

Open the Prison
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We are in a series called Open and today's sermon is Open the Prison. My text is Isaiah 61:1 which says:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.

This is the text that Jesus read when He began His ministry. It shows us that the main things He came to earth to do were to preach good news, heal the sick and set captives free.

All of us are in an invisible, spiritual war. We have an enemy called Satan who wants to take us captive and keep us controlled by addictions, deceptions and life-controlling problems. But we have a Savior who wants to set us free. The Amplified Version of John 8:36 says:

If the Son makes you free, then you are really and unquestionably free.

The Bible teaches that we really can be free. We can be free of addictions! Free of bondage to sin! Free of legalism! Free of the things that hold us down or hold us back! Free of bad attitudes! Free to love people unconditionally and to worship God unashamedly! Free to give unselfishly and to live supernaturally!

But for many of us – life as I just described seems like an unattainable dream. We don't think we can be that free. We see it in the Bible – we hear it in sermons – but then we look at our own lives and they look more like this:

Instead of victory, we experience defeat
 Instead of freedom, we are bound up by addictions
 Instead of walking in holiness, we are falling into sin
 Instead of having self-control, we are out of control
 Instead of joy and peace, we experience depression and fear

Oh, we try. In fact, we try really hard. We may even experience a little victory for a while, but we can't seem to hold on to it! So... how can we experience true freedom?

1- Realize that Jesus died to open prison doors.

Yes, He shed His blood to forgive us and save us and give us eternal life. But He also shed His blood so that we can walk in freedom now!

When we are saved, Jesus brings spiritual freedom into our lives. We are spiritually free, but we still have areas of life that need freeing. When we are born again, we are like Lazarus when he was raised from the dead. In John 11:43-44 Jesus went to the tomb of Lazarus and –

Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" And he who had died came out, bound hand and foot with grave clothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

Lazarus had new life, but he was bound up in grave clothes and needed to be set free. Likewise – when we receive Jesus as our Savior – we are born again and are now new creations in Christ. We were spiritually dead and now we are spiritually alive.

But we have an enemy who wants to keep us bound up in the old life. He doesn't care what binds us, as long as we're bound. So, after we are saved, we all still have areas in our where we are bound up with things that hold us back from experiencing freedom.

The Bible makes a point of showing that Lazarus had his head bound up, his hands bound up and his feet bound up. To me, that represents the way the enemy wants to bind us up. He wants to bind up our eyes by blinding us to spiritual truth and by stealing our vision for our God-given destiny.

Your eyes are bound if you can't understand the Bible or you have no vision for your future. Jesus wants to open your eyes so you can understand truth and receive vision from God.

Satan wants to bind our ears so that we cannot hear the voice of God. But Jesus wants to open our ears so we can hear His voice.

Satan wants to bind our mouths so that we speak curses rather than blessing. He binds our mouths so that we never share our faith with anyone else. Jesus wants to open our mouths so that we speak blessing and we speak the truth about Jesus in love.

Satan wants to bind our hands so that we never give or share or serve. Jesus wants to open our hands so that we are not grasping everything for ourselves – but giving and helping others.

Satan wants to bind our feet so that we feel compelled to go to the wrong places on the wrong roads with the wrong people. Jesus wants to set us free so that we follow His footsteps.

But the main thing Satan wants to bind and control is our thoughts. If he can control our thoughts, he can control our lives. These areas of bondage are also called strongholds in the Bible.

2- Opening the prison requires us to demolish strongholds

What is a stronghold? Anything that has a strong hold on you! A stronghold can be a besetting sin or an addiction or a deception. For some it is money. For others it's an addiction. For others it's a false belief or a person. Anything can become a stronghold in our lives.

Literally – in Bible times a stronghold was a fortress prison like Alcatraz. And Satan wants to build a fortress prison in our minds. A stronghold that keeps God's thoughts out and Satan's thoughts in. It's better to deal with the enemy before he builds a fort in our lives. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Your mind is a battlefield, so strongholds begin in the mind. Notice that those strongholds are arguments, pretense and thoughts. A stronghold is a deceived way of thinking or reasoning that becomes established in your mind unless you demolish it. And a stronghold usually develops over time. It starts with opening the door to the enemy by not taking your thoughts captive, which allows him to get a toehold which becomes a foothold that eventually becomes a stronghold.

Satan attacks in the area of our thoughts! He wants us to believe things that are contrary to God's word. So, he exalts ideas that war against the truth of God. Satan knows that if he can seize control of your thought life, he can seize control of the rest of your life. That's why we need to be very careful about what we see and read and put into our minds!

Have you ever noticed that different people come through the same tough circumstances differently? Some use it as a reason to quit and others as a catalyst for change. Some shrink from it and some grow from it. Some get bitter and some get better.

What's the difference between these people? The difference is not the circumstances, but what they tell themselves about their circumstances. The difference is the way they think. Some people think their own thoughts or thoughts that Satan told them. Others think God's thoughts – thoughts based on the word of God. Some people are held captive by their thoughts, but

3- Opening the prison requires taking your thoughts captive.

We must guard against having passive minds. A passive mind is a mind open to any thought that comes in. It does not analyze or seek the origin of the thought, it just receives it as truth.

It's like a kid zoned out front of a TV – just taking in whatever is shown without analyzing whether it is true or false. We cannot afford to entertain thoughts about God that are not true. We cannot afford to believe thoughts about ourselves that are contrary to the thoughts God has toward us! How do we know God's thoughts toward us? He reveals them in His word!

Any thought that is not a God-thought needs to be taken captive and cast out – replaced by truth! Notice that we do not take Satan captive; we take our thoughts captive.

The original language is pretty violent. It means to take something captive at the point of a spear and to demolish it until it is extinct. It means: Don't coddle it – kill it! Don't try to tame it – exterminate it!

We must get serious about taking our thoughts captive and replacing them with God's thoughts. The word used for the thoughts we should take captive is the same Greek word used in 2 Corinthians 2:11 for Satan's devices.

Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

The devices or schemes of Satan are the thoughts in the mind of Satan. He wants to remove the thoughts of God from your mind and replace them with his own thoughts.

We sing, "God is good, all the time" and the whole time Satan argues, "God wasn't good this time or that time." Which do you believe?

You believe God is love and Satan argues, "How can a God of love allow you to go through what you're going through." Which do you believe?

You believe God is right and Satan will argue all the ways he thinks God is wrong. Which do you believe?

In order to experience freedom, you must take your thoughts captive – or your thoughts will take you captive! So - how do we take our thoughts captive? First, we must examine their source. There are four possible sources: God, self, other people or Satan. We determine the source by asking three questions:

- Does it line up with God's word?
- Does it glorify God?
- What does it produce in me? Pride or humility? Faith or fear?

If I determine the source is not of God, I take that thought captive by replacing the lie with the truth – the word of God. True change comes through the Word of God. Romans 12:2 says:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Satan wants to conform us through his words.
 God wants to transform us through His Word.

The word 'renew' means to renovate. It takes work. To renew our minds, we must recognize thoughts that are not from God. Then we must resist those thoughts and replace them with the truth of God's word. That's the key to taking thoughts captive: recognize, resist and replace. You'll never change your life until you change your thoughts!

You renew your mind by recognizing the source of the thoughts and choosing to believe God's word over Satan's words or your own words.

Satan wants you to doubt your beliefs and believe your doubts! Satan wants you to question God's answers! So, you must resist Satan. James 4:7 says:

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

You resist and overcome Satan with the word of God.

I want to expand the way you see spiritual warfare today. We usually see it as a power encounter with demons, but most the time spiritual warfare is a truth encounter! Deception is Satan's main tool. That's why Ephesians 6:14 tells us the first piece of spiritual armor:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.

I know prayer and praise are big keys in spiritual warfare. But I've preached on those recently, so I'm not today. I thought my sermon was finished on Wednesday, but I woke up Thursday feeling compelled by God to tell you this: Spiritual warfare is not just about having God's power, but knowing God's truth! Jesus said in John 8:31-32

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

We must know the truth in God's word – and then do like Jesus did when Satan tempted Him – speak the word of truth.

There are times when overcoming the enemy requires identifying our enemy by name. For instance, when dealing with a demon possessed man in Mark 5:9

Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many."

Notice the demons identified themselves as Legion. And when we have strongholds in our lives – we need to identify them. It can be a stronghold of anger or fear or lust or addiction.

Not all anger is demonic – but when anger has a strong hold on us and controls us – it can be a demonic stronghold. At times like that – we need to name that demon and bind it out loud in the name of Jesus. I mean literally say out loud – “In the name of Jesus I take authority over a spirit of anger. I bind anger in the name of Jesus and refuse to allow it to control my life. Anger, be gone in Jesus name.”

4- Opening the prison requires the power of the Holy Spirit.

It’s interesting that the names of the Holy Spirit show what He does and everything He does counteracts the works of the devil.

- The Holy Spirit is greater than an unclean spirit.
- The Spirit of truth is greater than the spirit of deception and lies.
- The Comforter is greater than the spirit of heaviness.
- The Spirit of wisdom is greater than the spirit of confusion.
- The Spirit of grace is greater than a spirit of condemnation.
- The Spirit of life is greater than a spirit of infirmity and death.
- The Spirit of the Father is greater than an orphan spirit.
- The Spirit of the fear of the Lord is greater than a spirit of fear!
- The Spirit of joy and gladness is greater than a spirit of depression.

Greater is the Spirit of God in us than the spirit that is in the world! In the name of Jesus, with the truth of God’s word, and in the power of the Holy Spirit – we can be free of demonic strongholds! But once we get free – we need to concentrate on staying free!

5- Freedom that is gained must also be maintained.

The New Living Translation of Galatians 5:1 says:

Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free...

I want you to notice a couple of truths here: Christ died to set us free – but it’s our responsibility to stay free! Jesus said in Matthew 12:43-45

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.

In other words, cleaning out your spiritual house is not enough. You must fill it with something else. What should we fill our spiritual houses with?

First – we must be born again.

This happens when we repent of our sins and place our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. When Jesus comes into our lives – they are no longer empty!

We also need to fill our spiritual houses with the Word of God and the Spirit of God. Jesus sets us free and then the Word of God and the Spirit of God work together to keep us free! And once you are free – God wants to use you to set others free.

6- When you are free you can open the prison for others

God wants to set you free so you can help others get free! God sets us free, but he involves other people in that process.

Think back to how I started this sermon with the story of Lazarus. Jesus raised him from the dead, but he told people to loose him from the grave clothes that were binding him. And God wants you use you to help set others free. But you must get free first! Free people free people!

We experience freedom by submitting to God, resisting the devil and replacing his lies with the truth of God's word! Satan's lies have no power over you until you believe them! God's truth has no power in your life until you believe it!

So – when Satan lies to you, you must choose not to believe it. You must choose to believe God's word instead! You must talk back to the devil – bind him in the power of the Spirit – and take back what he stole from you in Jesus' name!

When Satan tells you that you that you're a reject, you tell him that you are accepted in Christ.

When Satan tells you that you that no one wants to be your friend, you tell him that you are a friend of God.

When Satan tells you that you are a loser, you tell him that God says you are more than a conqueror through Christ.

When Satan tells you that you are stupid, you tell him that God says you have the mind of Christ.

When Satan tells you that you can't do anything right, you tell him that God says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

When Satan tells you that you are weak, you tell him that God says when you are weak, He is strong.

When Satan tells you that you will always be broke, you tell him that God promised to meet all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus!

When Satan brings up a past sin - you tell him God already saved you from your past - it's under the blood and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

And when Satan tells you that you will never be free, you tell him that God says when you continue in the Word, God's truth will set you free! Really and unquestionably free!