

Acts 12.1-24

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[0 : 00] Lord, we thank you. You are so incredible.

I just want to delight in you.! Thank you for your presence with us this morning. You are such a good, good Father.

Help us to continue to receive from you. To draw nearer to you. And to love you more.

Amen. Amen. If you'd like to, take your seats. Thank you, man. As was mentioned by Tim earlier, my name is Sean. I'm part of the leadership team here.

And I just want to welcome you. It's great to see you all here. As I was preparing for this morning, I was just reminded of my frailty.

[1 : 18] You know, that actually to stand up here and to proclaim from God's Word is it's a big thing.

And it's a challenging thing. And yet, as I was just considering that, mulling that over, I felt God just remind me of when the 5,000 were fed.

How Jesus said to his disciples, well, go on then, you feed them. And they went, what? No, we can't do that. It's far too many people. And yet, they did find a little boy with five loaves and two fishes.

And they presented him to Jesus and said, look, we've got this. And Jesus said, that's enough. And so, this morning, I'm presenting five loaves and two fishes to you because I believe that's enough.

Because I believe God's going to do something with it in your hearts, in your lives. So, it may not come across as a great banquet. But I present it, you know, in God.

[2 : 25] And let's see what he's going to do with it. Okay. So, we're moving on in Acts. And I've, we're looking this morning at Peter in chains.

And so, I've entitled what we're doing this morning, Chains Broken and Captives Free. But we, before we dig into Acts, actually, I wanted to just focus on Jesus.

When Jesus was 30 years old, to this point, he had just lived pretty much as an ordinary man.

He'd become a carpenter or, you know, a builder in his local town of Nazareth. And he got on with life. I guess there were glimpses of who he really was.

But generally, he had just built things. And yet, at the age of 30, when John the Baptist is baptizing people in the River Jordan, Jesus also comes to be baptized.

[3 : 37] baptized. John protests, but Jesus said, no, I'm going to be baptized. And so, Jesus walks into the water and John baptizes him.

And at that point, something very different happens to what had happened for everyone else that had been baptized. baptized. Because the Bible tells us that heaven is torn open.

And the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove. And then, a voice from heaven, from God himself, God the Father, says, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

And then, at that point, Jesus is led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where he spends 40 days fasting.

And at the end of those 40 days, he is tempted by the devil. Obviously, as we know, he resists those temptations and sends the enemy packing.

[4 : 49] And then, he returns to the region that he had grown up in, an area called Galilee.

And he starts to teach. So, he goes into the synagogues, that is, the Jewish churches, if you like, on a Saturday, and he starts to teach from the Old Testament.

And it says, at this point, that everyone praised him. Obviously, this teaching is something that they are enjoying and receiving well.

And so, everyone praised him. And then, one day, the Bible tells us, he went to his hometown of Nazareth. That's where he grew up, as I said.

That's where he played as a little boy, and then worked as a carpenter. pastor. And again, he enters the synagogue. He stands up, so that he can receive the scriptures, so that he can read from them. [5 : 55] And he is given the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. And he turns in it, and he reads a passage, which we know as Isaiah chapter 60, verses 1 and 2.

And he reads this, and I'll read it from the gospel of Luke. He says, this is Jesus reading from the scripture. He says, the spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Now, at that point, everyone in the synagogue is thinking, yes, we've heard it a lot many times before. It's a great chapter, or a great verse, great verses, and it's just one of over 300 prophecies about the coming Messiah.

And then, Jesus goes a step further. He declares, I am the fulfilment of this scripture.

[7 : 07] I'm the one, I am the Messiah, Messiah, I am anointed to bring good news to the poor. I'm sent to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind.

I am the one to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Wow, what a statement in his own town.

I am the Messiah, he said. And then it's at this point, really, that his ministry really gets going.

We read about how he starts to heal the sick. His teaching is like nothing anyone's ever heard before. He speaks with authority.

The kingdom of darkness is driven back before him. and he selects 12 disciples who leave whatever they're doing.

