

On the morning of August 23, 1973 a man carried a jacket that was folded over his arm and walked into a bank in Sweden. He then pulled a submachine gun from his folded jacket – fired rounds into the ceiling and then in a fake American accent yelled "the party has just begun." Then in the next few minutes Jan Eric Olson – the machine gun toting bank robber who was also an escaped convict shot and wounded a policeman, abducted four bank employees took them hostage and pillaged the banks safe. After that he issued demands to the authorities and within just a few hours Olson's demands were met. Waiting in front of the door was \$700,000 – in Swedish currency – there was a getaway car – a blue Ford Mustang with a full tank of gas – why he didn't pick a Camaro, I have no idea – a friend, Clark Olufsen, who had actually been released from prison and was being released was offered as part of the demands. However, the authorities refused one of the robbers demands. Olson wanted to leave with the hostages to ensure his safety. So, over the next six days, the hostage standoff ensued. But a strange thing happened during this hostage situation. Today is labeled the "Stockholm Syndrome." Some of you were alive when that happened. After just two days the hostages began to build a bond with their captors. Interesting, I imagine employees of a bank in the initial training they would have been trained –man with gun robbing bank... Bad... People with guns protecting bank... Good... but that was not the case. After a while one of the hostages even called the Swedish Prime Minister to plead with the authorities to allow Olson to take them with him. They wanted to go with him in the escape car. By the end of the ordeal and the roles and the allegiances had completely switched. The hostages were now totally loyal to their captors and they viewed the authorities who were attempting to gain their safe release as the enemy. This was labeled the Stockholm Syndrome. Even though it is not officially listed in the DSM the field of psychology recognizes Stockholm Syndrome as a real response of people who have been taken captive by an enemy and held for an extended period of time. Last week Jim Putman started the conversation about "Winning the Battle of Our Minds." And this morning I would like to present to you – is it possible that Christianity in many way's, shapes and forms is victim to Stockholm Syndrome to where we are defending the enemy and at least confused about our Savior. Jim brought this book – Craig Groeschel "Winning the War for Your Mind," many people are using it in their small group and some questions developed off of that. And today we want to talk about some of the findings that Craig Groeschel scrutinized Scripture and went through a process in order to get free. But we also want to make sure this is the book we're going to turn to today for authority. The Bible. Listen to this – in terms of captivity. Colossians 2:8 says this – "be careful – he is talking to Christians, he is talking to people like you and me in the church in Colossae." He says "be careful that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit based on human traditions. Based on the elemental forces of the world and not based on Jesus Christ." Be careful that you are not taken hostage. In 2 Timothy he writes to Timothy who is now pastoring a church in Ephesus – he says, "perhaps God will grant them"... the "them" in this passage are people who are trying to infiltrate the church and all they want to do is fuss and fight and disagree. And he says is, "perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth Then they may come to their senses and escape the Devils trap." The devil takes hostages. Having been captured by him – to do his will. Paul explains to us – and we're going to review it today and try and dig into it – a process by which God has to deprogram

even followers of Jesus from being in captivity from their past. Or held hostage by the ruts and influence of evil in the present. Craig Groeschel calls it replacement. We learn how to take thoughts that are wrong, destructive, hurtful and flat-out untrue and remove those – confront those and

replace them with the truth of Scripture and the truth of God's redemptive message. He calls it replacement. In this book – (the Bible) – it also has a title for the same thing – it is called the renewing of your mind. Renewing of your mind has been described in the New Testament for over 2000 years. But recently, modern neuroscience has discovered, and has actually affirmed it. And that is always a win and if you are new here to the church or the Bible – don't pick up on any sarcasm, that is not my intention – but I do find great joy when science once again discovers that the Bible is true. It is called neural plasticity. Maybe you have heard about it, it has been in the literature of course all over the YouTube – From Psychology Today historically – (this is a quote...) historically scientists believe that the brain stopped growing after childhood. That's why my parents wanted me to move out when I was 18. But current research shows that the brain is able to continue growing and changing throughout your life span It can refine its architecture – it can even shift functions to different regions of the brain. Neural plasticity. The importance of neural plasticity cannot be overstated. Now this is from a psychological review. "Importance of neural plasticity cannot be overstated" – it actually means that it is possible to change dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behaving and to develop new mind sets new memories and new skills and abilities even into old age. The research has shown that your brain is capable of forming not only new connections, new neural pathways and in some cases even nerves that will create memories and habit patterns to replace the old with new and more healthy ways of thinking. And so this morning we want to look at this idea of replacement against the backdrop of being taken hostage. The hostages in Sweden started out believing one thing – accepted a lie – and completely did a 180° to where they were now, defending the enemy. So let's look at the life of Saul. Saul, in the beginning, he was a persecutor of the church and later he actually changed his name because of the change in his life to the Apostle Paul – but is the same person. And if you have your Bibles, if you would turn with me to Acts 9 – let's take a look at Saul's life in this process of being freed from hostage situation. His Stockholm Syndrome. This is against the backdrop of Saul now – who we know for a fact

