

# Release to the Captives

Sunday 15 August 2021

## Call to Worship

*Psalm 111*

Hallelujah!

I give thanks to GOD with everything I've got—  
Wherever good people gather, and in the congregation.

**God's works are so great, worth  
A lifetime of study—endless enjoyment!  
Splendour and beauty mark his craft;  
His generosity never gives out.**

His miracles are his memorial—  
This GOD of Grace, this GOD of Love.

**He gave food to those who fear him,  
He remembered to keep his ancient promise.  
He proved to his people that he could do what he said.**

He manufactures truth and justice;  
All his products are guaranteed to last—  
Never out-of-date, never obsolete, rust-proof.

**All that he makes and does is honest and true:  
He paid the ransom for his people,**

He's so personal and holy, worthy of our respect.  
The good life begins in the fear of GOD—

**Do that and you'll know the blessing of God.  
His Hallelujah lasts forever!**

## Guide me O, thou great Redeemer

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand:  
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore, feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow  
let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:  
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  
be thou still my strength and shield,  
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside;  
death of death, and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:  
songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee,  
songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee.

### Reading Exodus 2:15b-25

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. <sup>16</sup>The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. <sup>17</sup>But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. <sup>18</sup>When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" <sup>19</sup>They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." <sup>20</sup>He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread." <sup>21</sup>Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage. <sup>22</sup>She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, "I have been an alien residing in a foreign land."

<sup>23</sup>After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. <sup>24</sup>God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>25</sup>God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*Rachel Hackenberg, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/08/08/sunday-prayer-psalm-130/>*

To you, O God, we hold out our hearts.  
Deal gently with them, we pray.  
Increase their love with your forgiveness;  
soften their bitterness with your peace.

**Until peace comes,  
we will wait and watch.**

To you, O God, we hold out our hungers.  
Have mercy on them, we pray.  
Rain down with manna to renew our hope;  
quench our despair from the wellspring of your glory.

**Until hope comes,  
we will wait and watch.**

To you, O God, we hold out our wounds.  
Heal their shame, we pray.  
Bind up their bleeding and wipe their tears,  
and we will praise the balm of our salvation.

**Until a salve comes,  
we will wait and watch.**

To you, O God, we hold out our lives.  
Be with them in this wilderness, we pray.  
With each breath, dawn a new day;  
in each death, light a light to comfort us.

**Until a new day comes,  
we will wait and watch.  
Amen.**

### Reflection

Unless the LORD builds the house,  
those who build it labour in vain.  
Unless the LORD guards the city,  
the guard keeps watch in vain.  
It is in vain that you rise up early  
and go late to rest,  
eating the bread of anxious toil;  
for he gives sleep to his beloved.

What do you worry about?  
What would you like to say to God?  
How does God guard your heart (city)?

### Notices

#### The Peace

As you share the peace look the other person in the eye, and really mean it.

### Come, now is the time

Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God  
Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God  
One day every knee will bow  
Still the greatest treasure remains for those  
Who gladly choose you now

### Open the eyes of my heart

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord  
Open the eyes of my heart  
I want to see You  
I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up  
Shining in the light of Your glory  
Pour out Your power and love  
As we sing holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy  
We cry holy, holy, holy  
You are holy, holy, holy  
I want to see you

### Reading Luke 4:16-21

<sup>16</sup> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read,  
<sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

### Message Release to the Captives

God who releases us from captivity we ask that you would release our minds today to discern what you have to say to us through the Scriptures. And in discerning help us to respond with changed behaviour.

### Recap

<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

This is God acting directly upon a person and the Holy Spirit is moving on that person. There is a purpose in the Spirit being upon the person and that purpose is to empower them for a task or call.

Good News is found in relationship with Jesus AND in the restoration of life.

How are you going to bring good news to the poor?

### Release to the Captives

There are two obvious parallels to this phrase that the writer of Isaiah would have certainly been alluding to when he wrote this passage. They are, of course, the release of the Hebrews from Egypt, and then the release of the Judahites from Babylon. The whole idea of release for the captives is tightly bound up in Scripture with these two events and whenever the phrase, ‘release to the captives’, was used devout Jews would immediately think of the stories surrounding Egypt and Babylon. They would likely have also thought of the hated Romans who, through Pilate, had been exerting a vice-like grip on the tiny nation. For most of us here it is likely really hard to imagine what it might have been like in Judea in that time. The emotions released at hearing those words would have been considerable. I think the closest we might likely come to those kind of emotions would be hearing that a close family member is severely ill and might not live very long. Think a parent or spouse or child. We just don’t have a similar experience to compare it to. Unfortunately, what that means is that we have no concept of how someone who has experienced the loss of freedom or their homeland would ever feel. We could say that we don’t know what we don’t know. To say that we understand how someone feels in that situation, or worse to not understand and tell someone to, ‘get

over it', exhibits a huge lack of awareness. The only people who genuinely understand what it means to be a refugee are refugees.

