

Mark D. Reichert
Lent Rotation 2022 – The Crucial Hours
John 18:12 – They Bound Him

Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus. They bound him.

Handcuffs are an important part of any police or security officer's toolset, and if you know anything about them – hopefully none of you have spent too much time in them – then you know how effective they can be at restraining someone in a dicey situation. Handcuffs aren't foolproof, but when they are applied correctly under proper protocols, modern handcuffs are almost impossible to escape. Normally a person would be handcuffed behind their back, tightly enough so they can't twist their wrists, with their palms facing outward, away from each other. Positioning your arms that way puts you seriously off-balance if you think you're going to try to run or jump or climb to get away, and it means that unless you're a super human like what you see in the movies, you're most likely not in a position to be able to break or slip the cuffs, either. Combine that with the fact that a person in handcuffs will almost always have a trained officer at arm's length to keep them under control and that officer should already have searched them for weapons and lockpicks and any other unpleasant surprises, and that makes the prospects of escape very unlikely.

But like I said, nothing is foolproof. Even though proper handcuffing techniques should be about as close to foolproof as it gets, equipment failure and operator error can always factor in. So it goes with one human being binding the hands of another with a piece of steel, but what *is* totally foolproof is the devil holding us in the bonds of sin. Those cuffs went over our hands and hearts all the way back in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve first broke God's Law by disobeying his Word and taking that forbidden fruit, and ever since then our lives have shown the evidence that we are bound, restrained, and handcuffed: we don't use our hands to serve God and help our neighbors like we should; we don't fold our hands and go to God in prayer like he wishes; we don't keep our hands busy with love and kindness and good deeds; and we don't take up God's Word in our hands to read and learn and cherish as much as he wants, either. It was for our evil actions that these horrible handcuffs went on us in the first place, and the way the devil leads us around and controls us, we have no ability to actually do what is good and godly on our own. We can't run, we can't slip away, we can't escape. We are *bound* in sin.

And this is what we deserve – we've brought this on ourselves. But Jesus didn't. For 33 years of his life, he only ever used his hands to help, heal, and bless. In fact, immediately before Jesus was arrested here in the Garden of Gethsemane, he used his hands to heal a servant named Malchus, whose ear Peter had just cut off with a sword. Why would you *want* to bind hands like that? Jesus had done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment, and yet out came the Jewish temple police and hundreds of Roman soldiers to arrest him. They treated Jesus like he was

public enemy #1, and for what? Could they point to even one thing he had done that would justify this, other than that they *un*-justly hated him? No, they couldn't – and yet still, they bound Jesus with chains or ropes, hands behind his back, arms to his body, maybe feet roped up too, and they surrounded him like a pack of dogs and walked him back into Jerusalem so he could stand trial and die, as if he were the worst of criminals.

No, he didn't deserve it – and yet, that's why he had come. Only, it wasn't really the ropes and chains that bound Jesus that day, and it wasn't the devil and his power, either. It was Jesus' love. It wasn't so much that the soldiers *bound* Jesus, it was that Jesus *allowed* the soldiers to bind him. After all, “for us and for our salvation” was the whole reason Jesus came down from heaven, became fully human, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. As Isaiah said, he was numbered with the transgressors, to make intercession for the transgressors. He came to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, because he offered himself in exchange. He was treated like a criminal, so the real criminals could go free. But in order to do that, he had to take our place. He had to be our substitute for sacrifice and salvation. He had to be bound, so that we could be unbound. He had to be punished so that we could be forgiven. He had to die so that we could live. Yes, he had the power to escape if he wanted to, but what he *really* wanted most of all was to stay and save us, and it was his love that bound him to it.

See, handcuffs like these, they don't just fall off. You need a key if you're going to get out and get away and get free. And the spiritual handcuffs the devil put on our hands and hearts because of our sins, well they needed a key, too – and Jesus was the only one who could provide it. Only it wasn't really a *key*; it was a *cross*. That's what Jesus used to unbind us from the devil's restraint, so that we could be free from his deadly power and bound to Jesus instead. And that's not just exchanging one slave master for another. That's like exchanging a hateful slave master for a loving spouse; that's exchanging a hellish prison for a heavenly home; that's exchanging an eternity of perdition for an eternity of Paradise. Jesus is the one we *want* to be bound to, because all that helping and healing and blessing he did throughout his life is what he still wants to do for us now, too. And the best part of it all is that when we are bound to Jesus, that means we're also bound for heaven with him, where the devil and all the fear and guilt and hurt he brings will never be able to control us again.

So friends, let's not use the freedom Jesus earned for us to run *from* him, like the disciples did when Jesus was arrested. That doesn't do us any more good here or in eternity than a fugitive from the law who's constantly on the run, trying not to get caught again. There can never be any real peace or joy or rest in that kind of life, because the only thing waiting at the end of that road is another set of handcuffs. Rather, let's use the freedom Jesus earned for us on the cross to run *to* him, to trust him, to love him, to follow him. By God's forgiving grace, now we are blessed to live free and to live forever, because Jesus was bound for us so we could be unbound from our sins, so we could be bound to *him* and his love, and so we can be bound for heaven *with* him for all eternity. Amen.