

Faith of The Imprisoned - An examination of motive, spirituality, and the mind of the captive.
By Chase McKnight

What makes the down-trodden to rejoice? To whom do the weak cry for strength? And though in chains, what corridor of a prisoner's heart allows him to feel free? These answers can be found in the harrowing tale of Mary Rowlandson, the captive who lived among her captors. In the early spring sunrise of 1675, savage Indian warriors stormed the quiet puritan community of Lancaster, resulting in countless puritan casualties. In the midst of these attacks stood a young woman. Hazed by the fog of gunpowder and puritan blood, her eyes glared helplessly at the gruesome scenes of murder by the hands of those blood-thirsty warriors; a fate which she feared would befall her, as well as her family. Alas, after the smoke of the gunfire had settled and the rain of bullets had ceased, she would find herself made a prisoner of war at the hands of a people she despised. She details her days of survival in the wilderness, as well as the treacherous journies in which she and many others were forced to take part. She describes the physical and spiritual struggle of being the prisoner of a cruel people, even going so far as to refer to her captors as "ravenous beasts" after enduring countless horrific trials at their hand. While her writings depict no distinct and awe-inspiring climax as we know it today, her account of Massachusetts colonial officials arranging her release by ransom could be described as one of the most breathtaking depictions of freedom in human history. Perhaps even more moving than her tale of freedom, is her tale of hope in captivity; which she attributes solely to her christian faith. As we read in her accounts, the indomitability of her spirit and faith could only be rivaled in literature by the Apostle Paul and his tale of rejoicing in the midst of defeat. Mary paints a beautiful reflection of Paul and Silas singing gleefully within the prison walls of Philippi with the brush of her own life story, a reflection which lives on in the hearts of many prisoners today. The resolution of her polarizing story lies in the precise moment her eyes met the faces of the ones she loved after her release. She details the joy she felt knowing that her family would alas reintegrate into the puritan community which she had so longed for while a prisoner. However, despite her historic tale of human triumph, the darker facets of her story warrant a deeper exploration. The question which plagues the reader's mind could be described as such, what was Mary's goal in detailing her time as a prisoner? To uncover the answer, we must first understand the mind, and convictions of Mary Rowlandson. Although we're not given an abundance of clarification on the mindset or heart of Mary in her writings, she does make her views on religion, and race very apparent. Mrs. Rowlandson proclaims her puritan faith with great pride and zeal in her writings. She remarks dutifully of the moral superiority of the puritan belief system, as well as the faith which seemed to beckon her captive soul to find joy in despair. Her strong faith and adherence to the puritan way seems to be the driving force of her life, and all its facets. While her endless proclamations of puritan doctrine certainly cause the reader to question the convictions behind her writings; it is her disdain for the American Indian people, which she makes indubitably clear, that causes the reader to examine the true motive of Mary Rowlandson's accounts. However, as natural as it may be for we as humans to find a simple answer to a complex case, I'm afraid a simple answer would never do these questions justice. In fact, I believe the true answer lies at the crossroads of what most would consider her primary motives; an amalgamation of 3 possible desires; to further propagate her perceived white superiority over the American Indian people, to encourage readers to engage in the puritan faith, as well as proclaim her own devotion to God, and lastly, to share her own life story, and give hope to those who could relate. While she made clear her severe dislike of the American Indian people, it seems her primary goal in publishing her writings was to not only spread awareness of the puritan faith, but also to encourage those who endured trials to trust God to bring them through such. However, whether intentional or not, her blunt racism and grotesque descriptions of the American Indians served as a deadly fear mongering tool in order to spread more hatred and distrust toward the American Indian people for generations to come. While her tale of bravery, faith, and survival will live on in the hearts of prisoners for as long as her name is remembered, and long after it's forgotten; her story serves as a cautionary reminder to every soul on earth. Though the trials of our life might maim, mutilate, or even destroy our souls and flesh, we shan't ever use those trials as a means to justify the hatred of those who brought those trials upon us. For even in chains, the soul shall remain forever free.