Let me give you a small illustration of how difficult we can find it to understand. I spent some time in Guyana in 2009. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Guyana it was sparsely populated with indigenous peoples before it was colonised, first by the Dutch and then later the British and French. Eventually it was split into two parts with Britain getting Guyana in the north and the French getting the south and renaming it Surinam. Guyana was held by the British because by importing first slaves, and then following the outlawing of slavery in Britain, indentured workers, sugar could be produced in large quantities. I had the opportunity to have some lengthy and sometimes heated discussions with some of the descendants of the original black African slaves. To my astonishment, 200 years after their ancestors had been freed, the bitterness over those events was as fresh as if it had happened yesterday. As I dug deeper, I realised that the legacy of slavery in those people's lives will never be fully erased. And deeper still I began to understand that it never should be erased. Not only was that slavery the reason these people were here in the first place, it shaped their entire worldview. Everything was coloured by those experiences, both of their ancestors, and subsequently their own. More to the point, no-one had any right to tell them they were wrong or explain how things could be understood differently. This was their lived experience and as such had equal rights to be heard next to any other experience.

It took a while to sink in, but I began to realise the same had application to Māori in Aotearoa. Colonists came in, bought land for next to nothing, and where they couldn't buy it, they stole it. Māori were not made slaves, but everything of substance that had belonged to them before the colonists came was taken from them. In a way they were made captives and outcasts in their own land. Where they protested for their rights they were either shot or imprisoned, even when those protests were peaceful. Now, unless you are Māori, you can never understand or even begin to comprehend the impact of that experience on who and how you are, even 200 years after the event. We don't know what we don't know.

The Jews sitting listening to Jesus read would have been having very similar thoughts running through their minds to the Black Africans of Guyana or the disenfranchised Māori of NZ. The emotions would have been running high, the

pulse fast, the breathing heavy. This was close and personal, and it mattered. A lot!

I was tempted to downplay these next examples of captivity. On first glance they can somehow seem less important, of less material consequence. As I considered them I began to realise that just as for the Israelites, the Guyanans, the Māori, I don't know what I don't know. These things will be, for those who experience them, just as devastating, just as heart-breaking, just as soul destroying as any other form of captivity.

I'm thinking of those who are captive to substance abuse. Those captive to conspiracy theories and lies. Those who are captive to social expectations – it might be they feel they can't be honest about their sexuality or what they dream of achieving. They become like lepers living inside the community but separated by a huge wall of social expectations, each one captive to something over which they have no control.

I haven't even mentioned political prisoners, women kept prisoner by male privilege, the Uighurs of China or the Rohingya of Myanmar. Captivity is real, it matters, and release, real release is spiritual as much as it is physical. That is because captivity has both a physical aspect and a spiritual aspect to it. The physical is usually obvious, although for those trapped in social captivity it can be more difficult to detect. The spiritual is often much harder to discern. In part that is because it can't be seen with our eyes. We have been trained to believe that if we can't see it with our eyes then it's likely not real. There are a multitude of examples where this is patently not true. Take the wind for one, or radio waves as another. Most of us can't see the spiritual. We can't see the forces that act on us when they are not physical in some way and so we discount them as not real, as imaginary. Of course, the crazy thing about that is we are here talking about God stuff. Spiritual stuff. If it's not real, then we are completely crazy! Careful what you say now 😊.

So, on the basis we accept that God is spirit, and that God can and does act in the spiritual realm we can then ask what we mean by spiritual captivity. To be honest I found myself stuck here. Not because there isn't an answer, but because there is so much to the answer. We've kind of danced around the question of captivity. Explaining the human spirit and spiritual is such a huge topic. If we dig too far we end up bogged down, not far enough and we risk missing important points. My compromise is to not dig at all for now. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 speaks of our spirit, soul and body as separate aspects of

our human nature. Romans 8 digs into what that means for our relationship with God. 1 Corinthians 12 investigates some of the results of the interaction between our spirits and the Holy Spirit. I will leave you to do your own research on those.

For now, I hope that you will allow that human beings have spirits and just as our bodies can be held captive, so can our spirits. Because spiritual captivity is difficult to define and because it often can't be seen it is often discounted as not being real or not having any real affect. Yet it is closely connected to physical captivity and in some cases, particularly things like addictions or social captivity can be the source of the physical results.

All this means that when Jesus talks about proclaiming release for the captives, he is speaking in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm. As you will be aware, letting a person out of prison doesn't automatically set them free. If you have seen the movie, 'The Shawshank Redemption', you may remember the response of the prisoner who was set free, but found that even though he was no longer in the prison he was still chained up on the inside. And just as we saw last week that Good News for the poor came in two parts – relationship with Jesus and restoration in the physical life, so release for the captive is also a two-parter. There is the physical release from captivity, and there is also the spiritual release. Often the physical release is the easy part.

