



## Communion Weekend September 2013 – “Freedom for the Captives” (Selected Scriptures)

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Read Isaiah 61:1-2; Read Luke 4:16-21; Jesus stopped in the middle of verse 2 because what no Old Testament prophet realized was there would be this indefinite period between the first and second coming of Jesus Christ known as “the church age.” We see this also in Daniel’s prophecy as well (Daniel 9:25-27). Paul says that this was “kept hidden in God” for ages (Eph.3:9). John describes what this period of time would be like in John 1:16-17. Read John 3:16-17.

And what exactly is Jesus doing throughout the church age?

- Preaching good news to the poor (Poor, weak, afflicted).
  - Salvation is free (Isa. 55:1-9; Rom.3:23-24).
  - God will sustain you in this life, by faith (I Kings 17:7-16).
  - Glorious future inheritance (Eph.1:18; I Cor.3:21-22)
  
- Healing for the brokenhearted (rend violently, shatter, crush).
  - Heaven will make right all our disappointments in this life.
  - John 4:4-26
  
- Proclaim freedom for the captives.
  - To Satan (II Tim.2:25-26; Mark 5:1-20)
  - To Sin (John 8:34; II Peter 2:19b)
  
- Release from darkness for the prisoners.
  - One translation says the “opening of the prison to them that are bound.”
  - This is not a literal prison. We know this because they are released from being a prisoner of darkness. This simply refers to people who are blind to the truth and are living in the spiritual darkness of this present world. See Acts 26:18a.

I received a letter from a lady this past week who is in a Florida prison. She had lived through years of abuse in a troubled marriage, has two young sons, is now divorced and incarcerated. The first day of her imprisonment another lady gave this woman a Bible and said, "I was told you need this." She kept the bible without any intentions of reading it. One evening she sat on her bunk in her cell angry and saying to God, "If you are real you better prove yourself to me now." Later that evening she found herself in the prison chapel weeping uncontrollably for her two boys. While overcome with emotion, she grabbed the Bible and opened it to Jeremiah 31:15-17 (read). She was not familiar with the Bible, had never read the Bible before this. Knowing that God had just proven Himself through His Word, she then begged God to let her know when she would be free to go home. She flipped over to Ezekiel 1:1. Family and friends hired an attorney for her to try and get her sentence reduced. As it turns out, she will now get out on April 5<sup>th</sup> (5<sup>th</sup> day of the fourth month). When she gets out, she wants a church that will accept her despite her past. She began to pray that God would lead her to a church like that. Recently she was in the chapel library and found a book called "Stories of Calvary." Chapter one is titled "A Hope and a Future (Jer.31:17)," and is about another lady that just happens to be named "Angela," the same first name as the lady I am telling you about. Read the first two paragraphs of chapter one in "Stories of Calvary." She couldn't put the book down. After reading she talked to a close friend, "I told my friend I get out on a Friday and I will be at Calvary Chapel on Saturday and Sunday even if I have to walk...I don't know how to get plugged in or how to become a member. I want to get involved. I want to be in Bible studies so that I can learn as much as I can. I am new at all of this, every day is a learning experience for me."

Thanks to Mary Fairchild and all who were part of putting together "Stories of Calvary." This one letter makes it all worth it to me. How many more are out there just waiting to be set free through the message of the gospel?

The book of Acts starts out this way – read Acts 1:1-2. The stories in Acts are stories of what Jesus continued to do through the message of the gospel and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. One of my favorite stories in this book is found in Acts 16:16-34.

The officials who beat Paul and Silas were called "lectors" in Latin. This is where we get the expression "taking your licks." In Jewish legal tradition, there was a maximum number of blows that could be delivered when beating a person, but the Romans had no such limit. We can rest assured Paul and Silas were severely beaten. Paul would later write of his ministry: *In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.* (2 Corinthians 11:23)

See II Tim.2:8-10.

Despite the painful circumstances Paul and Silas were in, they were full of joy. They begin to pray, and then they sing. It could be that neither one of them could carry a tune in a bucket, but they weren't concerned about pitch or correct notes, they were simply responding to the overflow

of the Holy Spirit in their lives. At times like these I'll bet Paul's mind went back to Stephen, how everyone saw Stephen's face as the face of an angel, how Stephen prayed for those pelting him with stones. Now Paul had what Stephen had (Jesus), and no beating, no prison, no hardship in this life could rob him of his joy and hope!

What is fascinating to me about this is what God used to shake this prison and set these captives free – the prayers and praise of two Christians in prison. If God can use two Christians praying and praising, what might he do through several hundred. He used several hundred in II Chron.20 to defeat a vast enemy army that was threatening the people of Israel. (Read II Chron.20:12, 21-22.)

## CONCLUSION

Good news to the poor, healing for the brokenhearted, freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners...