

Loosening the Bonds

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Our first scripture reading this morning is from 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 17 through 23.

Since you call on a father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

Our second scripture is from the book of Luke, chapter 24, verses 13 through 35. Now that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem.

[1 : 22] They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they walked, talked, and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them, but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, What are you discussing together as you walk along? They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?

What things, he asked. About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him.

But we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us.

They went to the tomb early this morning, but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said.

[2 : 41] But they did not see Jesus. He said to them, How foolish you are and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?

And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther.

But they urged him strongly, Stay with us, for it is nearly evening. The day is almost over. So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to give it to them.

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, It is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.

[3 : 52] Then the two told what had happened on the way and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

So friends, let's pray together. Almighty and gracious God, we do give you thanks for the gift that is this day, for this time. As we come with our hearts open, Lord, we know that we need you to light that fire in us again.

The Spirit is moving in this room, and we know it to be true. We need to open our hearts wide and just receive the way you are moving. So plant a new seed in us, Lord. Stoke that fire again so that we go out brighter and reflect your light to a world that needs it so desperately.

In Jesus' name we pray and ask. Amen. So, we've been talking about a living hope. And we are in week two of this series. And today is about loosening the bonds.

Loosening the bonds. So, here's what I want you to think about as we get started. I want you to think about 15 steps. 15 steps. 15 steps. How long does it take you to walk 15 steps?

[4 : 59] Yeah? Everybody kind of calculating in your head? See, here's the thing. 15 steps have become a bit of a challenge for me, and here's why. I calculated as I was putting this message together that it takes 15 steps for me to go from my dining room table to the middle of my kitchen.

And the reason why these 15 steps have become a challenge for me is because many a night I will be doing something in the dining room as we are getting ready to eat, and I will look up and there will be a spoon missing, or I'll forget, a knife for the butter, or something like that.

And then I will walk those 15 steps, and I will get into the middle of my kitchen and start to go, now why did I come in here again? It seems like I got some people who know what I'm talking about.

Yeah, those 15 steps have been a bit of a challenge for me. And the reason why I bring this up is because when you go that journey and you forget why you came into a room, it's really kind of demoralizing.

It takes a while to kind of get your stuff back, and you kind of go, okay, eventually it comes back to you. But it's important that you remember why you're in the room, right? Because you don't want to forget. It changes everything, and you find yourself kind of needing to remember, okay, here's why I'm here.

[6 : 23] Everybody agree with that? That's a good thing. So you know why you're in this room today? Okay. Okay, there's a few heads that move.

That's a good sign. But see, here's the thing. No matter how many steps it took for you to get from your car to this room, no matter how many steps it took for you to get from your kitchen to your car, remember why you're in the room.

Because there's sometimes folks really seem to have forgotten. And that's what this message is about today. Because as we talk about loosening the bonds, if anybody's ever had a bond that they've had in life, loosened for them by Jesus, then you know why you're in the room.

And if maybe you have forgotten that, or maybe you don't remember the fact that God has in fact set you free from a couple of bonds and being bound in your life, then let's remind you that that's kind of important today.

Because if we have just fallen into this habit of making sure we get up and do this thing on whether it's Saturday night or Sunday morning, and we don't really have that sense.

[7 : 39] Like you heard Nancy talking about when we were getting to the praise time today, is that most of us have a story. And we lose touch with our story.

And if you have lost touch with that reason to praise God, if you have lost touch with why you're in the room, you need to remember, and here's why this is even more important than we think.

You know, we have all talked about the state of the world, especially since coming through COVID. One of the things we learned on the other side of COVID is that some folks, when there was permission, if you will, not to get in the room, they didn't feel that much motivation to go back to the room when they could go back.

And we see that to be true now. Of course, there was a period where things fell through the floor because we couldn't get together. But what we've seen is, since about November, that number has kind of picked back up.

It hasn't gotten back to where it was, but it's kind of leveled off. Here's an even scarier thought. What do you think that number looks like for people under 30?

[9 : 06] And if you don't remember why you're in the room, if you are not in touch with what Jesus has done for you, if you can't reflect that out to the world on purpose and make it look like it means anything, then why in the world would anybody else care?

