

Giving Up or Giving In: 3

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Acts 12:1–4 NLT

¹ About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. ² He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword. ³ When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter. (This took place during the Passover celebration.) ⁴ Then he imprisoned him, placing him under the guard of four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring Peter out for public trial after the Passover.

If we could set the stage this morning for a message that will change your life...if you will only hear and do. This story starts with the death of one of the disciples. James which was the brother of John was beheaded because he preached and practiced the gospel an lifestyle that Jesus had commanded each of them. If we could go back to the final words that Jesus spoke before He ascended.

Matthew 28:18–20 NLT

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Make disciples...not converts. So what is a disciple?

The Greek word for disciple is mathētēs (math-e-tes) which means to learn, understand. A learner, pupil, an adherent who accepts the instruction given and makes these instruction their rule of conduct.

This means that they accept the gospel and has corresponding actions by the life that they live. But the word that Jesus used was deep that that. He used the greek word: mathēteúō (math-e-te-uo) means not only to learn, but to become attached to one's teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and conduct of life.

This commandment from Jesus is for us to teach but also to walk along side while we are teaching. The message of salvation is often preached in most churches every Sunday...but how about the disciple part? The making and walking through the process just like Jesus did with the disciples. He taught and lived among them. They were constantly reminded of what they were called to. And Jesus used these 12 men to turn the world upside down. What would happen if we would disciple people the way Jesus did. But some would speak the excuse...but I can't do this. Then we must look at the issue a little deeper. Either you have not been discipled or you

fail to see the power and authority that has been graced upon your life. And if you fall into either of these two brackets please see me after this message!

As we get back to our main scripture, James was put to death because he took the commandment of Jesus seriously. And as we have read already that Peter was too! But Peter was only arrested because trials and executions were not permitted on Passover. It may have looked like his punishment was certain but delayed. How many times have we felt like Peter's situation? How about right now? Do you feel like judgement from man is knocking on your door? Can you feel the weight of persecution in your current season? Imagine how Peter felt! Knowing that you were doing everything right and this is what you get in return. Does this look or preserved as fair? How about the lies that the enemy was feeding his mind. And how long before these lies would begin to penetrate his heart. And if that wasn't enough Peter was on Israel's most wanted list. Because they had him guarded 24 hours a day with 4 guards working 4 different shifts. And this went on for days during the Passover Festival. But Peter's fate seemed to be just like James, the brother of John.

Acts 12:6–8 NLT

⁶ The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. ⁷ Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. ⁸ Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered.

Just when it seemed that all hope was lost, the tides turned. But if we could envision our situation in the shoes of Peter. Day and night Peter was under the watchful eye of man and the enemy. Peter would not be able to make a move without someone seeing him. There was not hero to come and rescue him from the doom that he was about to face. His situation was hopeless. I would be bold enough to say that Peter had either accepted what was about to take place or he was totally exhausted from sleepless nights. Because scripture states that he was asleep, chained between two guards. I'm not taking anything from Peter's faith because we don't know anything except for what is in scripture. But the enemy is always plotting and scheming to knock us off course. But here is what should be happening to each of us as we are sitting in our situations. The Angel of the Lord brought light to a dark place. But if we look a little deeper at the message that is being spoken here. Angels are almost always described as being messengers from God. So watch this...the message of God brought light and not only did it bring light but it brought awareness to Peter! The word of God has full potential to change our surroundings. But we must become aware of the message. Not only an awareness of the words presences but the willingness to obey it! Many people are hearing and seeing the word in church this morning but their life will remain the same. And because they have neglected to allow the word to change them, they will remain the same. When we have chosen to give up and not give in to the word we have simply told God that we are comfortable in my prison, comfortable in my chains, comfortable with the eyes of man watching my ever move, comfortable with being alone, comfortable with my judgement.

But it doesn't end here. Peter was struck by the message which caused him to be awakened. The word struck and awaken signifies situational awareness. The word touched him and opened his eyes to see beyond the natural. And once his eyes were opened he received further instructions. "Quick! Get up!" Isn't it amazing that three simple words turned this hopeless situation into a flawless victory! This message from the word spoken caused the chains to fall! Ladies and gentlemen...what are we waiting for? Why is the church still bound when they have been set free? We hear the message preached week after week but we are still struggling. Could it be that the word is not actually being preached. The real message isn't being delivered. What do you mean Pastor? Look at what Paul said...

