floor and I took it with me back to the cell. (This has about the same value as an American penny). The reason I was glad to find the coin was because I wanted to carve something on the wall. So using the coin I carved out John 3:16; the verse that sums up the entire Bible on the wall in bold. By the grace of God I was put into the biggest cell where about 8-10 people fit and according to standard procedure people were moved to different cells as their case progressed. But for me I requested that I remain in that cell and my request was granted. The reason I wanted to remain there was because it was big and the chances of me being able to talk to people was higher if I remained there and also because I wanted to exercise and take walks after every meal to aid digestion and also to stay healthy because the last thing I wanted was to get sick in a lockup. I would always look at that verse and meditate upon it and try to grasp its meaning prayerfully.

On Thursday morning the police called me out. Remember, by this time I was alone because Peter my friend had already been released. They cuffed me and I began to think to myself, "What are they going to do to me?" They put me in the car and we hit the roads. I thought they were going to transfer me to another lock-up or put me to prison and I was a little bit worried because I hoped my family and friends knew the location where they were going to put me if it was true that they were going to transfer me.

My thoughts were running all over and I began to claim Bible promises and sang "You are My Hiding Place" and God spoke to me and said, "I have a surprise for you." And that gave me peace. So much so that I was sleeping all the way. The police that took me looked surprised because he knew that they were taking me to the court and he was surprised that I had peace. (But no one had told me where we were going and I hadn't asked, so I didn't know.) He was thinking, "no criminal is so calm when they are taken to the court." I could sleep peacefully eager to see the surprise that God had for me. We made our way to the court in Temerloh. Now you should know that this is a large unreached city. Only a few months before my friends and I had come to Termerloh and left hundreds of truth-filled books in that dark place. It was surreal to see the places that I had canvassed. I had flashbacks of those days and it felt nice.

Soon we reached the court and sure enough I saw the surprise that God had in store for me. It was my parents and my friends with Pastor Janssen! I was surprised and happy to see them there.

I went inside the court and they read the charges against me if I was guilty and not a refugee. The charges for illegally entering the country is either 6 years imprisonment and 6 slash or Rm 10,000 fine. I told them I was a refugee and the judge gave me one week to see whether I was a refugee or not. So I was told that I had to stay one more week in the lock-up and return to the court on the 28th June after the investigations are done so I was put back into the lockup.

I spent another Sabbath in the lock-up; I really missed my friends and singing in the church.

Deliverance

The devil again began to torture me by reminding me that I could go to prison for 6 years and waste my best years there. My time in the lock-up was a time of ups and downs; there were times when I would have perfect peace but there were times when I was tempted to doubt God's presence. The Devil even used a drug Lord who was in and out of prison. This man began to share with me all the reasons not to go to prison and also how he was slashed 10 times in his bottoms. (Malaysia punishes some crimes by hitting the convict with canes.) How much it hurt and that he had to stay in the hospital for weeks. And that really got me thinking of the negative things that could happen. And Thursday, the end of my week for bringing proof, was soon approaching and I had to pray more earnestly as the day was approaching.

It was Tuesday evening and there were only two days remaining and as usual I took a stroll in my cell because I had just eaten dinner. As I was walking back and forth my eyes were fixed on John

3:16 that I carved on the wall and I began meditating upon the Father's love for us. You know when I met my parents in the court I could tell that they had suffered a lot. I could tell from their eyes that they had cried a lot although they didn't want me to know. There was a time when my dad visited me in the cell and I could tell that he tried his best to not break down to see his son with prison clothes and handcuffs. The visitation time of 5 minutes was over so he prayed for me but this time he couldn't hold back. He broke down and he began to weep as he was praying and seeing my dad so hurt moved me to tears. Both father and son were just weeping like never before.

And as I was meditating upon John 3:16; I compared it to my dad's love for me. As a matter of fact, I can say with confidence that my parents suffered more than I did. And I began to think about how much God the Father would have gone through to have his son slain from the foundation of the world. How His heart would have been pierced to witness his only son being tortured at the hands of sinners. Yet he loved us so much that he was willing to give up his only son and go through all that.

As my eyes were opened to behold John 3:16 like never before I literally broke down to tears while taking my walk in the cell. I got down on my knees and asked for forgiveness to God for failing to realise His love for me. I asked for forgiveness for always praying only for deliverance and not knowing that God loves me with an "everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3) and that he loves me more than parents ever will (Isaiah 49:15). And God began to speak to me through verses like Jeremiah 29:11 (His thoughts towards me are not evil and he has a better future for me with hope), Matthew 28:20 (He's with me even to the ends of the world) and Hebrews 13:5 (He will never leave me nor forsake me) and my heart understood a little bit of God's love for me.

So right then and there I gave my life to God again. I told Him, "I surrender all; I know that you love me so much and that you will be with me always. If I have to go to the prison or get deported back to Myanmar I know you will be with me so I surrender my life to you. Whatever happens let it happen."

"God is love." Immediately after I prayed a prayer of surrender a police came up to me and said "Joshua, you are going out." I believe it was because of everyone that prayed for me but I also believe that God was just waiting for me to surrender my life to Him. I got released on Tuesday evening; two days earlier than I was supposed to. All God wanted me was to surrender like Abraham did and He did not require my sacrifice because all he wanted was a "willing mind" (2 Corinthians 8:12) and He accepted it. I learned that when I surrender my life to Him; I'm not surrendering my life to a tyrant. I'm surrendering my life to my Father who has my best interests in mind.

And I was released two days earlier without any charges right after a prayer of surrender. Every day my prayer was that God would give me a new heart, a heart of flesh. I was praying for the promise in Ezekiel 36:26. I didn't know what I was asking for. I was actually asking for a heart transplant and that is exactly what God did for me. But the thing is He didn't use anaesthesia this

time. God knew that if he just gave me a new heart without any pain I would not value it so he had to make sure i appreciated it. He told me, "I will hurt you but will not injure you."
I learned that God allows us to get hurt but not to injure us but to heal us.

Job 23:10 tells me that God knew every step I took; the path I was taking during Canvassing. He knew I was going to meet the YB and be put into the lock up. I know that if I was not only going to get hurt but also injured God would have let Timothy, who is a Malaysian citizen with proper documents to take my place but He knew that I could get through this trial and that I could come froth as gold tried in the fire. He had faith in me and I learned many valuable lessons during my time there. I called upon God and He answered me and showed me great and mighty things I had never seen or experienced but the greatest of all miracle was my Eyes being opened to John 3:16. I had it memorised since I was a kid but never really meditated on it.

Thank you for your prayers; not a single prayer was unheard or in vain. God answered every single one of them.