

Praise To The Liberator

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE MAGICAL MOMENTS you would never expect. I was working in my office one morning last week when two men stopped by. Their appearance was a bit unusual; they wore maroon vests with writing and insignia, and similarly-decorated caps. They quickly began a conversation, and it took a few moments to understand who they were.

THESE MEN HAD TRAVELED ACROSS THE STATE (and in Tennessee, that's a considerable distance!) to a gathering of ex-prisoners of war. These had been captured during World War II, but others at the convention were veterans of other conflicts. I imagine some of the stories at this event were vivid and electrifying.

AS WE WERE VISITING, ONE OF THE SENIOR members of our congregation came into the building on an unrelated mission. Frank is a native of Hungary, and had also been pressed into service during World War II. He, however, had been forced to fight on the Nazi side. Being a man of strong conviction, he eventually fled his army rather than fight for a bloodthirsty dictator. He was captured and made a prisoner -- by his own army.

WHEN I INTRODUCED OUR TWO GUESTS TO FRANK, they immediately began comparing notes. One insight almost immediately surfaced: Frank had been liberated from the Hungarian army by the same forces that liberated our two guests. General George Patton and the Third Army had been the liberators in each case.

I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THAT THERE WERE glowing words given in honor of General Patton and his troops! And quite understandably so. I've never experienced anything like the conditions these men have been through, but my imagination runs wild at the thought. To be robbed of your liberty to move around freely; to be thrown into humiliating and oppressive conditions; to have your very dignity and existence challenged -- all of these seem to be a common experience of the prisoner of war. Can there be a harder lot in life?

AND THEN COMES THE LIBERATOR! Can you imagine the rush of relief when the gates are flung open? The joy erupting from the core of your soul! Free again! Free again! Never more will you take freedom for granted. Being able to open your door and take a walk down the street now becomes a cherished possession. How wonderful to be able to go down at night with no fear of being awakened in the morning's wee hours for more intimidation by those in control.

YES, THE LIBERATOR WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED by those who have once been prisoners. Whenever that name is mentioned, tears will come to their eyes and a lump will be felt in the throat. Those who were once prisoners of war, those who almost abandoned hope of ever living free again, will always feel a debt of gratitude to their liberator.

THE SCENE THAT DAY LASTED ONLY A FEW MINUTES, but the impression on my mind will last long. Immediately it reminded me of a lesson that I must never forget.

THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT PROPHECY found in Isaiah 61:1. Jews through the ages have recognized this as a prediction of the work of the Messiah. It is a promise of joyful and happy days: "The Spirit of the Lord 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." For anyone who had ever known the whip of slavery on their back, these were precious promises indeed.

JESUS, AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY, read from this very passage. Then, in Luke 4:21, He claimed to be the fulfillment of the prophecy. What a dramatic moment that was: Jesus claiming to be the Messiah, the "anointed One" of God! But it was not the only time Jesus staked such a claim. On many occasions, He spoke of setting people free.

LISTEN TO ONE OF THESE CLAIMS: "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36)

What does He mean, "free indeed"? Imagine the commander of a prison camp announcing to the captives that they will be allowed "freedom" to march together to a specified location on a certain day. There they will watch a ball game and then march back together to their cells. Yes, that is freedom on a limited scale. But nothing like the freedom the Allied forces bulldozing the fences and allowing them to live their lives on their own terms! That is being "free indeed".

JESUS PROMISES TO BE THE GREAT LIBERATOR. But from what does He liberate us? We're not captives, are we? In America, we revel in our freedoms. We don't need an Emancipator as some in Third World countries might. What can Jesus possibly offer us?

JESUS ANSWERS THAT QUESTION, AGAIN IN JOHN 8: "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). Ah, that kind of bondage! It's not the kind one can see with physical eyes. It is a spiritual enslavement, one that pertains to all of humanity. Whether we realize it or not, we are in bondage to an Evil Power ("We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one", 1 John 5:19).

THOSE OF US WHO BELIEVE GOD'S WORD grow quite alarmed at such an announcement. We realize that we are not really living as we could because we are being manipulated by one whose motives are not in our best interests. If only we could break free from his grasp! If only someone could help us break free!!

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15). Do you hear the bells ringing? Liberation has come!! Not all the prisoners have heard the news, they continue to live inside walls of captivity. But for those who hear, believe and submit, the gates have been smashed. They can walk out of the camp of death into heavenly freedom!

AND WHEN WE HAVE WALKED OUT INTO FREEDOM, shall we forget our Liberator? Shall we wave our hands in thanks to Him, and then walk away? Or will we not forever be bound to Him (a new bondage!) by chains of gratefulness? Nothing He asks will be too much to give in return. Nowhere He leads will be unreasonable -- because He paid the supreme sacrifice to set me free. Thank You, my Liberator. Forever, thank You!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE FREEDOM Christ can give you? Get in touch with us. Let's open God's word together. There's some wonderful news to be found there!

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