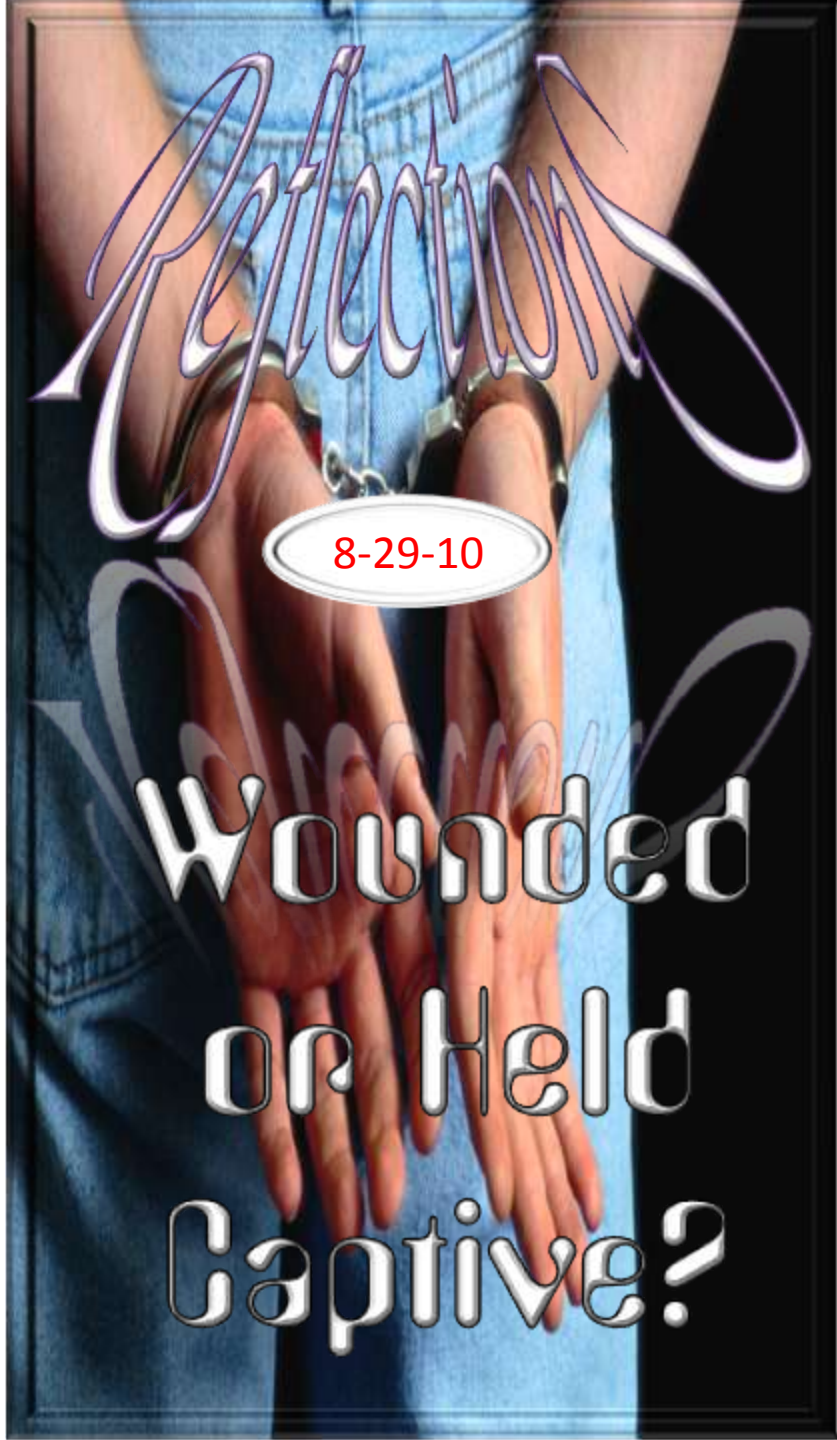




Sermon Notes



Reflection

8-29-10

Wounded
or Held
Captive?



Reflections

Imagine that you have been convicted, sentenced, and imprisoned, and your “crime” was sharing the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Pretty hard to imagine isn't it? This was the dilemma faced by many of the disciples of Jesus and Peter was one who had such an experience. *Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. ² Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. ³ And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. ⁴ So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover. ⁵ Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church. ⁶ And when Herod was about to bring him out, that night Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two soldiers; and the guards before the door were keeping the prison. (Act 12:1-6 NKJ)* The story continues as the Lord sent His angels to release Peter from his chains and then from the prison itself. He, at first, imagined that he was having a vision until the angels departed leaving him outside the prison. Peter then went to the house where many were praying for his release. When he arrived a girl named Roda answered the door and in her joy neglected to open the gate to Peter. The rest doubted her story until the gate was opened and Peter came in and explained what had happened to him.

So here we have what might, in our day, be a typical scene played out among the believers in a particular city or church. Someone is in chains. These chains could be addictions, slavery to sin, false theology, even religious persecution leading to actual imprisonment, or any other condition that has captured and now controls a person's life. The individual seeks to be delivered, but will our faith compel us to pray for him and minister to his needs, or will we turn away and declare it to be a self-inflicted problem that he must overcome on his own? Clearly the believers were praying for Peter, but were still astonished at his actual liberation. They, of course, rejoiced in his delivery but one might wonder why the surprise when their prayers were answered? Did they not pray expectantly?

The Scripture calls on us to bear one another's burdens, to pray for one another and to believe that God will liberate those for whom we pray. We are even given the parable of the good Samaritan, who ministered to the needs of one wounded and left for dead, to remind us

that we are to show mercy to those who are in trouble and in need of help. He bound up the man's wounds, took him to shelter, for which he paid, and made arrangements for the long-term needs of this man that he did not know. Jesus then asked the question that still rings true today. Who was this man's neighbor? In this man's case, the answer was given that it was the Samaritan who ministered to his needs that was the man's neighbor as he was the one who showed mercy.

Jesus, as He taught, referred to Isaiah's prophecy and quoted the portion that described His mission on Earth. *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; (Luke 4:18 NKJ)* If we are to be like our Savior, then we must become obedient to His Word and learn to love our neighbor as ourselves and learn to discern who our neighbor is and to give of ourselves on behalf of those who are hurting or held captive. Remember the believers who prayed for Peter's delivery? Let's not be surprised by answered prayer as they were. Let's pray in faith knowing that God hears and answers.

Someone might then ask: "What if the wounded one is me? To whom do I turn for help?" It is obvious that it is Jesus who has the power to deliver, but did he not tell us to love one another, minister to one another, to bear another's burdens? Did he not teach us to pray for one another? Should we not, like our master, reach out to the poor in spirit, to the broken-hearted, to the captive, or to those bound by sin? If you or I have become the wounded or captive one, can we not with expectation turn to our brothers and sisters for help? I believe that it is a spiritual imperative that we must learn to bind the wounds of another in order to minister to their spiritual need for a savior. How can we rightly remind them that we are all sinners and that Christ died for us all, if we do not minister to their personal need? If we treat them, as the Samaritan treated the wounded man, could we not expect a better opportunity to lead them to the One who can indeed liberate them from their sin and their captivity? Certainly the Samaritan expended his own time, energy and resource in meeting the man's needs. Can we do any less for one who the Lord places in our path? It is Jesus, working through His disciples, and only Him who can heal, restore, and liberate the captive. Are we His disciples? If so our calling is clear.

Pastor Doug