That's why we need to remember why we're in the room. Now, in case you are out of touch with your story about being set free from the bonds you are in, being let go so that you could be free in the world, if that story's kind of gotten away from you, let's listen to what we see in our brothers who were on their way to Emmaus because their story kind of mirrors what a lot of us go through.

So what's happening here is that these are two men going from Jerusalem to Emmaus to walk about seven miles long.

And so, it's still the day of the resurrection. And, they're talking about what's happened.

These are guys who have believed. These are followers. They're in, they are all the way on the team. But they don't know what to do with what's happened.

[10 : 30] And so they're trying to make sense of it. Especially, given the news that folks have shared with them in the morning. And so, all of a sudden, this stranger shows up and is walking next to them.

And asks, what are you guys talking about? And so, they kind of like, you don't know what's happened? You don't know the news of the day? And so, they lay it all out for this stranger.

And this stranger helps them understand, you know, you know, we all grew up with these stories. We grew up with the book that reminded us that God's chosen one was going to go through these things.

That he was going to suffer these problems. That this was going to happen to him. And, not only was he going to suffer these things, he would in fact rise after the third day.

And, when they get to Emmaus, Jesus looks like he's going to keep going, but they invite him in to his, no, no, something's happening and they don't want to lose this thing that's happening.

[11 : 48] And so, they say, please stay with us. And after, they get inside and they're at the table together and Jesus starts to do what only Jesus can do.

All of a sudden, everybody's eyes are open. And they realize the truth. Now, here's the reason why that story hits a little closer to home than we'd like to think it does.

It's because when life throws these things in front of us and we're trying to make sense of it, we get that stack of bills that we know we've got to pay. And we're not sure how we're going to pay them all.

We get that medical diagnosis that we're not sure what we're going to deal with. How am I going to get through this one? Maybe it's a relationship problem where people have been starting to fight and we don't seem to just have the same chemistry we used to have.

We don't know what seems to have been the magic that we've lost and people are going back and forth about it. no matter what it is and you're trying to make sense of it and whoever you are talking to, however you're trying to work it out, then all of a sudden maybe you start to hear something different.

[12 : 58] Maybe it's somebody you know, a friend who offers particularly good advice. maybe it's your devotional time and you get directed to a particular piece of scripture that tends to put things in a new light.

Maybe it's even just a song on the radio that brings something back to mind. You say, you know what? That is in fact what I was trying to figure out. However, God chooses to speak to you, if you are listening, you will hear God give you the direction you need.

The problem is is that we forget. We get so blinded by what's happening in front of us that we stop paying attention to what God is trying to tell us.

See, here's the thing. You know, I have worn glasses since I was 16. And we need to start thinking about what God has done for us in a similar kind of way.

Now, here's what I mean. If you have a story of God having set you free, if you felt God move and work in your life, if you know what it means to have a bond that this world has put on top of you broken, if you know what that's like, if you know you have been forgiven of your sin, if you know that death has no power over you, if you know the spirit of God is a part of your life, is that the lens through which you look at everything that happens to you or do you kind of put these over here and then just kind of look at your world and wonder why you can't see it straight?

[14 : 39] you think about the difference that makes when your bonds have been broken, when you know who God is to you because if you start with I am a child of the most high God and this thing will not overcome me, this thing will not break me and even if it's big and even if it's scary, I know that I have been set free and if you know that to be true, then that peace you need in order to face things, that courage you need to have that difficult conversation, that strength you need when you don't feel like getting out of bed, you know where to find them, you know that they're not your own and when you lean into that, that's how we can show a world that is lost, that is confused, that is headed in so many wrong directions that being a follower of Jesus Christ does in fact make a difference because that's why so many people think

I don't need church, I don't need that kind of connection, people get together, I could sleep in and hang out with my friends later because sometimes that's all people think we are, a group of people who come together and hang out.

Now, don't get me wrong, I love hanging out with you guys but that's not why I come to church on Sunday and I hope that's not the reason you come to church on Sunday, whether you come to church in person or whether you come to church virtually, there's got to be something that's more to your story than just that and if you don't understand that part, if that's not real for you yet, that's okay because sometimes folks don't get it first, meaning that they don't have some big life event that sends them, right, what happens is because they are connected and they see it in other people and other people share their story, then eventually they start to understand that this Jesus person matters.

People's journeys may be different but the result is the same and if you are struggling with a burden right now because I'm willing to bet that many of us are dealing with stuff.