– there is no way he was on vacation when Jesus was having His ministry and being tried – he was on the ground floor of the Pharisee movement in order to persecute prosecute and execute Jesus Christ. And just a few chapters earlier – Saul is the one who gathers a mob from the Synagogue of the Freed Men to encircle Stephen – this deacon who has been chosen by the church and empowered by the Holy Spirit – and Saul has chosen to get the mob – take him out and they stoned him to death. Folks it was not Hollywood! – Everybody did not dust off after it was over and go back to their trailer – Stephen was crushed by the pelting stones of an angry mob who had been taken hostage and could not tolerate his message of the gospel. And Saul was holding their coats. He was the organizer. And so in chapter 9 we pick up it says "meanwhile Saul still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord – he went to the High Priest" – the High Priest would be like the leader of the denomination – or you know the Pope or – I don't know... Joe Rogan... Something like that

– "and he went to the High Priest and he requested letters from him to the synagogue in Damascus. So, that if he found any who belonged to the 'Way...'" We used to be called the Way and some of you who are new to the Bible... [you are saying...] Well what does that mean? Jesus said I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life – so in the beginning we – followers of Jesus – we were called "The Way" – "If he found anybody belonging to the Way either men or women, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem." And he wasn't bringing them to prisons like we have in the United States. There were not prisoner rights. And some of them were going to be bound and wait for execution. And as Saul traveled – "he was nearing Damascus and a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. Falling to the ground He heard a voice saying to him" – I want you to listen real closely, "a voice saying to him Saul, Saul... Why are you persecuting Me? Well who are

you?" Lord Saul said – "I am Jesus who you are persecuting" – now this is a commercial, but I want you to let those words sink in just for a minute – when you are held hostage, it is natural for you to think that the good guys are bad and the bad guys are good. That's what a hostage situation is, that's what Stockholm Syndrome is all about. If you believe enough bad press eventually you start thinking that the people trying to save you are bad, and your captors are actually good. And when Jesus says to Saul and confronts him on the road to Damascus – He says "why are you persecuting?"... and wouldn't Saul say "well I am not persecuting You I'm persecuting Ned, and Fred and Clarence and Silas and his wife, and their wife, and I am not persecuting You." And then Saul says to Him – he says "well you are Lord – I am Jesus – the one that you are persecuting." I want you to hear this – when we slander the church – We slander the bride of Christ. And it is OK – how many of you in here actually been hurt by people that were Christians – or that were in the church – and let's ask the next question – how many of you – maybe willingly or unwillingly – maybe in your ignorance or maybe in your immaturity – but how many of you as Christians have actually hurt other people – we are not perfect. But we are being perfected and when we are held hostage we settle for Christianity that is not what was originally intended. And Jesus says "why are you persecuting Me?" Jesus takes it very personal with blog posts – and Instagrams – I am telling you man. The men who are traveling with Saul

– they stood speechless hearing the sound, but seeing no one, then Saul got up from the ground and though his eyes were open he could not see anything. So they took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. He was unable to see for three days. Now in Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias – now this is so funny because it is so serious at this point – and then it gets funny that the Lord has a sense of humor. And the Lord said to Ananias – He says, "Ananias..." and Ananias says, "Lord here I am" – "get up and go to the street called Straight" – and the Lord said to him "to the house of Judas and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, since he is praying there. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming and placing his hands on him so that even by regaining his site." Have you ever written a check for your wife that you forgot to ask her about. I mean here is Jesus like... And by the way he has already seen the vision, so you are going boy. I just love that... Ananias answers, he is a little skirmish he says, "I have heard from many people about this man – how much he is done to your Saints in Jerusalem. I mean Jesus were not you listening? And he also has authority here from the chief priest to arrest all who call on your name" and the Lord doesn't even hesitate, He says "Go! For this man is a chosen instrument to carry My name before the Gentiles, Kings, and sons of Israel I will certainly show him how much he must suffer for My name." I am going to pause there for just a second – because if you are new to this and if you are struggling with change – which we are all in the process – or if you're not a Christian yet and you are just saying I don't understand how that works – it starts with an encounter with Jesus. Until we meet Jesus – until we surrender to Him as Lord, the process does not start – we don't begin to experience His Holiness coming to us and helping us and confronting us and forgiving us and supporting us and encouraging us until we meet Jesus, and somebody said on the sermon team they said, "Well yeah, but I'm still waiting for a light to appear." – you know – "I am waiting for a voice from heaven" I want you to hear two things out of the text here though – first off we are looking at an account that is more than just a conversion. He is not just coming to a realization that he had been "Stockholm Syndromed" – That he had been lied to – that he had served a perverted view of Judaism that was now instead of honoring the covenant of Abraham and Moses, it was destroying the very Messiah. Peter's sermon – God sent His Son and you