2 Corinthians 11:2–4 NLT

² For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ. ³ But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent. ⁴ You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

Paul's pure desire was to present the bride of Christ to be a virgin bride. A bride that took themselves off the market for other contenders. A bride that refrains from being involved with and flirting with the world. Because flirting and batting our eyes with the enemy means we will end up like Eve. She was deceived. She was commanded not to eat from the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil. And what was she deceived by? Well, yes it was the serpent, but how did he deceive her? By manipulating the truth. He brought her attention to the good side of the tree, not the evil. He flipped the script and made God look like a taker instead of a giver. And this was the stern message that Paul was speaking to the church of Corinth.

A different Jesus was being welcomed into their hearts. If we could say it this way, "A Knock-off Jesus" or "A Counterfeit Jesus". Think back to [John 1](#), In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God and the Word was God. God created everything through Him. The Word gave life to everything created. And in verse 14, The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus declared that He was the way, the truth, and life and that no one could come to the father except through Him. So if the Church of Corinth was gladly accepting a Jesus that only represented partial truth then their salvation was in question. If the modern church of today is preaching a different Jesus then our salvation is also in question. If the modern church is preaching that it's okay if we live like the world or if we are conformed to the ways of this world then they are preaching a knock-off Jesus. A watered down truth that has produced a watered down Christian. A gospel that has become sugar coated. A gospel that has tickled the ears of corrupt man. A gospel that says, I can have my cake and eat it too.

As we bring our focus back to Peter and the facet that truth brought an awakening and caused his chain to fall. But it stop there. He had to continue to do what he was told to do. Notice that truth requires corresponding actions. He was told to get dressed and follow him. Peter had to assemble himself. What does it look like to dress ourselves?

Ephesians 6:10–18 NLT

¹⁰ A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. ¹² For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶ In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. ¹⁷ Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This portion of scripture that we may know as the armor of God but the covering of this truth will aid us while fighting the enemy. And this was a truth the Peter was faced with. But he had to choose to give in to the truth spoken or give up on the truth that was setting him free. He may have been freed from the chains but he was still imprisoned. But the word said to follow him. Peter had to be willing to leave behind what he may have already accepted as fate. By choosing to follow the word he would remain in the light. He would defy the odd. He would escape the hopelessness. But he had to continue in the word and message of hope.

Acts 12:9–11 NLT

⁹ So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guard posts and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. ¹¹ Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!"

Peter's full freedom happened because he followed the word all the way to the end. What if he would have only went half way? What if he would have only clothed himself but never continued to follow. We have got to be a church of completion! We must recognize what is causing us to abandon mission. It's not about how hard we try...it's about how much we surrender. And surrendering is simply submitting your will to the will of another. And the other is the word of God. We will not experience the fullness of freedom until we surrender fully and whole heartedly to the word of God. We cannot change the word of God but His word can change us.

As long as Peter followed, his surroundings seemed to be a blur. The more he followed the less his surrounding mattered. His flesh became desensitized by what was happening in the flesh as long as he followed the word. This simply truth is hard to explain because this knowledge comes from the experience. The experience of surrender to a call that is so much high than man. A call that leads us to bring others to the feet of Jesus. But I want you to hear with your spirit what Peter declared in verse 11. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned for him." When we come to our senses that it is the word that is sent and our following of the word, we become free from the enemy. So now we know

why they is so many quote unquote Christians that are bound because they follow a different Jesus. A Jesus that fits their prison and chains.

I want to close with a parable that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees.

Luke 7:41–47 NLT

⁴¹ Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people— 500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. ⁴² But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” ⁴³ Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.” “That’s right,” Jesus said. ⁴⁴ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. ⁴⁶ You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. ⁴⁷ “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

It’s the realization of what we have all truly been forgiven of but we must ask ourselves the question...How am I displaying what I have been forgiven of? Do I find myself at the feet of Jesus or am I still sitting at the table? Let me pray with you today!