

From the book: "The Prisoner in the Third Cell"by Gene Edwards

.....*It has been said that it is impossible to forgive a man who deliberately hurts you for the sole purpose of destroying you or lowering you. If this be true, you have but one hope; to see this unfair hurt as coming by permission from God for the purpose of lifting your stature above that place where formerly you stood.*

John 1:23 He said, I am THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS, MAKE STRAIGHT THE WAY OF THE LORD, as said the prophet Isaiah. (John the Baptist)

Jesus speaking to John the Baptist in prison before his beheading.....

"John, they have come for you. Much sooner than you had thought. In a few minutes you will be no more. There is no time to send word to your disciples. Nor to my mother, Mary, who has worried so much for your safety. You will not be given a single word to anyone. Nor will you be able to ask again the question you addressed to me.

"In less than four minutes now, you will be dead. How many thoughts can be crowded into one's mind in four minutes? How many doubts? how many questions? Not many. But, John, worst of all, there will be *no* answers.

"And blessed are you, John,
if you are not offended with me.

"They have unshackled you. The staircase is before you. The door above is open. You can see the light of day above you.

"Why is this happening to you, John? You, of all people? Your head....*severed* from your body? Why? Because of an obscene dance by a teenage girl. How ironic.

"You will never live to see your thirty-third birthday, nor will you know exactly why I have called you. Nor will you know if your life on this earth counted for anything. Those long years in the searing desert, you denied yourself of everything this earth affords except food and water, and only enough of that to keep you alive. You did all this for me. Yet, as you face death, there is no evidence that your life was anything but wasted. Have I forsaken you in the hour you need me most?

"And blessed are you,
if you are not offended with me.

"You have reached the head of the stairs. You are not sure which way they would have you turn. A guard points to the left. You follow. Is this happening? You have less than one minute before that immutable blank. You recall those long vigils before my face. Did you misunderstand me? Were you mistaken? Perhaps you did not hear my voice at all?

"In all those years you lived alone in the desert never once knew love or comfort from another human being. Will I not extend such comfort to you now, at last? You never had the pleasure of your own children to climb up on your lap, to give you earthly joy. You never came in contact with a woman, ever; you never had a wife. You have never known intimate love. Your whole life was lived for your calling, and for me. Will I not now, in this last moment of your life, part the veil and allow you to see something.....anything.....of my purpose in your life and in your death? You will die wondering why I ate and drank as I did, why I did not fast as you fasted, nor pray as you prayed. Was the Messiah not to be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?

"You will die today at the hands of uncircumcised, heathen, Gentile, Romans. But your death at their hands will come about only by my sovereign permission. And you will die not understanding why I allowed this seemingly senseless act.

"And blessed are you,
if you are not offended with me.

"You will not see the multitudes cry out at my entry into Jerusalem. Neither will you see me crucified, nor hear of my resurrection and my triumph over death. You will die not knowing that you have proclaimed the coming of none the less than the *Son of God*.

"And blessed are you, John
if you are not offended with me.

"They have opened the gate to the courtyard. There it is, the block on which you will lay your head, and there the man who will take your life. You will be remembered as one of the greatest men who ever lived. But you will not know that, nor will you hear the Son of God say, 'Of men born of women, there was none greater than John.'

"Even now as you kneel, you wonder if you are a complete failure. You gave so much, poured out you life so completely, lived for God so singularly. Yet despite all this, you could not so much as win the favor of God to the point of his giving you one answer to one question. It was, after all, the only request you ever made.

"I did not give you an answer. I never have. The question of *why* always remains unanswered in all my dealings with men; this is my way. But if there were one human being on this earth to whom I would make clear my purpose, it would be *you*. And it would be now. Above all other men or women who have ever lived, I would give an answer to *you*."

John knelt and placed his head upon the block.

"When I called you, John, and told you that you would announce the coming of the Messiah, you assumed that because you were going to prepare the way for me, you

would have the joy of seeing that wonderful day of my coming in glory. But today you have met a God you do not understand. Such are my ways in every generation. No man has ever understood me, not fully. No man ever will. I will always be something other than what men expect me to be. I will work out my will in ways different from what men foresee.

"The guard has shifted his weight. The blade is raised above you. Death stands beside you. Die, my brother John, in the presence of a God who did not live up to your expectations.

"And blessed are you,
if you are not offended with me.

A day like that which awaited John awaits us all. It is unavoidable because every believer imagines his God to be a certain way, and is quite sure his Lord will do certain things under certain conditions. But your Lord is never quite what you imagined Him to be.

You have now come face to face with a God whom you do not fully understand. You have met a God who has not lived up to your expectations. Every believer must come to grips with a God who did not do things quite the way it was expected.

You are going to get to know your Lord by faith or you will not know him at all. Faith in Him, trust that is in Him....*not* in His ways.

Today you are resentful of those who so callously hurt you. But no, not really. The truth is you are angry with God because, ultimately, you are not dealing with men, you are dealing with the sovereign hand of your Lord. Behind all events, behind all things, there is always His sovereign hand.

The question is not, "Why is God doing this" Why is he like this? The question is not, "I need him desperately, why does He not come rescue me?" The question is not, "Why did God allow this tragedy to happen to me, to my children, to my wife, to my husband, to my family? Nor is it, "Why does God allow injustices?"

The question before the house is this: "Will you follow a God you do not understand? Will you follow a God who does not live up to your expectations?"

Your Lord has put something in your life which you cannot bear. The burden is simply too great. He was never supposed to do this! But the question remains, "Will you continue to follow this God who did not live up to your expectations?"

"And blessed are you
if you are not offended with me.

Shall we scorn that God has revealed so little concerning His ways, or rejoice that He has revealed so much?

"Captain, the third cell is empty."

"It will not be empty long. I have just received word that we are to receive a new prisoner."

"What has this one done?"

"I do not know. There is always the possibility this one is as innocent as was John"

The soldier's response was simple. "I hate having such prisoners! We have a prisoner in the first cell who rails against unfairness, against men, and against circumstances. We have a prisoner in the second cell who is hostile toward God because of what his God has done to him...."

"The new prisoner has arrived," called a voice at the head of the stairs.

"Take this rope," said Protheus to the guard. "Lower the prisoner into the miry pit."

Who is this prisoner? Who is this one who will now be imprisoned in the third cell? What name will be inscribed beside the cell door?

One thing is certain: It was inevitable that this person be sent here. Inevitable, unavoidable, and a sovereign act of God.

The prisoner's name? Surely, the question is not necessary, dear reader; *you* are the prisoner in the third cell!

"And blessed are you
if you are not offended with me.

Dear reader, no one can fully understand the pain you feel as you suffer your present situation. Whether it came upon you because of circumstances or by the deeds of men, one thing is certain. Before this present tragedy entered into your life, it first passed through the sovereign hand of God.

"And blessed are you....."