

CAPTIVITY

“And he forsook the tabernacle at Shiloh, the tent where he had dwelt among men, and gave his strength into captivity, and his glory into the hand of the oppressor; and delivered up his people unto the sword, and was very wroth with his inheritance: the fire consumed their young men, and their maidens were not praised in [nuptial] song; their priests fell by the sword, and their widows made no lamentation. Then the Lord awoke as one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth aloud by reason of wine; and he smote his adversaries in the hinder part, and put them to everlasting reproach.”—Psalm 78: 60–66.

“And thou, son of man, prepare thee a captive's baggage, and go captive by day in their sight; and thou shalt go captive from thy place to another place in their sight. It may be they will consider, though they are a rebellious house.”—Ezekiel 12: 3.

“And the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, Son of man, what is that proverb which ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days shall be prolonged, and every vision faileth? Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the accomplishment of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination in the midst of the house of Israel. For I [am] Jehovah; I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall be performed, it shall be no more deferred. For in your days, O rebellious house, will I speak the word and will perform it, saith the Lord Jehovah.”—Ezekiel 12: 21–25.

“And the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said to her mistress, Oh, would that my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria! then he would cure him of his leprosy. And he went and told his lord saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.”—2 Kings 5: 2–4.

The link in these Scriptures, as they are in one's mind, is in the idea of captivity. Not that I think we are going into captivity, I do not think so. One has been into captivity and He is out of it, and the glad tidings involves this, not that we should go into captivity. I think some would

like to see us going into captivity, every one of us; they would like to put us into captivity, and keep us there too. But God does not mean that. Indeed, the Lord would say to us, to assure our hearts, I have placed before thee an opened door, which no one can close. God means His word to run and be glorified, and He means to bring us into the gain of the glad tidings, so that if the gospel is veiled, it is veiled in those that are lost. It was not veiled in Paul, nor Silvanus, nor Timotheus; they preached the word. The Son of God has been fully preached among you by me, Paul says, and Silvanus and Timotheus. Well, we appreciate what that includes, this great service, and carrying it forward, and those available to have part in it. Wonderful matter, the radiancy of the glory of the glad tidings. Who is it shining for? It is shining for us today! The glad tidings is shining for us, shining from heaven, the radiancy and the glory and the power. And the word is preached that the radiancy of the shining might be in our hearts, not off at a distance—although we are thankful for what is general. Paul rejoiced that the gospel was preached in any case, even about those who preached contentiously; he was thankful that, in any case, the gospel was preached. But the shining was in his heart, and in those with him, and it is to be in our hearts.

The One who has come into the world that He created, and how He has come in, how He has come in, and what is in Him as He comes in in John's gospel, In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. Wonderful what shines out that lightens every man; that is, sheds light on every matter, but how it is meant to shine into our hearts. That is what Paul says, it is the God who spoke that out of darkness light should shine who has shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Wonderful to see the radiancy in the face of Jesus! And so we preach Jesus; Christ Jesus Lord, as Paul says, and ourselves your bondmen for Jesus' sake. He never served for his own sake, he never served for base gain, he never served for wages—unless the wages of love; he carried on as a sacrificial service the ministration of the glad tidings. One would love to be in line with that kind of service and that kind of serving. God is in it, it's God's matter, the setting forth of His own thoughts in Christ, the One who was marked out Son of God in power, according to the Spirit of

holiness, by resurrection of the dead.

O my friend, have you a link with Jesus? Have you heard the voice of the Son of God? We have heard His voice, we have heard the voice of the Son of God; that is not future. There is what is future, all that are in the tombs will hear His voice, but it says, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God—and through grace we can say, most if not all of us, that we have heard His voice, we have heard His voice—and they that have heard shall live. It's a question of life. It is no formal, dead, stale, stagnant order of things, not what we are engaged in, not what Christ is setting on. The enemy is not equal to it, the enemy is not equal to it. The Lord is encouraging us not to fear, in that sense, him that when he destroys the body has nothing more that he can do. Fear Him, He says, who has authority after He has killed to cast into hell; yea, He says, I say to you, Fear Him. Have you no fear of God? Some people have no fear of God, they show by what they do that they do not fear God. You take that man on the cross when Jesus was there, the malefactor who appealed to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, when Thou comest in Thy kingdom. When his companion spoke against Him, he says, Dost thou too not fear God? Don't you fear God? That is what he says, he says, If Thou be the Christ, save Thyself and us; and the man who was convicted says, Dost thou too not fear God, we that are under the same condemnation? You know what the beginning of wisdom is? The fear of the Lord, the fear of God. What will the end of these people be? Peter raises that matter. What will be the end of those who obey not the gospel? So we want to think of the end, what will the end of all this matter be? We know what the end will be for us, we know what the end will be. Jesus will come Himself to claim us for Himself, and we will be kept out of the hour of trial. I don't think we'll go into captivity, I don't think so. The enemy is going to defeat his purpose, he always does, he goes too far, he defeats his own purpose. What God does remains. Do you know what God does? Do you know what He has done? He has given heaven's best to meet man's worst; that is what God has done. You know who died? Jesus died. That Person died and went into captivity. Do you think He needed to? Do you think there was no power to keep Him out of it? No, dear friend, He was delivered up according to the determinate counsel