It's also worth noting that proclaiming release doesn't mean people will necessarily receive that release. Not only are there two parts to the release itself, there are two parts to the release process. There is the proclaiming of release. That release needs to be taken up – a receiving of release if you will. I can take an example of that from my chickens. Last week I thought I would perform an experiment and let them out of the run to spend some time in freedom. I wasn't at all sure I would be able to collect them back up again, but I wanted to see what would happen. I eventually decided to leave them out all day and overnight. You might imagine my surprise when I got up the next day to find the chickens were not only all back in the run. Somehow the door had closed behind them. They had gone back into captivity because it felt safe there. Funnily enough it is a very human response too.

To bring all of this together, God longs for us to be freed from captivity, whatever that captivity happens to be. Once we are freed from captivity we are ready to be a part of freeing others. That can even mean releasing people

from bonds we have imposed on them. Proclaiming release for the captives is a call that will be with us until Jesus returns.

It is entirely possible that there are people listening today who find their hearts racing in realisation that they feel captive. It may be that you feel captive to something or things I haven't even mentioned. That doesn't make it any less important. It certainly doesn't mean that Jesus wasn't speaking to you when he read from Isaiah. We are all invited to be a part of Jesus proclaiming release for the captives. That may receiving release. It may mean giving release.

How do you need to respond to Jesus' proclamation today?

If anyone would like to talk about this after the service, if you would like prayer, please come to the front after the service and someone will pray or chat with you.

### We Pray

God of the captive, we come to you, some bound and weak, others strong and ready, all of us needing you to work in our lives. Lord God, we pray that you would release the captives among us today. We pray that you would release the captives who are not among us. We pray that the chains that bind up people's lives and hold them down would be broken and tossed away. Help us to be a people of release and relief. Teach us to see both the physical and spiritual release needed and train us to respond in love and in the power of your call. Amen.

### Let the weak say, "I am strong."

*Reuben Morgan*

Let the weak say, "I am strong"

Let the poor say, "I am rich"

Let the blind say, "I can see"

It's what the Lord has done in me

Hosanna, hosanna

To the Lamb that was slain

Hosanna, hosanna

Jesus died and rose again

Into the river I will wade

There my sins are washed away

From the heavens' mercy streams

Of the Saviour's love for me

I will rise from waters deep  
Into the saving arms of God  
I will sing salvation songs  
Jesus Christ has set me free

### Offering

Eternal God, our time in this life is limited, and our days are numbered. Yet you have reminded us that if we are wise and use that time well, you have an eternity waiting for us that is beyond our imagining. Help us to focus on what we have, and what we can share, and how the gifts we offer this day can bless others until we are joined with them, and your children give you their thanks and gratitude for the rest of eternity. In Christ, we pray. Amen.

### Prayer for Ourselves and Others

God, we give thanks that we are all called to serve you in prayer.

May we be attentive and obedient to that calling.

Eternal God, we give you thanks for our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. We pray for Christians around the world who are living in fear for their lives due to persecution or hatred. By your Spirit's power protect, guide and keep them safe as they serve you.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Loving God, thank you for holidays, retreats, for days out and days doing nothing but resting. Thank you for the people who remind us that it is ok to rest and encourage us to stop when it is obvious to them that we need to. Help us to rest in you and to encourage others when they need to rest too. We pray for all the members of our church community who are able at this time to take a break, that they will return rested, refreshed and renewed.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Generous God, we thank you for the physical bread that our community and other local churches provide for those in need. In particular we pray for the community foodbank and for the food that is supplied from the freezer we keep here. We pray that this generosity will grow and develop and that others will hear your call and be willing and eager to join.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Faithful God, we thank you for all the people who minister to and care for us every day, especially those we take for granted. We pray for all who are worn out and weary for whatever reason; pain, worry, overwork or just the daily struggles of life. We pray your Holy Spirit will bring them love, healing, support and hope as they have need.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Father God, this morning we pray for those we know and love who do not know or acknowledge you. We pray Father, that you will draw them to you and that they will respond to your call. We pray for all who will hear you speaking to them this week, that they will answer in a positive way your call on their lives.

Lord, in your mercy; **hear our prayer**

Eternal God, thank you for your promise that you hear our prayers.

Strengthen our faith in that promise, so that our lives might proclaim your love, mercy and goodness to all we meet this week

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Risen Saviour Jesus Christ who taught us to pray...

### The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

### Power in the Blood

*Lewis E. Jones*

Would you be free from the burden of sin?

There's power in the blood, power in the blood;

Would you o'er evil a victory win?

There's wonderful power in the blood.

There is power, power, wonder-working power

In the blood of the Lamb;

There is power, power, wonder-working power

In the precious blood of the Lamb.

Would you be free from your passion and pride?  
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;  
Come for a cleansing to Calvary's tide;  
There's wonderful power in the blood.

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow?  
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;  
Sin-stains are lost in its life-giving flow;  
There's wonderful power in the blood.

Would you do service for Jesus your King?  
There's power in the blood, power in the blood;  
Would you live daily His praises to sing?  
There's wonderful power in the blood.

### Benediction and Grace

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Love of God,  
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.