[8 : 12] You may recall if you're reading in the Bible where he approaches these fishermen and he says, leave them, leave your nets, leave your boats, come and follow me. So Jesus has declared he is the Messiah.

He's chosen 12 men to gather with him, to learn from him, to be disciplined by him. And so we move along in looking at Jesus and there's this point where he has been ministering all day to the people. Crowds are gathering. You can imagine the crowds are gathering. The sick are being healed. The demons are being cast out. The teaching is incredible and so crowds are gathering.

And Jesus is tired. And so he decides to leave the crowds behind and he says to his disciples, many of them are fishermen, he says, let's go across the lake, away from the crowds.

So they get in a number of boats and they're crossing the lake or the Sea of Galilee, which is about eight miles across, so it's not a small bit of water. It's not like a boating pool, this is a substantial sea and a storm arises.

[9 : 37] Now these are hardened fishermen and yet they are scared. So this is a big storm. And where is Jesus? Well, it's funny, isn't he?

He's sleeping. And he even says, on a cushion. I mean, it's just, Jesus is sleeping in the midst of the storm, his disciples are scared, and they wake him and say, look what's happening.

Not expecting him to do anything about it, and yet he tells the winds to stop and the waves to calm. That's exactly what happens.

Now the disciples were scared before, but now they're scared even more, because suddenly, what is this man? Who is he that even the wind and the waves obey him?

They reach the other side. Obviously they were going to reach the other side. Jesus said, let us reach, go to the other side of the lake. And when they get there, we read in the book of Mark, chapter 5, about a man they find there.

[10 : 53] I'm going to just read that. It says this, when Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet.

So this man, presumably, I guess, strengthened by these demons that were in him, but was able to release himself from physical captivity quite easily.

But the problem was that he was spiritually in chains. He was bound up by these demons that had possessed him. And yet, the man who could heal the sick, tell the winds to stop, can also tell the demons to go.

And that's exactly what he did. He commands the spirit to leave. This man is set free by Jesus, the Messiah, restored to his right mind.

And Jesus goes on to say to the man, tell others how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. Jesus, the one who sets the captives free and has mercy on us.

[12:36] And so we move on to our passage of scripture. Acts chapter 12 verses 1 to 18. The early church is growing and expanding.

There has been persecution. But the church is going out. The gospel is spread. And our passage says this.

It's going to come on the screen. It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. So James was an apostle. One of the twelve. But he's beheaded.

And continuing to talk of Herod, when he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the festival of unleavened bread.

[13:39] after arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. So Peter is chained up, four soldiers watching over him.

Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. So Peter was kept in prison, praying. But the church was earnestly praying.

They're praying to God for him. And the night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping. It's funny, isn't it? You look back at the boat, Peter was scared.

Jesus was asleep. No, Peter's no longer scared. He's asleep. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers bound with two chains and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick, get up, he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrist.

[15:01] Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals. And Peter did so. Wrap your cloak around you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison.

But he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city.

It opened for them by itself and went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter came to himself and said, now I know without a doubt that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were hoping would happen.

When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Had gathered them and were praying.

Peter knocked at the outer entrance and a servant named Rhoda came to answer the door. When she recognised Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed, she ran back without opening it.

[16:13] I find that hilarious as well. Isn't it funny? There is a lot of funny bits in the Bible. Peter's arrived, the servant girl has heard his voice and instead of letting him in, she runs back to the others.

she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, Peter is at the door. It kind of gets more hilarious here.

You're out of your mind, they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, it must be his angel. So the church is there praying for Peter to be released and when he is released, they don't get it.

But Peter kept on knocking and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.

Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison.

Tell James, so this isn't the James obviously that's been beheaded, but instead it's James, the brother of Jesus who was leading the church at the time. Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this, he said, and then he left for another place.

[17:25] In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers. You can imagine that, there was no small commotion. The prisoner has gone, the chains have fallen off.

No small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed.

Peter is physically chained and unlike the man that Jesus found at the other side of the lake, Peter was unable to release himself physically.

But this was also a spiritual battle going on because the devil was trying to destroy the church and Peter was a key part of it.

