

In recent weeks I have been crying out to God, "O Lord, take hold of me. Grip me, possess me, apprehend me!" Oh, how I've longed for that. But I didn't know I wasn't prepared to have the Holy Ghost handcuff me!

It is clearly Scriptural - and, in fact, apostolic - to pray that God handcuff you. This means asking Him to place manacles on your hands: to lock them up, throw away the key and take you as His prisoner.

Paul often refers to himself as *"the prisoner of Jesus Christ"* (EPH 3:1). In Ephesians 4:1 he says being a prisoner of the Lord is actually his vocation, his calling! He considered this God's gift of grace to him (EPH 4:7). He wrote to Timothy: *"Be not... ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner."* (2.TIM 1:8). Even into his old age the apostle still rejoiced in having been apprehended by the Lord and taken captive to His will: *"Being such an one as Paul the aged, and now (or still) also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."* (PHIL 9).

Paul could tell you the very day and hour that the Lord handcuffs him and took him captive. He was on the road to Damascus, with letters in hand from the high priest, bound and determined to bring back Christians to Jerusalem. He was *"...breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the Lord's disciples..."* - full of hatred, bitterness and anger in his misguided zeal for God.

As he approached the city of Damascus, *"...suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven..."* (ACTS 9:3). He was struck completely blind by that light which was Christ!

Handcuffed to Jesus!

Paul would tell you, as he testified again and again, how he had to be taken by the hand and led into Damascus. He was a helpless prisoner! He spent three days in an isolated room without sight and without eating anything. He'd been taken captive totally - in spirit, soul, mind and body!

What happened in that prison room for three days? The Lord was handcuffing Saul making him Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ!

In this vivid scene, Paul lets go of his independence and submits to Christ's yoke. He stretches forth his hands to Jesus, to be handcuffed for life!

You can almost hear his agonizing prayer: "O Lord, I thought I was doing Your will! How could I have been so blind? I've been going my own way, doing whatever I thought was right. I can't trust my own thoughts!"

"Lord, put to death my will! My independence has blinded me. Here, Jesus - take my hands and put Your manacles on me. Take me prisoner to Your will. Lead me away as Your conquered trophy, and take me wherever You want me to go. Keep me handcuffed to Your mighty right arm. I want to die to independence!"

Many godly men and women throughout Scripture understood what it meant to be handcuff to God. David said of the Lord: *"Thou hast beset me behind and*

before, and laid thine hand upon me." (PSA 139:5).

"Thy right Hand shall hold me." (or "grip me" in the original Hebrew; PSA 139:10).

David was saying, *"I am led about handcuffed to my blessed Lord - one cuff locked on my hand, the other locked on His. If I try to flee, He will not permit it. He is always with me. If I ascend to heaven, or try to take wings and fly away, even there His hand is with me."* (PSA 139:7-13).

In the Song of Solomon, the bride expresses her great love: *"For I am sick of love."* (SOS 2:5). In other words, "I am lovesick for my lover." With so great a love, how could she desire anything else than to be chained to her love? *"His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me"* (SOS 2:6).

She is saying, "I am a prisoner of His love! I put out my hand and He cuffed me to himself. He said, 'Rise up, my love, and come away.' My beloved is mine, and I am His."

Isaiah prophesied, *"For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."* (ISA 41:13). He too heard the Lord say, "I will hold you by My love-lock!"

No One Understood Being Handcuffed to Jesus More Than Peter Did!

Peter had an incredible encounter with the resurrected Jesus, in which the Lord prophesied of his need to submit to this "handcuffing":

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

JN 21:18

Some Bible scholars suggest the Lord was revealing to Peter that he would spend his last days in senile helplessness - half-blind and dragged about against his will. The apostle John wrote, *"This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."* (JN 21:19).

Indeed, tradition says Peter was crucified upside down, with his arms outstretched. John would have known about this, since he wrote his gospel account some time after Peter's death.