killed him. Paul was on the wrong side of that. But also, the drama of this encounter with Jesus is also explained because Paul was being – Saul was being – appointed as an Apostle. Not all of us are going to receive that appointment. It was fairly dramatic – but the common theme for you – for me – and for Saul of Tarsus was an encounter with Jesus Christ. "And Ananias left and entered the house and then he then placed his hands on him. He said brother Saul the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road you are traveling has sent me to you that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit and at once something like scales fell from his eyes. And he regained his sight and then he got up and he immediately was baptized. And after that he took some food and regains his strength." Paul for three days was in the midst of being confronted by the lies that had held him hostage. He claimed to be zealous even for God the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. In fact he was doing the contrary. He had sold his soul to the bank robbers. And was attempting to kill those who follow the Savior. And for three days he was confronted with that fact because he had certainly seen the ministry of Jesus – I think he was there to vote the day that they decided to crucify Him and now all of those teachings were seeping into his heart because it had always bothered him the way that Stephen died. Stephen didn't die with his fists in the air cursing his accusers he asked for them to be forgiven and it says that Heaven opened up and he saw Jesus – I can't believe this one – Jesus stood up to encourage Stephen as they were taking his life. And so for three days Saul was processing that to get rid of that old way of thinking – to confront those lies in his life so it could be replaced with the gospel. In Galatians 1:17 the verse goes on and says, "and Saul was with the disciples in Damascus for some days and immediately began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogue." – "for some days" – in Galatians 1:17 it says this about that little gap there – "some days" – Paul himself says I did not go up to Jerusalem immediately – I did not go up to those who would become apostles before me – instead I went away to Arabia and came back to Damascus. I take great hope in that for two reasons – the process that we are looking at today in the Bible of replacement is a process that Saul was disciplined in as he became Paul. And for three years, actually if you count Tarsus when he went back to Tarsus and waited for Barnabas to come get him –he had been involved in growing as a Christian for over 10 years before he really came of age in leading and guiding the church. He still believed in Jesus – he still proclaim the gospel which you can do that from the day you accept Him. But, he had a lot of baggage. He had been held hostage by a lot of lies. It said he went away to Arabia for a while. Who disciplined him? Someone, maybe Jesus, in some form or another. Paul was originally an enemy of Jesus. He sincerely thought that he was serving God by persecuting the followers of Jesus. Paul had been taken captive in his mind by false teachers and a religious system. And it was a system that had been corrupted from God's original plan when He made the covenants with Abraham and Moses. But how did he transform. As we see from the text if we look at it historically – it wasn't like when the good fairy showed up and hit Cinderella and she just transformed. It was a process – and He shares that process with us. In Colossians 2:8 he says be careful that no one takes you captive – don't be held hostage – through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition based on elemental forces of the world. What is that process and why should we even do it? As followers of Jesus I am telling you today we should continue to strive and replace those flawed and marred thinking. Those false doctrines, those thoughts and rumors from the past – we should strive to replace those with God's truths because