and foreknowledge of God. He had to go that way and, by the grace of God, He has tasted death for every thing. Wonderful matter, the gospel, there is nothing, there is nothing that you can set up alongside of God's glad tidings. Paul says, Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, he says, I am the first, or the chief. Oh, what it is to think of what that involves, presented as it is, the case of Saul of Tarsus, how he was converted, how he was changed, what the result is as arrived at in the testimonial position. For me to live is Christ, and to die gain; oh, what the result was. What the result is to be in the glad tidings in relation to what God has in mind. To justify us? Oh, yes, before God. Wonderful to think of being justified before God. Before men? No. But whom He has justified, these also He has glorified. Man will do his worst, I suppose he will keep on doing it, I suppose he will, many of them will, but the preaching is to turn man from darkness to light, and from Satan's power to God. And the truth is that the darkness is passing and the true light already shines.

Why did Jesus come into this scene? O dear friend, He came in to undo the works of the devil, that is why the Son of God has been manifested, that He might undo the works of the devil. How? In you and in me, to set us free. He was delivered for our offences, that is why He went into captivity; He was raised again for our justification. And so, as justified by faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ. But in the glad tidings, what is in mind is that those whom He foreknew, those also He predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Very great honour to be among the brethren, very great honour, very great favour. There is no greater company of people on the earth than the brethren of Christ. Oh, what it is to get hold of God's truth as it is in Jesus, to know what it is, to know the Sanctifier and those sanctified all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Not what we have done, not where we have come from, nothing national, nothing racial, but God's glad tidings. The same Lord of all is rich towards all those who call upon Him. Christ gave Himself for us, that He might deliver us out of this present evil world; that is why He died, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God. How real God's gospel

preached for obedience of faith to all the nations is, and we shall not go into captivity. He has been into captivity for us. He delivered His strength into captivity, His glory into the hand of the oppressor. What it was when the ark of God was taken, but what strength was there! Who can stand before God's anointed, God's beloved Son? Who can stand before Him? Have you no fear of the Son of God? O my friend, it is a question of what is in mind, of what God has in mind for every one of us, to turn us from our evil ways, to turn us from darkness to light, to arrive at what it is that is said, which thing is true in Me and in you. Oh, that the light might become effective! That's what He says, as long as you have the light, walk in the light, that ye may become sons of light. That is what Paul is, he is a son of light, the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God. It's becoming luminous. That's what is in mind, not less than that is in mind for every one of us. To appear where? Testimonially in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation; among whom ye appear as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life. That is the position testimonially. Are we going into captivity?

Well, you see, I read that passage in Ezekiel because I think the Lord has been indicating in the way of a sign what is to come home to us. You see, it was the prophet was to prepare himself a captive's baggage, and he was to do it in the sight of the people. How are they moving? How are we moving? This is what comes up when the gospel is preached, it is meant to penetrate into us, it is what Christ has done. It is what is presented for the obedience of faith. The mercy-seat, through faith in His blood; it is what is held out. How God is just, and the Justifier of him that is of the faith of Jesus. Are you of the faith of Jesus? Through grace my faith is in His finished work. He could not be holden of death; He awoke as a mighty man out of sleep. His enemies, what about them? What power there is, you see! Destroy this temple, He says, and in three days I will raise it up. Oh, the glory of God in the way in which it has operated in taking Christ out from among the dead. He could not be holden of its power, that we might not go into captivity, but then the prophet was to prepare himself a captive's baggage in the sight of the people, for a sign. And the Lord has been having to say to us, beloved brethren, that we might know how to get by. I don't think a captive would take anything to burden

himself, I don't think he would. He would get by, dig through the wall and get by. Of course, they had to go into captivity, they went into captivity, but, as I said, I don't believe God means us to go into captivity. I believe He means us to move in the gain of an opened door which no one can shut. How wondrous is His grace, the grace of God, the wealth of it, how it will shine out in the day to come, how it is to be known now, and the gospel is preached that we might come into the gain of God's provision in His grace. Saved by grace, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. When we could do nothing for ourselves Christ died, He gave Himself for us to set us free so that we might not go into captivity, so that we might get the gain of what He is saying to us. A man burdened down with earthly things, tear down our barns and build greater, that man is called a fool—this night thy soul shall be required of thee. How we are to get through in the present course of things; the grace of God has appeared, in this connection, teaching us that, having denied impiety and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, justly, and piously in the present course of things. How wondrous the teaching of the glad tidings!