But what Christ was saying to Peter here goes far beyond these interpretations. In Peter's epistles, we find the apostle still burning with Holy Ghost fire in his old age! He was battling apostasy, exposing false prophets, preaching red-hot thunder! This old man was anything but senile. He wasn't mentally weary, and nobody was leading him around against his will.

Peter wrote, *"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me."* (2.PET 1:14). He knew that soon he would die, for he had never forgotten the Lord's words to him.

But listen to him speaking God's truth boldly! *"Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up."* (2.PET 1:13). He then launches into a fiery sermon exposing men's demons, lust, ungodliness and entanglements with the world. He's on fire, bursting with Holy Ghost energy!

I have no doubt that, in this passage in John, Jesus was telling Peter how he would die. But Christ was saying much more than that; He was talking about a spiritual process! In fact, I believe He was

prophesying not just to Peter, but to every believer who claims to love Him.

Here is what I believe Jesus is calling for in all of us:

1. True Love for Jesus Must Result in the Death of All Independence. All Self-Will Must Die!

Peter truly loved Christ. Three times Jesus had looked him in the eye and asked, "Do you love Me?" The disciple knew that Jesus could read his very thoughts - yet still he could answer honestly, *"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."* (JN 21:17).

Peter not only loved the Lord dearly; he probably was more zealous in his love than the others disciples. He was always jumping out of the boat to go meet Jesus!

Yet in spite of his great love and zeal for the Lord, Peter was still a man full of a spirit of independence. Now, without question, he was separated from the world - repentant, broken over his past sins, loving Christ and ready to die for Him. But even at this stage, nobody was going to tell him what to do! His independent will had not been broken!

Peter exuded confidence and competence. He was self-reliant, used to acting alone - a vote of one, dependent on neither the Lord nor others. He probably felt the Lord needed him as much as he needed the Lord!

He would tell you, "Sure I'll listen to what you have to say. I'm not a closed person." But then he would go off and do things his own way! He had to think and get for himself, never admitting to himself or anyone else his need for others' help. He was self-made, always in control.

The world loves and admires such a man. The American dream consists of people who are self-made - self-confident shakers, movers and independent thinkers, doing everything their way!

But in the kingdom of God, that kind of independence is a sure sign that a person has not been to the Cross to mortify his flesh. Peter had not died! And you cannot be handcuffed to Christ until

that independent spirit is driven out of your heart - until you willingly stretch forth your hands in total surrender!

Jesus heard Peter's repeated testimony of love for Him. Yet He didn't publicly acknowledge it. Christ chose instead to focus on a sobering reality, and made Peter face it: "Peter, since you were young you've been used to doing whatever you wish to do, whenever you please. You've done it your way, in your good time. That's your nature. It's the kind of man you are."

"Thou girdest (set in action) thyself... and walkedst whither thou wouldest."

JN 21:18

Even though it was clear Peter loved Jesus - he would defend Him with his life, weep over Him and come running at the sound of His voice - he still was not the Lord's prisoner! He remained his own man, having his own way - serving Jesus his way!

You can see his spirit if independence break out in brash self-assertion: *"I go a fishing!"* (JN 21:3).

Jesus had already called Peter to go fishing - but for men! At one time Peter had laid down his nets, forsaken his boat and fishing career and followed Jesus to fish for souls. The Lord had even breathed onto him the Holy Spirit! Yet Peter wanted to go fishing his own way - not Jesus way.

We see here that it is possible to have a revelation of the resurrected Christ - to be in love with Him and to be filled with the Holy Ghost - yet still not be His prisoner, still not be handcuffed to Christ!

You see, when an independent spirit rules a man, he'll put God's programs and blessings above God Himself. The job, the career, even the ministry we've been blessed with is secondary - and when it becomes first, we've gone fishing - but not His way!

We All Want Our Last Big Haul Before We're Handcuffed!

