

Captivity and Deliverance

“When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter. And our tongue with singing.”
(Psalm 126.1-2)

Somewhat of a historical problem appears in this psalm of David. When we think of captivity in respect to Israel, the Assyrian or the Babylonian captivity comes to mind. But this can have reference to neither of these, for they come much later in the nation’s history than David’s reign. Also, it is not the nation that has gone into and come out of captivity, but “Zion”, the hill or city.

Therefore, what we have set before us is a spiritual principle of the church. It has happened, is currently happening, and can be expected to occur again. Such captivity has been, is presently ongoing among the saints, and will be again. There will be a final deliverance at the Lord’s return, but until then these “captivities” will recur. It is *spiritual* captivity that is in view, not a physical or political one. The whole drama of God’s salvation of His chosen people is one of deliverance out of captivity. The church is the “called out”. *“Out of Egypt have I called my son”* (Matt. 2:15). Our salvation began with God’s calling us out of “nature’s night”, the bondage of darkness, sin and death. Our sojourn on this earth together with all the people of God embraces a series of seasons and experiences wherein we are progressively delivered from the world, the flesh and the devil. There are times (some very short, others extended) when we sense ourselves bound, groping in darkness, and during which we struggle to recover spiritual footings. Such bondage is certainly not a tangible, physical one but an entirely spiritual one. Outwardly there may be little, if any, evidence or reason for the inward state. But the symptoms of bondage are the same. Our spirits are oppressed. We see the rise, prosperity, seemingly unfettered triumph of evil, of the enemies of our souls. Those who slander and hate righteousness and grace increase in power, while it seems our labors and testimonies are met with defeat, deadness, dryness and discouragement. We may be sorely beset by fierce temptations, assaults on our spiritual lives, and may even feel ourselves tottering on the brink of apostasy. We are desolate, weak and spiritually impoverished.

When we are delivered, (and we always are) it is by the sheer and undeniable power of God. There is no evidence of anything we have done to secure it. In fact, we may have been at our lowest point, near to despair and utter hopelessness. It is so great and marvelous in our view, we think we must be dreaming. We have become so accustomed to defeat and discouragement we cannot believe the liberty and joy we now know!

And how do the saints respond when they are brought again out of spiritual captivity? Laughter and singing. This is one of the few places in the Bible wherein laughter appears in the positive sense. Such laughter and singing is not a worldly sort because something is funny, or they are amused and having “fun”. That is the laughter of fools. No, this delirium is in the sheer joy and wonder in the power and glory of our mighty God and Deliverer. – C. M.