of these two arguments. You are asking me why – why should I do that Bill? You are not working for your salvation why should you do that? Well the first one is because our culture is filled with lies from our enemy – from God's enemy and he – the enemy – who seemingly kind of has disappeared from evangelical theology – we don't talk about the devil anymore. He seeks to take you hostage and he seeks to thwart you and God's church from God's original plan. That is his intent. Ephesians says for our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers – against the authorities against the world powers of this darkness – against the spiritual forces of evil in heaven. Yeah Jim is right – when he says it is a war – we do have an enemy – he showed up in the garden and fooled them and he is still trying to fool you and me today and take us hostage. Hostage to the point that we are now defending the false teachers. Like Saul was. Jesus says this about our enemy, they were confronting him and if you haven't read John 7 and John 8 Jesus is going at it with the Pharisees and the Jewish leaders you know – and what He is basically saying is "I am God – I am the Savior I am the Messiah" – before Abraham was, I am. I was there – and they are like just incensed. And they start playing so dirty that they reach clear back into his past – remember the Mary and Joseph story? They reach clear back into his past they go "Oh yeah – you are God – while we were born of illegitimate parents. Our parents did not have us out of wedlock." – they throw that in His face – Now come on – was Jesus illegitimate? No – he was the ultimate legitimate born of a virgin – come to be our Savior – and they say well Abraham is our father and He says no you were of your father the devil. And you want to carry out your fathers desires. Now Jesus doubles down – on our enemy – on your enemy and my enemy even today – He says he was a murderer from the beginning and he has not stood in the truth. Because there is no truth in him. The enemy will lie, well He goes on to say when he tells a lie he speaks from his own nature because he is a liar and he is the father of lies. And I don't want to be casual about this but if the devil himself were to appear here he couldn't even tell you what time it is without lying about it. And the great power that he has – you know there is more mention of the devil in secular movies then there is in the church anymore. But the great powers that are attributed to Jesus says he is only got one – he is able to deceive people to do very heinous things. But he is a liar – that is his power. And he is pervading our culture. He is even trying to pervade churches – with the lies of his making so that he can take us captive and hold us hostage. 2 Corinthians 10 says it this way – "but we demolish arguments and every high-minded thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God taking instead of us being taken captive, we take every thought captive so that it will obey Christ." and to obey Christ means to fulfill that plan when Jesus saved you my friend it wasn't just hell insurance – His plan is to restore you to what the original creation was It wasn't just to flounder and yes I know there is addiction and temptation and I got hurt in my childhood or I got hurt in my marriage – I know that but together through the power of the Holy Spirit we don't have to be held hostage by that. We have the power of God – to replace that with the gospel. So my first argument is we have an enemy the devil and why should you seek to renew – replace – neural

"plasticize" – your Christian mind – because the devil just wants to thwart that plan and we have victory over that. But the argument number two is the thoughts even from your past they don't lead you to live as a person who has been set free. some of us have undergone some really difficult things – things from our past that we are still working through and we might be working through it with a counselor, we might need some additional help for that – because it was really devastating and we are working through that – we are making headway and God's power is still available. Some of them though are little more subtle than that – you know I think about this from my past – I grew up in a church it was really a good church – but you know we've earned stars for bringing our Bible and we earned things for memorizing our verses and somehow I kind of picked up on this deal that the Christian life is a life where you earn people's favor. And somewhere in there in middle

school it switched over and I began to think – you have to earn God's favor. You have got to work harder. You've got to be better. And it got to where like (while you have heard of eternal security) – I lived in eternal insecurity. I actually believed that if I sin in a certain way and went to bed and died without confessing that sin – I probably would wind up in hell. Because I was trying to earn God's favor. I thought you had to work your way into heaven – you know – good Bill – God likes – bad Bill – God does not like. and then I ran into this verse in Romans 8:1 – and it is after Romans 7 where Paul himself talks about his struggle to keep on the right path. And it says, "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And I am like what do you mean? Well it's grace Bill – oh its grace – you see the other way of living – I told you I am a recovering Pharisee – it made me very judgmental because when you are working as hard as I was working for my salvation you are judging everybody around you. Doubting and criticizing everybody – and don't think I can't pull that out real quick. I still go back to Romans 8:1 daily. It was false. It was a lie and I was held hostage. Colossians 3:8-9 he says this, "seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices – and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator." – when you were born again God pushed the reset for you to be restored to begin that process of being restored to what He originally intended you to be. Both relationally and spiritually and emotionally. And so Paul shares with us a process even though he was originally an enemy of Jesus – there was a process that he must have learned – probably in Arabia. It was disciplined into him – he did not pull it offline or get a self-help book at the library. He had learned to process in becoming a disciple of Jesus of how to live out the restored life and there are three steps to this process, and they are very simple and they are actually affirmed by the research of neuralplasticity. The three-step process - a process that he himself must have use to renew his mind so that his behavior and attitudes would change. And so where does it start? If you are in your Bible, turn to Ephesians 4 – it starts with this, he is talking to the Ephesian people who are in the same process of discipleship – of replacing the old with the new and in that experiencing change and he says, "But that is not how you learned about the Messiah." When he says that, he is saying – you didn't learn about the Messiah from the lies of the culture. You didn't learn about the Messiah from the lies of your past. That is not how you learned that. The culture taught you to be a carouser the culture taught you to be a gossip – the culture taught you to be a thief – "you didn't learn Christ that way assuming that you heard about Him or taught Him because the truth is in Jesus" – the beginning of this change process begins in the same way it began on the road to Damascus with an encounter with Christ. And then he said Ephesians 4:22 – "you took off your former way of life – the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires." God's truth – the preaching of God's word the encouragement of God's people the prayers of your small group – the podcast or Scripture reading – or the Scripture memory that you do is God's truth that comes in initially to confront the lies that you have been believing. Like me – I had to earn my way to heaven – I could even kind of try and prove that I had to earn my way to heaven from Scripture until I ran up against Romans 8:1 and I had no way out. And so when we identify those things – the language that is used here is like clothing. You take off your cloak – and you lay it down – you take it off – it is old – it is corrupt – it is false and you take it off and you lay it down. And sometimes we need help identifying those things, But definitely we need regular time exposed to God's truth in order to see

