

PRISONER OF THE LORD

I have always been a little embarrassed when people come to me after I get through preaching and ask me to sign their Bibles. It is a custom unique to the Bible-believing churches for whom I most often preach. The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee said he used to refuse to sign someone's Bible by saying, "I didn't write it, and so I shouldn't sign it." One day someone said to him, "Well, can you sign your approval of it?" He happily agreed to that and from then on he considered it a mark of approval of the precious Word of God. In my youth, I felt awkward signing someone's Bible until I was told, "I treat the signatures in my Bible as my prayer list." So from then on, I joyously sign Bibles hoping that everyone whose eyes fall upon my name would remember to take that name to the throne of grace.

For forty-four years I have been signing the same verses, II Timothy 1: 8,9 which says, *"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."* A few years ago I added II Timothy 1:7 along with those two verses because I believed we all need to be reminded that God doesn't want us to fear anyone or anything but Him and this would be conducive to being filled with His power and love, giving us a sound mind. *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind"* (II Timothy 1:7). My goal in the two original verses was that all of us not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus and that we would all remember that we are saved with a purpose that God has in mind for us and He has made provision for this purpose according to His grace which has been working in our favor since before the foundation of the world! There is one phrase in my "life verses" that I would like for us to focus on. I think about it every time I sign a Bible. It is the phrase from verse 8, *"Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner...."* Paul spoke of himself as a prisoner. He makes reference to this also in Ephesians 3:1, *"For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles...."* Then again in

Ephesians 4:1, *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."*

What does it mean to be a prisoner of the Lord? It means:

1. My time is not my own.

In II Timothy 1:8 and 9 Paul referred to himself as God's prisoner and then said we are operating in grace that has been working in our favor since before not only we were born, but before the world began! Before time was calculated, God has had us on His mind. Therefore, how can we do less than consider time as a gift and it belongs to God. David said, *"My times are in thy hand..."* (Psalm 31:15a).

Christ came at the perfect time in history, *"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law"* (Galatians 4:4). When our Lord came to earth, He was always aware of the schedule the Father had orchestrated for Him. We see this when we observe John 2:4; John 7:6; John 7:8; Matthew 26:18; John 12:27; John 17:1 and John 17:4. If He, who created the universe, made time and then stepped out in time to die for our sins, how much more should we surrender our time to Him. It is a life sentence.

Since this life is so brief, let us say with Jesus, *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4). Psalm 39:4; Job 8:9; Job 9:25; Job 7:6; and Isaiah 38:12 remind us of the brevity of life. Only one life 'twill soon be past only what's done for Christ will last. If you haven't started *"serving your time,"* start today! And for those of you who have been giving your time to Jesus as His prisoner, don't break out of the yoke of service with Him.

2. My treasures are not my own.

I once talked to a man who had climbed the corporate ladder of success only to become involved in some illegal dealings that landed him in the penitentiary. He told me how strange it was to surrender all his personal belongings from his clothes to his wallet. He was handed his jail clothes, flip-flops, a washcloth and towel and that was it. He was no longer surrounded by his own things.

When we become a prisoner of the Lord, everything changes. We no longer look at our things as ours, but now everything is His. *"And He (Jesus) said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"* (Luke 12:15,34). Make Christ your treasure!

3. My talent is not my own.

"John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:15,16). If you can administrate and do the work of a CEO, God gave you that ability. If you can preach, teach or lecture, God gave you that gift. If you can sing or proficiently play an instrument, God gave you that talent! *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning"* (James 1:17). Give your talent to the Lord. You are his prisoner.

4. My territory is not my own.

Territory is an area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state. It can also mean an area of knowledge, activity, or experience. A prisoner has no choice where he lives. It is not unusual for an incarcerated man to move to different prisons. He doesn't move per his requests; he goes where the state sends him.

As God's prisoners we do what He tells us, move where He tells us, marry whom He tells us and serve Him in the church where He tells us. A perfect example of this sweet submissive spirit is Ruth, a lady who became a royal mother in the lineage of Jesus. She was from the wicked Moabites, but willingly left all the false gods she was worshipping, the land and culture of her upbringing and followed the only true and Living God. Here are her words of total dedication: *"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me"* (Ruth 1:16, 17). Notice the sequence: I will live where you live. Your God shall today become my God. Your people are going to be my people from here on out. I will die in peace centered in the

perfect will of God. She found her husband. She found a home. She found the only life worth living. In God's bond called marriage is a happy and permanent relationship. I am not equating it to incarceration; but I am saying it is a life sentence.

You are designed to be the joyful prisoner of the Lord!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the word "Pope".