

Jesus Liberating Captives by His Word

by Pastor Bob Hoekstra (son of Chaplain Ray)

“Liberating captives” was (and is) the ministry of Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior. *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Isaiah 61:1). In Luke 4:18, our Lord quoted this Messianic prophesy and applied it to Himself.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus went about preaching God’s word, proclaiming the gospel of salvation through His name. *“Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”* (Luke 8:1). Those who responded to Him in faith were forgiven of their sins. Their broken hearts were comforted. Then, a growing liberation from all that bound them was available from the Lord.

Prisoners are a notable group in Isaiah’s prophetic description of Jesus’ ministry: *“to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”* Our Lord wants to liberate such captives. Initially, He wants to free them from the bondage of sin and guilt. Then, He wants to increasingly liberate them from bondage to ungodly thinking and worldly living. At times, the Lord even sets them free from prison itself. Yet, even when He leaves them in prison to serve Him there, such redeemed prisoners are truly free in Christ.

My father, Chaplain Ray, through the years of his prison ministry, spoke of such “liberated captives.” He often reflected upon the many prisoners he knew who were more liberated spiritually than many Christians in the so-called “free world.” I have witnessed the same reality on numerous occasions, while ministering the word of God in prisons and jails.

This spiritual liberation comes from the ministry of the word of the Lord into people’s lives. Jesus declared this grand reality. *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32). The truth that liberates lives is the truth of the word of God. This liberating truth is experienced by those true disciples of Jesus who habitually receive the word of God into their lives. *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed”* (John 8:31).

The Apostle Paul recorded one of the most significant examples of spiritual freedom resulting from the ministry of God’s word. *“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God”* (1 Thessalonians 1:9). The citizens of Thessalonica had been in bondage to false gods. After Paul proclaimed the word of God to them, they became servants of the true and living God. The word of God, at work in their hearts changed their lives profoundly. *“For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

When people consistently take in the message of the scriptures as the true word of God, the word goes to work effectively within their hearts, liberating them from that which has bound them. The word of God is unique and powerful. It is not at all like the mere religious words of man. God’s word has a radical, life-changing message. It offers the help of God for the needs of man.

Multitudes of prisoners come to Christ every year. Those who earnestly get into the word of

God become gloriously liberated - - set free from the lies of the enemy, the bondage of sin, and the vain philosophies of the world. Pray for us at IPM, that we might be used of God greatly in seeing Jesus liberating captives by His word.