those things coming and see that they are embedded very deep in some cases. Then in Ephesians 4:23 he says – "You are being renewed in the spirit of your minds" – now I want you to hold on to this one – "Be Renewed" in Greek it is a middle and passive verb be renewed – it is just like it sounds – it means that it is being done to you. So the first thing is active – I take this off and lay it down – I find this truth then I go Oh My! I have believed a lie. Stockholm Syndrome – and I lay it down. But then I – Be Renewed – it is happening to me – and who is doing that? See this is the one thing that is missing from the neural plasticity research – as a Christian the Holy Spirit comes to give you – I mean we could go over the list all day – you now have got access directly with your Creator – He hears your prayers – Romans 8 says that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God pleading for us – active – He is pleading for us – 1 John says we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ The Righteous – who is stepping in a legal term and saying their forgiveness "has been paid for by Me." You have the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. The Spirit can change you. You have the truth of the Holy Spirit revealed in the word – you have the incredible power of the group called the church – the family of God that comes alongside you when you fail – when you hurt – when you are tired – to cheer you on to victory. Be Renewed. And then lastly, there is still one more thing that I have to do. You put on the new self – the one created according to God's likeness – in righteousness and purity of the truth You know when they were deprogramming those people from the bank robbery in Sweden, the therapy went on and on and on about telling them no those guys were evil, they were bad – they were convicts – they had murdered people – and the people just refused – they just refused – they just refused – they just refused... it took them months, and some of them even years to begin to put on the truth. That is what Scripture memory is about – is not so I get a star anymore it's so that I can put on the truth. that is what Bible reading is about – it's not so that I can come and tell you how many I have read this week – or that you'd be impressed – I read clear through the Bible – is so that I can put on the truth. That's what small groups is about – so that I can throw my understanding of the truth out on the table and people can help me see how it applies to my life because they actually know me. Because I'm not trying to be an incognito – secret Christian. You put on the new self the one created according to God's likeness. I'm not going New Age on you. You were made in the image of God and the restoration, power of Jesus Christ is available to you today. But it all starts with that encounter. I mean Paul's was pretty dramatic – I get it. Mine was sitting up in the balcony when Cecil Todd was preaching. You have encountered Him several times anyway if you just be honest and be quiet for a little while. He showed up here – He showed up there. – Inviting you into a process – not a process of just hell insurance – but a process of becoming the person you are always intended to be in Christ. – He is pushing the factory reset – I think that is what was going on in those three days because if Paul was a scholar of Scripture like we've been told – who was he thinking of? He was thinking of Jonah. God put Jonah in timeout for a while too – can you imagine what Paul had to deal with? The people he had murdered – he was a terrorist. The people he had jailed – the doors he had authorized to get kicked down... I mean he is going 150 miles north just to kick down doors – to think the guys a little zealous? Yeah! Because he was a hostage. Stockholm Syndrome. I don't know where you're at today, if you are entering that process man I say go for it – We are working at it and we need help – if you have not encountered Christ and stepped into it I am inviting you today to come forward and let somebody talk to you and pray with you. Replacement – neural plasticity – I like how Jesus calls it, He just says born again. It is a good thing – I probably offended a bunch of people, I'm sorry. It is just Jesus is so

good – He is not my Savior, He is my restorer – He is my hope – and He did it for all of us. 1 Timothy 4 Paul says it this way – he says, "But have nothing to do with these irreverent and silly myths." He is talking about people who all they want to do is fuss and be upset – he says have nothing to do with these irreverent and silly myths, rather train yourself in godliness for the training of the body has a limited benefit but godliness is beneficial in every way. When I work out, it is good for me, and yes I know I need to lose a few – but he says godliness is beneficial in every way since it holds promise for the present life. Your relationships can get better, your finances can get better, your emotions can get better, as God works He's restoring power in your life. This present life but also for the life to come. When Jesus comes and we are fully restored and we look at Him face to face, more than a carpenter – a Savior. A liberator – set us free from spiritual Stockholm Syndrome.