

The Terrorist, the Hostage and Me

Psalm 1:1-3

1973, *Kreditbanken* in Stockholm. "Next, please," said the young lady teller. She looked up and met the gaze of the next customer whose eyes looked like the eyes of a tiger ready to strike. A Kalashnikov rifle was pointed directly at her, and a chilling voice demanded, "Fill the bag with money."

Another bank officer pushed the alarm button. Within minutes, two police officers rushed into the bank, pistols drawn. The robber swung around, blasted one officer into eternity and incapacitated the other. Police sirens sounded from all directions.

The robber, Jan Olsson, on day release from prison, moved behind the counter. He took 4 people hostage, and locked himself and them into the bank vault. The police met his demand that his friend, Clark Olofsson, recently released from prison, be brought to the bank. The two fugitives then barricaded themselves with their hostages in the inner main vault.

Olsson terrified the prisoners. He'd place the Kalashnikov rifle to their foreheads, and squeeze the trigger to half pressure. He'd pause, and then remove the gun with a hideous laugh. Another prank was to place a noose around their necks, tighten it, and then release it with a sickening laugh. Police were warned that, if they tried to rescue the hostages, all hostages would be killed.

The police drilled a hole into the main vault from the apartment above and pumped in gas. The hostages were released after five and a half days of imprisonment. Nobody was injured physically.

After their release, the hostages repeatedly claimed that they were more frightened of the police than of the robbers during their ordeal. They clearly identified with their gaolers. Not one of the hostages would testify against either of the robbers.

The Stockholm Syndrome comes into play when captives are isolated and threatened with death, but also shown some token acts of kindness by the captors. It typically takes about three or four days for the psychological shift to occur. The hostages begin to consider that the captors will not hurt them if they are cooperative. Then they begin to identify with their captors. Victims are encouraged to develop habits that please their captors: dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, decide and think.

When the Stockholm Syndrome takes hold, you are fighting for your life. The person who has captured you has literally broken you down and reconstructed you. You're fully integrated into your captor's world.

1. Influenced by Our Community

The Stockholm Syndrome has affected concentration camp prisoners, cult members, pimp-procured prostitutes, incest victims, abused children, battered spouses and, of course, hostages. Note that many victims of the Stockholm Syndrome have been seduced, not captured by force. However, it is not confined to physical and emotional pressures: it also involves spiritual pressures. Paul wrote of Demas, who had helped him in prison: *"Demas,)loves the things of this world so much that he left me and went to Thessalonica."* (2 Tim 4.10) Demas had begun so well. When the New Testament uses the term "the world" metaphorically, it does not mean the community in general. It means 'those negative

elements in the community that are destructive to positive faith in the living God and to public morals."But he came to believe the world, which had taken him captive. His allegiance to Jesus Christ had shifted. We might say that in some respects Demas was seduced

Many Christians today are rather like Demas. They begin their Christian lives with great commitment to the Lord, but after a time they find themselves unable to escape their bondage to worldly concerns, the Christian's great enemy. So a great change takes place. The world, which is destroying them, is now regarded as their friend. The Lord, who had formerly been in the centre of their lives, is now placed on the circumference.

Psalm 1:1 tells us: 'God blesses those people who refuse evil advice and won't follow sinners or join in sneering at God.' Peter Craigie comments helpfully, 'The righteous person avoids all the dimensions of the way of the wicked: therein lies the source of blessedness or happiness'¹. The Psalmist emphasises the point that by restating it in three different ways: such people 'refuse evil advice', 'won't follow sinners' and '[won't] join in sneering at God'.

We should not adopt the attitudes or values of people who are going in the wrong direction. As Paul said, the Devil can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11.14). He's deceptive, he's our enemy, and "the world"—human society, broadly speaking—is his sphere of sovereignty. The tragedy of the Stockholm Syndrome is that hostages' fear is gradually replaced with a love for an enemy who could destroy them. John urges, "*Don't love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the*

¹ Word Biblical Commentaries, No. 19, p60.

world, you can't love the Father (1 John 2.15)" The world (in New Testament terms—all that is destructive and damaging in the human community) is your enemy, not your friend. Don't love it.

Option 1: Sue came from a strong Christian home and was active in her church. She travelled to a distant city to attend university. She was an attractive, talented girl, and some of the guys began to date her. The sports and parties caught her attention, and she was completely swept away by the university environment.

Her father and her pastor had recommended a church near the university and she went the first Sunday, but never went back again. She found life was one great whirl. When she returned home for the Christmas holidays, it was obvious that she had changed. She was indifferent toward her parents and spent hours on the phone to her university friends. She was bored by the less sophisticated friends she had had before. By the time her first year of college was over, Sue was a different person. She had been seduced by the longing for popularity and fun.

Option 2: Jim, a Christian businessman, decided to set up his own business, and it became an immediate success. He threw himself into his work with increased vigour—12 and 14 hours a day. He had to drop the Sunday school class he'd been teaching because he no longer had time to prepare. Then he found he could only make it to Sunday morning worship service sometimes. His business made many demands on him, and often he had to play golf with friends on Sunday or go out of town.

Things changed at home. He became indifferent toward his wife and children and spent less time with them. When his wife tried to encourage him to come back to church, he replied, "Oh, they're a bunch of hypocrites. They don't know what's going on in the world." Jim had succumbed to the pursuit of material success.

We are so constantly manipulated by the culture of our affluent, materialistic, secular society that like Sue and Jim, we can let our guard down. We're being brainwashed that happiness and fulfillment come from the clothes that we wear and the cars that we drive. But some people who wear the right jeans and tops and drive Lamborghinis live a truly miserable existence. Beware of being misled by either a desire for the things that look like fun or by a fear of being on the "wrong side" (the spiritual "Stockholm Syndrome").

So what is our defence against all this pressure? We have to be very careful as to what shapes our attitudes.

Psalm 1:2 talks about people who find that "... *the Law of the Lord makes them happy, and they think about it day and night.*" Here we learn that a person who receives their "fix" from God's Word, not from "the world", is the one who finds real pleasure.

The Psalmist saw Scripture as the constant source of direction and inspiration for God's people: "*they think about it day and night.*" When we apply this Bible verse to our lives, it challenges us to think constantly about God's Word. For this we need to have a regular daily discipline of reading the Bible, preferably in a systematic way. We find it amusing when we read of tribal people who take all of the medicine that the doctor prescribes, not systematically daily but in one single intake. But we in the West often expect "church" to

give us our full weekly intake from Scripture. As with medicine, so also with what we eat: as we need daily food for our physical bodies, we must also provide food for our souls on a daily basis. If you don't currently have a daily Bible reading plan, Bible Society is one organisation that can help you.

As Christians, we need to make sure we have a Biblical worldview. The way we look at reality should not simply reflect that we are part of 21st Century Aussie culture, but should show that we are people who desire to honour God in what we think, say and do through absorbing his Word and showing it in our lives. The greatest thrill is when, through the pages of Scripture, we really get to know God through Jesus Christ. Fellowship with our Master is our greatest protection against the spiritual "Stockholm Syndrome", and brings us most pleasure and fulfilment.

Psalm 1:3 reflects this: *"They are like trees growing beside a stream, trees that produce fruit in season and always have leaves. Those people succeed in everything they do."*

In this analogy, a tree planted by a stream represents the truly blessed life. This tree does not rely on rainfall for moisture. Its roots sink into the riverbank and each year, even if there is severe drought, the tree produces fruit. The leaves remain fresh because the tree is receiving nourishment from the stream. That happens to godly people as well. When the truth of the Bible is our source of spiritual nourishment; our faith remains fresh. However, when we do our own thing rather than what God wants us to do, the spiritual "Stockholm Syndrome" can rear its ugly head.

The problem with this syndrome Stockholm is that the hostages identify with their captors, and then take up the cause of their captors. However, sometimes things go the other way around: when the captors identify with their hostages.

2. Influencing Our Community

In Holland in the seventies, the South Moluccans captured a whole trainload of people. When the government refused the demands of these terrorists, they began by shooting two hostages, and threw their bodies out of the train as if they were bags of potatoes. On the second day, the hostage who was to be the next to die, Garrard Votters, asked if he could first give a message to his family. As he wrote his letter, he read it aloud. He expressed his love to his wife and said that his last thoughts were his love for her. He said that he felt that his life was a failure, and asked for her forgiveness. He was so disappointed that he would not be there to assist in bringing up their children. By the time the letter was written, the terrorists—the very men who had just killed two other hostages—could not bring themselves to kill him. Garrard Votters had ceased to a bag of potatoes; he was now a person, and they had identified with him. (This is one reason why captors put hoods on the heads of their hostages—it prevents them from beginning to recognise their hostage's humanity.)

The New Testament provides examples of this, where which Christians take the initiative and influence their hearers. One example is found in Acts 3:3-4: "*The [lame] man saw Peter and John entering the temple, and he asked them for money. But they looked straight at him and said, "Look up at us!" The man stared at them and thought he was going to get something*". The lame man was healed; his life was changed.

Jesus calls Christians to be salt and light. Salt is to purify, season, and change what it touches in the world, not be changed by it. Jesus said we're to be light in the world. He urged us not to let our light be covered by a bucket. Christians ought to shine out in the middle of a dark world.

Thus, there are two contrary things that can occur when hostages are taken. In our relationship with people of the world, we can identify with them and accept their values as our own. Or we can, through love, have them identify with us, and take up our spiritual values as their own.

Conclusion

Dear friends, the world can lull us to sleep with its tranquillising slogans and tempting attractions or frighten us into accepting its values. How are we going to be liberated from captivity if we have truly been seduced by the false values which surround us or overwhelmed by the spiritual Stockholm Syndrome?

First, we've got to be redeemed. Lebanese terrorists held 37 American hostages in Beirut. This was to put pressure on the United States to make a quiet deal with Israel. In return for the terrorists releasing those 37 hostages, Israel released 800 Muslim prisoners. The Americans were "redeemed"—bought back. The Bible tells us that when Christ died on the cross, he was buying us out of enslavement by our enemy, that come the people of God². Have you let Christ redeem you—buy you back for God—or are you still locked into the values of our human world system?

² See Ephesians 1.7 and Hebrews 9.15

Second, if we have been redeemed, our primary loyalty has got to be to Jesus Christ. That's why John says, "*Don't love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you can't love the Father.*" Let's say you were one of those 37 hostages from Beirut. Hourly you were living in fear. You were threatened with death. One day they said you'd be released. Finally, you went to Damascus. You saw that plane out on the airstrip and you boarded it. You were still afraid, but at last the door was shut, and the plane left the ground. How would you feel? Would you be saying, "When are we going to get back to Beirut?" No. "We're going to be home!" That's what the hostages were talking about all the way to Frankfurt.

Footnotes:

1. World Biblical Commentaries, No 19, p60
2. See Ephesians 1.7 and Hebrews 9.15