

Inmates Free a Child From a Locked SUV

The Wired Word for the Week of March 10, 2019

In the News

Except for the status of the rescuers involved, the incident under discussion here barely rises to the level of news. But the status of those who lent a hand -- county jail inmates -- is what caused it to be widely reported after a video of the incident showed up on Facebook recently.

The problem occurred in New Port Richey, Florida, after a father placed his 1-year-old daughter in a car seat in their SUV and then inadvertently locked both her and the car keys in the car.

As the father tried to figure out how to open the vehicle, he attracted the attention of some deputies from the Pasco County Sheriff's Office who were supervising five work-release prisoners who were repairing medians outside the West Pasco Judicial Center.

The baby's mother had by then arrived on the scene, and for the good of his daughter, the father was willing to have deputies break a car window. It was only 56 degrees at that time, and the child was in no immediate danger, so the deputies suggested the couple call a locksmith. But couple did not have funds for that.

At that point, several of the inmates told their supervisor that they could get into the vehicle without breaking the window or otherwise damaging the car, and the couple and the deputies agreed to let them try.

The inmates, dressed in traditional black-and-white-striped prison garb, went at it. Several pried on the door while one, using a straightened coat hanger someone in the gathered crowd provided, was able to slip the wire inside the door and push the button for the electronic door lock. They had the door open in about two minutes.

"Yes! Thank God!" Shadow Lantry, the baby's mother, shouted as the door swung open and the horn started to blare. "Thank you guys so much."

Lantry captured the rescue on her cell phone video and later posted it on Facebook where it was seen by many, including news media sources, who included the incident in their news roundups.

A spokesperson for the sheriff's office said the inmates involved were incarcerated for "low-level crimes." The inmate who was able to get into the vehicle with the coat hanger had been arrested for a probation violation for grand theft and fraud, according to online booking records.

Pasco County Sheriff Chris Nocco said, "There's only a very small percentage of those criminals out there that want to fight us and want to attack us, A lot of them, like these individuals, they know they made bad mistakes, bad choices -- but they want to do the right thing in life."

More on this story can be found at these links:

Parents Locked Their Baby and Keys in a Car -- and Needed Inmates to Help Them Break

In. *The Washington Post*

Florida Inmates Help Rescue Baby After Dad Locks Keys in Car. *ABC News* (includes video)

Applying the News Story

Providence is a word we don't want to throw about carelessly, for there have been many tragedies involving children accidentally left in hot cars all day and dying as a result. An honest skeptic might ask where providence was at those times. While we know of no answer to that question, many of us can tell of times when we felt that God was behind some help or rescue that came to us.

Today's lesson gives us an opportunity to explore the matter of coincidence versus providence.

The Big Questions

1. In the case of the baby locked in the car, do you think the proximity of inmates was a coincidence or providence? Both? Neither? Explain your answer.
2. Have you had anything happen in your life or that of a loved one that had to be either a remarkable coincidence or an action of God? What helped you decide which it was, or at least the likelihood that it was one or the other?
3. While there is no final and satisfying answer to this question, what are some reasons that God might help in some situations but not others that are similar?
4. We occasionally hear claims that faithfulness to God will bring health, wealth and happiness, but that is not the promise of the Bible. What the Bible does promise is God himself. His presence will be with us. Is that sufficient reason to give thanks? Why or why not?
5. Is it appropriate to thank God for his providence when we are in the midst of deep trouble or catastrophe? Would raging against God be a better choice? (Probably most of us would do both.) Explain your answer.

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Isaiah 43:2-3

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. ... (For context, read 43:1-7.)

In the Scriptures, deep water and fire are often metaphors for serious trouble and extreme danger. Sometimes they were also literal danger for the people of Israel. When they had to cross the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit, they faced literal deep waters (Exodus 14). When the three Hebrew young men refused to worship the Babylonian god, they were thrown into a furnace of literal fire (Daniel 3). In both of these cases, God was with them. When they trusted God was with them, they were able to face the danger.

God does not promise health, wealth and happiness. He promises to be with us.

Questions: How might you share with a person in deep trouble the conviction that God is with him or her? Might your own testimony help?

Matthew 6:30

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you ...? (For context, read 6:25-34.)

This verse and its context are all about God's providence. Providence comes from the same root word as does "provide" and "provisions," and refers to God's ability to "look" (*vide*) "ahead" (*pro*) and arrange for a person to have what is needed. It means that in an ultimate sense, nothing happens that cannot be subject to God's purposes. That does not mean that God plans everything that happens to us, but it does mean that this is God's world, and he, not luck, not fate, determines the meaning of this life of ours. Providence means that there is a creating, saving possibility in every situation that cannot be destroyed by evil or by anything else.

Questions: Where are you aware of providence operating in your life right now? What makes you question whether providence is operating in your life right now? How do you deal with your questions about God's providence in your life?

Exodus 8:8-10

Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, "Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." Moses said to Pharaoh, "Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." And he said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God, ..." (For context, read 8:1-15.)

This reading comes from the time when the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt. God called Moses to go to Pharaoh and demand that he let the Israelites leave and go to Canaan. When Pharaoh, not willing to lose his free labor force, refused, God empowered Moses and Aaron his brother to bring plagues upon Egypt. It took 10 plagues before Pharaoh finally relented and granted the Israelites permission to go. These verses concern the second plague, frogs.

Moses told Pharaoh that if he didn't let the people go, God would cause the land to swarm with frogs, so that the little green creatures would turn up even in people's beds and in their food dishes. Not persuaded, Pharaoh said no, and the frog plague occurred.

Finally Pharaoh had had enough. Then Moses said to Pharaoh: "Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile." In other words, you set the time for the plague to end, Pharaoh! When Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow," Moses replied, "As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God."

Do you see what Moses was doing? By forcing Pharaoh to name the time that the plague would end, Moses was eliminating any possibility that Pharaoh would say that the stopping of the plague was just a coincidence. Moses wanted Pharaoh to understand that God was behind the action -- not fate, not luck, not Mother Nature, and certainly not coincidence.

Questions: What sorts of signals do you look for to indicate God's activity in your life? When have you recognized them while they were happening? When have you recognized them only in hindsight?