We went through all of that sharing and joys of concerns. We know how serious some people's journeys are right now, how hard some people have it. That's real stuff and we have dealt with real stuff from day one.

[17 : 45] It may not have always been you but in this collective, in this community of faith. We have all seen, felt, and dealt with very real stuff but we've done it together with Jesus at the center of it.

And when you know that there are people who say I will go to God on your behalf and mean that, that's a real thing. When you know that the Spirit is making a difference in you because you don't know how you could have gotten this far.

And the only response that you can have when somebody says how do you keep a smile on your face in the middle of this? It's only grace. Can't be nobody but God.

And that's real. That's the difference. See friends, when we don't have that close, when we live our lives in such a way that Monday through Saturday, it looks like Sunday doesn't matter to us or it hasn't made any difference to us, why are we surprised that a whole lot of people say I'd rather stay home and have brunch?

church. But that, friends, is our mission. And we can never, ever forget that.

[19 : 23] That yes, Jesus chooses to help get the message to those who don't understand it because we are walking messages. Our lives tell this story.

of course there's the learning of the scripture. Of course there are those pieces that come with study. There are those things that come with community and conversation.

But your individual story of having been loosed from the bonds of this world is what will truly touch someone who doesn't understand.

because they may not ever pick up a Bible and they probably aren't ever going to go to seminary. But they will listen to your story.

And that changes people. That changes people. If you are a person with a living hope, if you know that Jesus has made a difference for you.

[20 : 35] See, here's why most of us are in the room. Psalm 116, you heard me read two verses of it during our opening.

But I want to give you a little bit more of it because I think it helps you understand that spirit of worship. Why you have to empty your soul out and give God glory on a regular basis.

Because you know it's only God that brought you this far. for you Lord have delivered me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

I trusted in the Lord when I said, I am greatly afflicted. In my alarm I said, everyone is a liar. What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful servants.

[21 : 46] Truly, I am your servant, Lord. I serve you just as my mother did. You have freed me from my chains. That last verse, different translations put that as you have loosed my bonds.

Sound familiar? So, hear it again. Truly, I am your servant, Lord. I serve you as just as my mother did. You have freed me from my chains.

I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, Jerusalem. Praise the Lord. Friends, that's the calling on each of us.

You may think that, God, I don't have anything special. You may think I don't have the talent that I see on some of my friends. You may think that I've never been through some huge, life-changing miracle.

[23 : 00] You may believe that, but no matter what God has done for you, no matter how the enemy may want you to think that it's just too small to be important, simple truth is this, is that if you were lost, and now you are found, if you were blind, and now you see, if you were bound, and now you are free, that story matters, and you should walk in it, you should live in it, you should thrive in it, and you should praise God because of it, because God loves you that much.

Amen? And amen. Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for the ways in which you have set us free from that which binds us, that we know what it is to have left those things behind, that even though we continue to stumble, even though we are far from perfect, we know that your death on the cross has set us free from the burden of sin.

We know that even though this mortal coil will wear out, that we will go the way of all flesh, that death has no power over us because you have conquered the power of death and shown it in your resurrection, that you have given us the gift of the Holy Spirit, that we know your presence here, now, and we are meaningfully connected to you and to each other because you are God that is that generous, that loving, that powerful, and even when the world seeks to break us, even when our circumstances would take us to places that we can't possibly understand and can't possibly overcome with our own two hands.

We know that as children of the Most High God, as disciples of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, there is nothing this world can do to us.

We have been set free, and just as you promised, we are not only free, but we are free indeed. let us live lives that show the rest of the world what that means and how true it is.

[25 : 26] Amen. If you have been free, live like you have been free. Remember that you have been freed for a reason, because you are loved, not because you are deserving, but because you are loved.

Those are not the same thing. make sure you understand and appreciate the grace of Jesus Christ that has set you free. Live a life that testifies to that fact. If you are looking for ways to put your faith into action over the course of the coming week, we have multiple Bible studies that are laid out in detail in your bulletin.

There are also opportunities to support the rummage sale, which is coming up next week, as well as some other ministries that have laid out their particular plans and needs. So use your bulletin, whether you have it here in paper or whether you can find it online on the website and look for ways in which to put legs on what you claim to believe.

Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, in the name of the Holy Spirit, our counselor and our sustainer, may God bless us as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen.