

Midweek 3

## “They Bound Him”

Sermon Text: John 18:12

**<sup>ESV</sup>(John 18:12) So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.**

It has no doubt been standard operating procedure almost since the Fall in Eden - to bind prisoners before transporting them. Binding their hands and feet makes life easier for everyone, except the prisoners, of course. It greatly reduces the possibility of an unpleasant surprise and tends to disabuse the prisoners of any thoughts of resistance or escape. It also communicates to prisoners that they are no longer in charge, that they are under the control of their captors.

The crowd in the Gethsemane bound Jesus. While it may have been standard operating procedure, this was anything but a standard operation. Binding Jesus was silly, ineffective, and unnecessary.

It was silly because Jesus posed no threat. Binding the hands of the One who came **“to give his life as a ransom”** was silly, pointless. What harm had those hands ever done? Jesus’ hands had always been used to help, heal, and bless. His hands had gently taken little children into his arms and blessed them. Jesus’ hands had healed the blind, the deaf, the mute, and the lame. Minutes earlier those hands had healed the severed ear of a man named Malchus. Malchus wasn’t even a friend or ally but was part of the mob that had come to arrest him, and yet Jesus used his hands to heal the ear of his enemy (Luke 22:50,51; John 18:10,11). These are the hands the mob decided to bind.

Consider also what the psalm writer says about God’s hands: **“You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing”** (Psalm 145:16). Is that really what any human being should want to do, to bind the gracious, gentle, giving, helping, healing hands of their Savior God?

Yet we often do just that, don’t we. We “bind his hands” when we fail to pray to him. When we do not ask him for deliverance and healing. Whenever we choose instead to try to handle things on our own, we betray our weakness and our lack of faith. And then, sillier still, we are surprised when Jesus’ hands remain still, allowing us to find out the hard way the foolishness of self-reliance. James wrote, **“You do not have because you do not ask God”** (James 4:2).

Other times we bind him more forcefully. We choose to go our own sinful way and want him to remain silent, binding not only his hands and feet but especially his mouth, so that his Word and commands are muffled by our rebellious nature. We’ll let him know when—or if—we’re interested in hearing from him. If we get ourselves into serious difficulty, then we’ll ask him to bail us out. Until then, he needs to stand in the corner, bound and mute. Though we have all probably been guilty of doing just that, we need to understand just how dangerous that position, that relationship, truly is.

Worse still is when sinful man binds Jesus’ hands by rejecting him as Lord and Savior.

The mob in the garden had no idea what they were doing. More to the point, they had no idea to Whom they were doing it. They were attempting to restrain the Son of God, which ought to have been frightening on so many different levels. They had tried something similar in the past.

Earlier in his ministry, when Jesus was preaching in Nazareth, the crowd decided that they weren't going to bother with binding him hand and foot and trying him in a court of law. They decided instead to just throw him off a cliff. What happened? **"He walked right through the crowd and went on his way"** (Luke 4:30).

Just moments before our text, recall how Jesus asked who they were looking for. They answered, **"Jesus of Nazareth."** Jesus said, **"I am he,"** and the group that was intending to step forward and arrest him instead **"drew back and fell to the ground"** (John 18:6). Jesus had demonstrated that with just a word he could prevent them from doing what they intended.

Even if they somehow managed to bind him, nothing at all could have held Jesus against his will—not ropes, shackles, or chains. So as they bound him, as they casually cinched ropes or chains on the very Son of God, what they did was no more effective than when Delilah bound Samson with fresh ropes and he **"snapped the ropes off his arms like a thread"** (Judges 16:12). You expect that they will soon realize the impossibility of binding Jesus. Yet they bound him anyway.

But then that's not the full truth, is it. The idea that "they bound him" is false—or at the very least, incomplete. It may have seemed to those binding him, and it no doubt appeared to those watching, as if the Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders were taking control and restraining Jesus. A far more accurate description of what was actually taking place would be that *"Jesus allowed them to bind him."* Though they undoubtedly imagined otherwise, they simply could not have bound Jesus without his consent. In reality, he bound himself – to us.