The language of independence isn't merely, "I go a fishing." Rather, it is something deep in the heart that whispers, "I've got to

have just one more big haul!" Peter was out to get more than just a few fish. If he had wanted just to relax, he could have taken a pole and some worms and stood knee-deep in the water and cast for his catch.

No - he wanted his old boat and crew and all the old nets. He was after something more. He had to have just one last shot at hitting it big! Then it would be entirely out of his system - and then he'd be able to follow wholly after Jesus.

Peter and his fellow disciples didn't spend a single hour on the streets or the wharves preaching the resurrection of Christ. Instead they toiled all night long on the boat, sweating it out, hoping for that one final, big haul.

Now, presumably Peter had a big family. And he might have been thinking, "If I can just make one big catch, I'll be free."

I know a young brother in the Lord, a dear friend, who had a wonderful call to be a fisher of men. He had a genuine touch of God for ministry. For about two years he preached Christ in the United States and overseas. But one day he stopped, and he turned his zeal to speculating in oil and real estate.

He explained to me, "I've seen so many poor preachers who are slaves to their congregations because of poor finances. I've got to be free of that kind of bondage. I'm going to make just enough so I'll never be dependent on people or the church for my support. If just one of my wells hits big, I can be free to go anywhere and give all my time to the Lord."

The end result was that he nearly backslid! His marriage ended in divorce. And when he finally reached his financial goal, there was always one more haul to be made! This brother never had quite enough. His zeal became an addiction - and everything he had came down! Thank God, he is now back in the ministry, totally dependent on the Lord for everything.

I also knew a young director of one of the most successful Teen Challenge programs in America, who dropped out to "build a little

nest egg". He was tired being poor and driving an old car. He also had a young son and knew he couldn't put away any money to send him to college. So he decided he'd had enough - he would go back into the advertising business until he made enough to return to the ministry better off financially.

But he too soon backslid. He even turned back to drugs, from which he'd been delivered. He got a divorce, married another young woman, and both of them became addicted to cocaine. He drove a Mercedes and lived on the beach in a nice house - but he was absolutely miserable.

This man was in my home not long ago, weeping. He wanted to come back to the Lord. But he struggled with giving up his new-found independence! Thank God, he finally did return.

The Church is filled with shipwrecked ministers who become tired of being dependent on the Lord and others. Multitudes leave for that one big, last haul - but few ever make it back!

That Night Peter and the Others Caught Nothing!

Jesus, standing on the shore, knew what was in Peter's heart. He said, "*Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find.*" (JN 21:6).

The Lord was going to let Peter have that one last haul - but He would make him miserable in the process! In fact, Peter would run away from it all.

Peter didn't recognize Jesus on the shore. He was so engrossed and excited when the nets began to get heavy, all he could think was, "We hit it big! What a haul!" But the beloved John was in the boat - and he was convicted. He knew by the blessing itself Who was behind it. He whispered to Peter, "Brother, this is the Lord's doing. He's saying something in all this. This blessing is a test!" Scripture says, "*Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.*" (JN 21:7).

Peter looked down and saw the water nearly boiling with the thrashing fish and he let go of the net. It was the biggest haul of his

life! The net was bulging...but something struck his heart. He remembered the call of Jesus: "I will make you My fisherman. You will catch men for Me! Come - follow Me!" Suddenly Peter saw how wrong, how futile it all was. He knew now that even a thousand big hauls would never fully satisfy him. The biggest fishing fleet in the land could not meet his need! He could never again be fulfilled in trying to make it on his own in this world.

Deep within he heard the call of Jesus again - and he said to himself, "I will not allow myself to become a prisoner to this net, this boat. I want to become a prisoner of Jesus! I want to be a fisher of men!"

"Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him... and did cast himself into the sea." JN 21:7

I'm so glad Jesus blessed Peter with that one last haul. Because the test of true love for Christ is not that you simply come back after trying and failing. Rather it is that you leave in the midst of your greatest opportunity - that you drop everything - and become Christ's prisoner!