And then the word is preached to penetrate into our souls, into our minds, that we might be affected. It's not going to be like it was, it's not going to be like it was. It's what is set on, I think that's the point. What is that proverb which ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days shall be prolonged, and every vision faileth? Do you think it will fail? Do you think the Lord's words will fall to the ground in what He is having to say to us? He doesn't mean them to fall to the ground, He means them to become effective. Tell them therefore, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but say unto them, The days are at hand, and the accomplishment of every vision. For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination in the midst of the house of Israel. That's what He means. He is giving us a sign, John's gospel links with it, he is giving us a sign how the work of God is to appear for what it is. That's what the Lord is at. The synoptic gospels bring the grace of God near to meet us in our responsibility and need; John brings out what the work of God is and how it shows itself and how it answers to His word. Now, in those Jews His

word had no entrance into them, the love of God was not in them, but if His word has entrance into you or me it makes all the difference, makes all the difference. We want to keep ourselves in the love of God, building ourselves up on our most holy faith; that is what Jude exhorts us, this line of things. He doesn't mean a single word to fall to the ground, He means His word to be effective, He means His words to be effective. There shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination; that's what He is at. That's what the Lord is at, giving a word and bringing about what it requires, performing it, and so He is having to say to us again and again, and, at this time, it's a question of what extends, it's a question of what comes out. And so God would have men everywhere to be saved, that's God's thought, that's God's thought. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, He doesn't want to see anybody finish that way, Christ rejectors; it's not God's thought. He would have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. His words are not to fall to the ground, and they are not falling to the ground. God's words are not falling to the ground, they are falling into honest and good hearts. Is yours an honest and good heart, my friend? That's Luke, you know, he has in mind a result of a hundredfold, that's what he has in mind. Has the word fallen into honest and good hearts? And you don't need to be an old person for this; not too young. There are not many young ones here, of course, but then that's how it is.

So I'm thinking of captivity, what that involves. Is anyone taken captive in these parts? The bands of the Syrians, people that band themselves together for an evil purpose; what will they accomplish? A little maid was taken captive, she was taken captive. How will it be? Well, how will it be? I think the Lord would enlist our sympathetic and prayerful interest in this matter in the fullest way, I think He would. But, you see, this little maid is in the gain of the gospel. Oh, well, you probably say, she didn't commit many sins anyway. That's not the point at all, that's not the point. If I was taken captive I sometimes wonder how it would be with me. It was all right with Paul and Silas. They got into the prison, you know. At midnight, with their feet in the stocks, it was all right with them. They turned the place upside down and inside out, they changed it completely; they carried on the service of God in the prison. I wonder how it would

be with me? Think of certain circumstances if they happened, the enemy would do it to every one of us, he would put us into captivity and keep us there if he could; but Christ has been into captivity so that we will never be there. We will never be there, not in that sense, but there she was. The bands of the Syrians, this band of the Syrians, they took this little maid, carried her away. How will it be? Will she fall into line with the life of the Syrians, the life of the world, as we would say, with its amusements and entertainments, with its T.V.'s and radios, with its sports and all the rest of it? Will she be captured in that sense? Will she be taken captive in that sense? O beloved, the grace of God has reached into her heart, there is what has been indelibly imprinted by the Spirit of God in her heart, the fleshy tables of her heart. She is equal, she is equal to being there, without any hard feelings, without any prejudice, without any bitterness, as far as we can see. Oh, she says, would that my master were before the prophet that is in Samaria! then he would cure him of his leprosy. It doesn't say that her mistress told her husband, doesn't say that, but it does say that, Thus and thus saith the little maid. Well! he says, go and see about this. Of course, we know well enough what had entered into it, but the point was that there she is, captive in this sense, and there she is manifesting the gain of the gospel at the Ephesian level. That's what it means, equal to the position; and that is what the Lord means to make effective in every one of us. We have been slow, you know, very slow to get hold of the truth. You say, Is that, all that in mind in the glad tidings? Well, The wages of sin is death; but the act of the favour of God, eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. The teaching involves, as we've often said, the kingdom, the covenant, reconciliation, and eternal life. His commandment is life eternal. His commandment, I think it gathers it up, you know, it gathers it up. We talk about eternal life, we enjoy it too, thank God we do, but reconciliation involves a moral change, it involves what God had in Christ when He was here. My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased; that is the point of reconciliation. But for us it involves new creation, it involves a change, a moral change. It has taken place in this captive maid. It has taken place in Saul of Tarsus. You say, How did it take place? It took place in the way in which he preferred Christ to himself, that's how it took place. Have you come to the point of preferring Christ to

yourself? That's what it is, Christ in me. So the Lord has these things to say to us. He has been into the distance, the darkness, the pressure of Gethsemane, the agony of the cross; My God, He says, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? We have to answer that; why was He forsaken? O beloved friends, it was for us, He went that way for us. To leave us as we were, going on as we were, enjoying what is in the Bible and living our lives as we like? No, dear friends, to bring about a change so that we can be as He would have us, anywhere, at any time, and all the time; and that's the gospel, that's the gospel. Going on with the world? Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord. What fellowship has light with darkness? That's what comes out. And so it's not a question just of what shines, but if it shines in you. If it shines in it will bring about a change, and that's what the Lord is at. He is at a change, and a change that can be seen anywhere, at any time. And so you see the illustration in the little maid, and may it be in every one of us. For His name's sake. Amen.

J.H. Symington.

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