You and I were the real captives. We were the ones who were bound, hand and foot, by our sins. We were bound so tightly, so securely, that we had absolutely no hope of escape. One of the hymns we sang on Sunday described it perfectly: *"Enslaved by sin and bound in chains, Beneath its dreadful tyrant sway, And doomed to everlasting pains We wretched, guilty captives lay"* (TLH 141:1). We had no way of escape, no tools for freeing ourselves.

Jesus chose to bind himself to us, to make our problem his problem, when he *"came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man"* as we confess in the Nicene Creed. That's why this binding by the chief priests and Roman soldiers was wholly unnecessary. Jesus wasn't going anywhere. He had already chosen, in the words of Peter, to bear our sins **"in his body"** (1 Peter 2:24). By doing so, he had also chosen to be bound, not just by Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders but by our sins and the death that we had earned for ourselves.

He allowed himself to be bound by the mob so that he might also be bound by God on the cross, forced to receive every last bit of just and righteous punishment from God for our sins.

Then he gave himself over to death, whose power to bind was unmatched. Death binds all. Some are bound very quickly and at a very young age. Some live for more than a century. Some survive accidents or illness that seem certain to end their time of grace. All, in the end, are bound. No one escapes death's power.

Jesus, of course, could have escaped. He chose not to. He chose to be bound by death – which is an astounding truth when you stop to think about it. As true God from eternity, Jesus was under no obligation. Yet he not only chose death, he chose arguably the most tortured and shameful death we could imagine – crucifixion.

We are obviously now in the season of Lent, a time when we focus on our own sinfulness and on the terrible price that our Savior had to pay for us to be released from our bondage to sin, death, and hell. This is altogether fitting, right, and extraordinarily beneficial. Yet as Christians we never want to pretend, until Easter Sunday, that the final outcome is still in doubt. Christianity can never be about that which is either fictitious or uncertain. We know therefore that although Jesus bound himself to physical death, even that humanly unbreakable bond could not hold him. We've seen the empty tomb; we know the victory won for us by our Savior. Having allowed himself to be bound, Jesus effortlessly burst even the bands of death. Death could not hold him because he had accomplished exactly what he set out to do. Offering his perfect life as the complete payment for our sins, the grave had no power to hold him.

Therefore, we are no longer bound by the guilt of our sin and the looming terror of eternal death. That's the first purpose for which Jesus freed us. The writer of Hebrews put it this way: ***"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."*** <sup>ESV</sup> (Hebrews 2:14-15) Just as the grave could not bind Jesus indefinitely, so it cannot now bind the soul that trusts in him. The bodies of God's children will die, but never our souls. Though our bodies will spend some time in the grave, they will not stay there. Jesus has in this way also released us from the fear of death. As the hymnwriter put it, we need now fear the grave *"as little as our beds."*

Yet while we have been freed from eternal death and from the need to fear physical death, you and I are obviously still among the living. As such, we are reminded that Jesus also freed us so that we, who have been raised from spiritual death to spiritual life, would no longer be ***"slaves to sin"*** (John 8:34), bound by sin in our daily lives. Instead, he sets us free so that we can, as the writer of Hebrews encourages, ***"lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."*** <sup>ESV</sup> (Hebrews 12:1-2)

Satan will never stop trying to drop that noose of slavery around our necks, never stop trying to bind us again with *sin* and unbelief. Our God wants us to be able to ***"run with endurance the race that is set out before us."*** God has a plan and a purpose for our lives. We can't run that race if we shackle ourselves with sin. So also we are reminded, especially during this Lenten season, to cut loose everything in our lives that hinders or prevents us from living as our Lord has intended. By allowing himself to be bound, our Savior has won our freedom. God the Holy Spirit preserve in each of us that precious freedom we have been given. Amen.