Sinners in nearby boats would have called Peter crazy: "Peter, you could have had it all! This was your big chance. You had it made. You're a fool to run just when it was your turn to make it big!"

But Peter swam to Jesus, thinking only of his Lord's words, "*What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul!*"

Was There One Last Dying Wish in Peter?

When they all got to shore, Jesus told Peter to help them haul in the fish. The Lord watched as His disciple helped count the haul: 153 big ones!

Was there one final tug on Peter's heart at this point? Jesus looked at him and asked, "*Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?*" (JN 21:15), meaning all the fish he'd caught. Oh, that's the way it always is for me! Just when I think I've got the victory over materialism - when I drop every-

thing and swim to Jesus - here comes the battle again.

Beloved, that is the question we all face right now! Of course you love Jesus, you answer. But do you love Him more than...

More than the biggest haul you've ever had - the one you've waited for all your life? More than money? More than success? More than recognition or honor? More than all your houses, land and holdings?

Are you ready to jump out of the boat as Peter did, run to Jesus and give up your spirit of independence? You see, Peter's about to be handcuffed - and become the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you're not handcuffed to Him when your own purposes cross with the Lord's you'll always put your interests first!

Jesus was saying to Peter in this verse, "Let me show you where you are headed, now that you have given up your independence. As you grow older in the Lord, as the days go by and you mature, you will walk with Me with your hands outstretched. And I will gird you (that is, prepare you for action) with My handcuffs. You will be My prisoner, doing My will, letting Me lead you - even where you don't want to go!

"Put out your hands, Peter. You say you love Me? Then be My prisoner. Let Me lead and guide you!"

You see, Jesus knew that, in his heart, Peter would not want to go to the Gentiles; he wouldn't want to go to the house of Cornelius. But

he learned to stretch out his hands, accept the cuffing and be led by the Spirit! Eventually he did go to Cornelius' house - by the Spirit's leading - and he brought Christ to the Gentiles!

"Another shall lead thee!" (JN 21:18). The Lord will lead you! He will take hold of you, put His armor on you and carry you to places and people you never thought possible!

If you can honestly say from your heart, "Yes, I love Jesus more than life" then stretch out your hands! Both of them! Submit to His handcuffing, crying out to the Lord, "Here, take me! Make me a prisoner to Your will. I forfeit my independence and lay down all my material blessings at Your feet."

2. Those Who Refuse to Be Wholly Bound to Christ and Be Led by Him Alone Will End up Making Excuses!

Those who refuse to submit will anger the Lord - and they'll miss the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

Listen to the language of those who refuse to yield: ***"And they all with one consent began to make excuse."*** (LK 14:18).

The certain man who held a great supper in this parable is God. The supper is His Marriage Supper for the Bride and the Bridegroom - His Son! The Holy Spirit is now moving throughout the world, calling the invited guests to prepare themselves and come: ***"All things are now ready!"*** (VERSE 17). But everyone is making excuses!

What's your excuse for not responding to this final call to forsake all and make yourself ready for the Marriage Supper? Is there one more big haul ahead of you? Are you tied up by some materialistic urge or career break? Are you one who'll be found making excuses if Jesus returned next week?

Think of this parable: They had no time for the Lord! All their time and thoughts and energy were focused on spouses, families, real estate - earthly things and loves!

Multiple thousands of Christians are angering the Lord in these final days. They will miss the Marriage Supper because they are entangled in the things of this world. ***"The master of the house being angry said... none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper."*** (LK 14:21,24).

Saints, the issue is eternal life! God is speaking of judgment here! Pray with me in this: "Lord, I don't want to have an independent spirit. I'm stretching out my hands right now. Put Your loving handcuffs on me and throw away the key!"

Beloved, don't become enamored with the world in this last hour! Yield to Him, submit to Him - fish for men and not for your own purposes. Then prepare yourself for the great feast with the Bridegroom at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

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