

## ***“Christmas: When The Faith Came!” (Galatians 3:23)***

For Your Life in Christ on the Circumcision of Our Lord, the Eighth Day  
of Christmas, January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011

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**Galatians 3:23: “Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.”**

### **Introduction: Did You Celebrate Release From Captivity & Prison?**

- A. As you celebrated the birth of Christ and -- as we reflected on last Sunday -- ***as you celebrated your birthday through Christ who came to give you life***, what did you get?
- B. I was thrilled that I finally got that silver Chevrolet Camaro with a racing stripe I’ve always wanted. It’s about a foot and a half long with a remote control! Not quite the real deal, but I was excited anyway!
- C. But seriously, what did you get? I told one of my kids early on that for me one of the best gifts was just having all of my kids together! Being with your family is a great gift indeed!
- D. In all of this inventorying of gifts (gifts that have needed returning, gifts that came damaged, gifts that maybe didn’t fit, gifts that have already been lost or broken), however, there is typically a gross underestimation of what we’ve really received. Sometimes the most important gifts – ironically – go unnoticed.
- E. But St. Paul while speaking to his fellow Jews, teaches about the greatest gifts they really received when Christmas came: the big thing that they all received was two-fold:
  - 1. One, was that faith itself came. They got the faith!
  - 2. And two, as result of the faith having come, they also received release from captivity. They got set free from prison!

### **Part I: Now It Might Seem Hard To Relate To Captivity**

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- A. Unless we’ve been through it, it seems almost impossible to really know how it feels. I’ve gone to visit parishioners in jail and prison and I’ve walked through those facilities with a myriad of thoughts and feelings, including relief that when the visit was over, I could just walk out. Our freedom is perhaps one of those things we underestimate the most.
- B. We’ve all heard about what hostages or prisoners of war can go through. We’ve seen television coverage of people reunited with their families, some of them so thankful to be back on American soil that they get down to kiss the ground!
- C. And the Jews to whom Paul was writing to in Galatia had ancestors who knew about captivity. They had been slaves to the Egyptians and captives under the Babylonians.
- D. Interestingly enough, however, St. Paul was writing to his contemporaries in the first century A.D. who could not claim a political captivity at the time, but what is even more interesting – on a spiritual level – his words in Galatians include all of us in respect to release from a different kind of captivity and prison altogether.

### **Part II: God’s Law Reveals A Spiritual Prison We Can All Relate To**

- A. It is virtually impossible to know the significance and the greatest gifts of Christmas, if one is unaware of the spiritual prison which is absolutely real.
- B. That spiritual prison is made known through God’s Law. For the Jews it was quite specific. The Mosaic Law was like a sentinel that held the Jews in custody until the fulfillment of the Law came. This mounted guard was a watcher for the coming Messiah, but until He came the Jews were bound to the ceremonial Law.
- C. In a different way, we also have a spiritual prison made known to us through the law. Whether Jew or Gentile, both the Law of Moses and the law in general reveal that we are sinners and until we are released, there is nothing we can do to get out of our captivity.

**Part III: But The Lord Puts Us On The Road To Salvation By  
Permitting Us To Know This Spiritual Prison**

- A. In the field of psychology there is much to be said about “addiction” and I believe that it can be an excellent way of describing our spiritual prison.
- B. Luther is bold and accurate in his Galatians commentary when he reflects on how young men feel captive to sexual desire (and how destructive can the sin of lust be to a young man?), and how mature men often fall prey to the sin of ambition (and how all-enveloping our careers can become!), and how older men easily give in to the sin of greed (so that men die clinging to things that turn to dust instead of Christ who never fades). (LW 26, 340-341)
- C. These “addictions” are revealed in us to show us that we are truly sinners captive within our spiritual prisons. The question is why does the Lord permit any of this to begin with?
- D. The answer is simple: It is not until one sees the severity of their sin – recognizing that they are truly in a spiritual prison – that one becomes so alarmed and so terrified that they truly want out. It is only when one hates their prison that they become interested in getting out of it! And Christmas proves that the Lord does not want us to remain in prison either!

**Part IV: “The Faith” Which St. Paul Wrote Of Is Our Release!**

- A. In Galatians 3, “faith” with its definite article in the Greek is “the doctrine” or “the fulfillment of the promises.” These refer to the coming of the Seed, that is, Jesus Himself.
- B. It is true that the Old Testament saints had faith in their hearts but it could only be in the promises about what God would do in the future some day. All of that changed. It was done! The day came! Salvation arrived!
- C. When Christ came, the Law lost its ability to keep us in prison!
- D. It is easy for people to think that they have to find a way to fix themselves by keeping the Law, but this can never work, because all the Law does is accuse us of all of our addictions,

failures and sins. So consider what God did by sending Christ:

**Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”**

- E. This is a vital concept, because in sin people continue to have false ideas of the Law:
  - 1. Ignore it as if it was insignificant, and in this way they never become aware of their spiritual prison.
  - 2. Mistreat it as if it was the key to salvation, and in this way become either diluted with self-righteousness or become overwhelmed with despair.
  - 3. Reject it and treat it as if it was no longer relevant, and in this way they permit themselves to sin without restraint.
  - 4. Or they fully recognize it, but they remain miserably in prison, because they fail to see what God has done to release them from prison (e.g. Cain, Saul, and Judas).

**Conclusion: But By God’s Spirit and God’s Word, You See...**

- A. What you really got for Christmas! First of all, the faith that is Jesus came to you, into your life. The faith came to you and by the power of the faith you now have faith in Christ!
- B. As a result, your faith informs you as to what Jesus did to the Law: He fulfilled it and He paid for the sin that it accuses you of! Every addiction that tries to dominate you has been dominated by Christ; and the guilt and the shame that fills your prison was removed from you and put onto Jesus when that baby became a man and died on the cross.
- C. But here is a vital detail that must not be forgotten: in your sinful nature, you jump back to being in state “before the faith” and you feel your prison all over again, but the Good News is that Jesus comes again through His Word and Sacrament. Remain in these, and you’ll know daily RELEASE from prison dear Christian!
- D. In the Christian Church, it is not enough to say, “Happy New Year,” we can say more because you have a NEW LIFE!