So this is a spiritual battle and these are also spiritual chains if you like as well. Satan is using Herod to stop the advance of the gospel.

[18 : 32] So Peter sitting in a cell both physically and spiritually chained up. so let's gather this together.

Jesus has declared that he is the Messiah not only to come and heal the sick but to see captives released. Not just physical captives although clearly God could release chains in the physical. Actually this is spiritual captive spiritual chains to be broken. So how do we apply this to ourselves? Two areas. Firstly salvation. I've put a passage up there.

It's this John 8 34 to 36. Jesus replied very truly I tell you everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family but a son belongs to it forever.

[19 : 44] So if the son sets you free so that's Jesus if he sets you free you'll be free indeed. Now we were created for a relationship with God.

We read that in Genesis. we were created in God's image and God walked with Adam and Eve in the garden and yet sin came in and broke that relationship all the way back then but sin continues to break that relationship with God.

Even the smallest sin before a perfect God destroys the relationship and we are slaves to sin chained up our relationship with God unavailable but Jesus came to set us free.

He went to the cross to pay the penalty for sin to destroy death so that that relationship could be restored. So if you have received Jesus or if you received Jesus as Lord and Saviour you are released from slavery to sin into freedom in Christ and that relationship restored.

That is what Jesus was saying. I come to set the captives free. But there is something else as well that we can take from this.

[21 : 27] And that is ongoing freedom. You see even though we are saved in Christ we still sin.

We can still get ourselves wrapped up in chains that hold us back. Spiritual chains. We are released from the power of sin and death.

sin. But sin still tries to get the better of us. Paul says this in Galatians 5 verse 1.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. So that's what we just said. Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burned again by a yoke of slavery.

slavery. So Paul is saying actually you can get caught up in sin again. You can be chained up even though you are in relationship with God.

[22 : 27] You see our own sin needs to be dealt with regularly. But also there is something more as well. You see it can be things that we have done right in the distant past.

Or it can be things that have been done to us. And these get us tied up in spiritual chains. So even when you are a little child maybe something was done to you and a spiritual chain has caught you up.

You are imprisoned because of someone else's actions. Or maybe your own in the past that you haven't dealt with. And so you are chained up. These could be chains of fear, anxiety, anger.

Jesus didn't just come to set the captives free. He came to break all spiritual chains. And just as we start to wrap this up, the Holy Spirit is here to release captives.

I felt God with us. Did you feel God with us? His presence in this place. He's here to release captives, to take away chains, break chains that maybe have been there for countless years.

[23 : 53] And I'm going to throw this over to you now. An opportunity to spend time before him, ask him for guidance. What needs dealing with in your life, in my life?

Do you feel held back in your Christian walk? Even hurts of long ago can be dealt with today. In the Psalms, it says this, he brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.

Can I ask the band to come up, please? So we're just going to spend a few minutes, we're going to there's going to be a worship song, but I also just want to pray for chains to be broken here this morning, that people will be set free.

Maybe it's something that's just been there since yesterday, but maybe there are chains that need breaking from childhood.

So, just as the black band plays, just I want us to, actually let's stand. If you feel comfortable with it, just lift your hands to God and ask him what needs dealing with in your life.

[25 : 17] And then I'm going to pray for us. you are the Messiah, the Son of God.

You came down from heaven to earth to set the captives free, to restore that relationship completely between God and mankind.

No chain is too great. No chain is too old, too rusty, too seized up. No sin is too great.

You cannot deal with it this morning. Lord, I pray through your spirit you would draw near to us. We would know your presence.

We would know your love. We would know security in you. And Lord, I pray for the releasing of chains, the prison doors to be flung open and lives to be transformed here this morning.

[26 : 33] That the enemy would be driven back and there would be a new freedom for people in you, Lord. Would you do it? Only you can do it.

We can't do it. Help us to open our lives up to you, to trust you in this and give you all the glory, Lord.

Holy Spirit, would you come and break chains? Amen. Amen. Let's respond by singing who am I, that the highest king would welcome me.

Thank you.