

## **Lesson Four**

### **1. Line from O Holy Night**

- ***Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother...***

### **2. Scriptural approach**

- God's people have certainly known what it means to be in chains. The Jews of the Old Testament went through three major enslavements (Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian) and countless other take-overs by foreign powers (Roman, Greek, Philistines, etc...).
- New Testament Christians were under the thumb of the Roman Empire and suffered persecution to various degrees depending on who the emperor was and how he saw the Christians as a threat or not (Nero, Augustus, Flavius, Caligula, etc...).
- Yet all those enslavements came to an end when God's people repented of their sins and turned back to being faithful. But there were enslavements to things other than chains as well.
- Some enslavements were to our sins like greed, envy, hostility and avarice. It was the heart that was enslaved in chains that would not allow God's people to serve Him faithfully and obediently for the glory of the Kingdom of God.
- Consider Psalm 107. King David is remembering those many occasions when the Hebrews were enslaved and God had to rescue them. Verse 6 reads, *"They cried out to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress."*
- Hear verse 10-11. *"Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High. So, He subjected them to bitter labor..."*.
- Some of these imprisonments were of their own making, yet over and over again, once the people repent, God always delivers them from their captors.
- Even when the captivity was from their own wicked hearts, you hear that God will deliver them if they will just repent and become faithful again.

- Read Isaiah 58:6-9a. *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe them, and not turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help and He will say, ‘Here Am I.’”*
- This same method of freeing us becomes a hallmark for the purpose of Jesus on earth. Listen to Jesus’ words in Luke 4:18-19 as he quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2; *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*
- This becomes true freedom from oppression. This is the breaking of chains both physical and spiritual. This is the truth that sets us free (John 8:32).
- God provided this freedom throughout the Old Testament and Jesus Christ brought that freedom to us as well.

### **3. Pastoral approach**

- This is the physical freedom from chains of slavery and exile. But it also speaks to the freedom from chains of hatred and bigotry, from racism and pride and elitism.
- Today there are still places in the world where Christians are thrown into physical prisons because of their faith. They too cry out from places like Northern Sudan and Morocco, from Somalia and China.
- But all of us find ourselves chained from time to time by our sins. The love of God is trapped within us, unable to be set free to follow the example of Isaiah and Jesus.
- We too are called to proclaim good news to the captives, but how can we do that if our own hearts are imprisoned?
- Again, the answer is Jesus Christ. Again, as always, it begins with our repentance and desire to have the chains of our hearts broken so we can be free to love one another as God first loved us (1 John 4:19).
- What is the state of your heart today?
- Are you living the free life to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength?
- Are you living the free life to love your neighbor as yourself?
- If you are like me, then your life parallels the history of God’s people. Sometimes free, sometimes enslaved. Sometimes loving, sometimes disobedient.

- In the same way that the Spirit of the Lord was on Isaiah and Jesus to proclaim freedom, so too the Spirit compels us to do the same. But it's tough to proclaim freedom when our own hearts/lives are chained.

#### **4. Questions to consider**

- This first question should be the one you were expecting to see – *What “chains” are wrapped around your heart at this time? Greed? Needing to be in control? Criticism?*
- Knowing that repentance and submission to Christ are the only ways to break free, will you spend the time in prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to grow fruit worthy of faith (Gal. 5:22)?

#### **5. Final thoughts and closing prayer**

- Just as the ancient Hebrews did not remain in prison, nor did the Christians of the First Century, neither do we have to remain in prison. BUT, it is impossible to free ourselves, we do not have the power. But Christ himself holds the keys, so use your prayer time this week to repent and ask God to send the Spirit to free you from whatever chains are keeping you from living a faithful and holy life.
- Let us pray. O God, we do indeed find that too often our hearts are wrapped in chains from which we cannot free ourselves. Have mercy on us, Lord. Hear our cries of repentance and bring us forgiveness of our sins through the blood of the cross. Then send your Spirit, that he may change us from the inside out, breaking every chain that binds us. For our sake and the sake of your kingdom, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.