

Emily and I go up. Communion. Prayer and encouragement. Welcome.

Let me start with this. “When I try to hold everything together...I fall apart. But when I let God hold it..I can finally rest.”

“Let the Chains Fall Off”

Because..there are times in our lives..when our soul is desperately crying out for some help. When it is troubled and anxious. When it is under attack or even trapped by fear. And..it cries out when.. God is about to bring us to another level of freedom. As a matter of fact...many times...it seems to get worse just before it gets better...because.. it’s coming to the surface. That’s good..btw. See. God is revealing it...so that He can heal it. This happens from time to time in my own life. Maybe you too...where the walls seem to close in. When things seem to get a little tighter and heavier. And when that feeling comes...I want to escape. I want quick relief from my trouble.

Ok. This is a deliverance message series. No foaming at the mouth. Or heads spinning. Deliverance is easy for Jesus. And everyone needs deliverance...in some way.

And one thing I’ve learned about God through the years.. is this. Before God changes my situation...He changes me in it. He delivers me in it. I lived half of my life without God...trying to escape difficult situations...and never finding true freedom on the inside. Let me show you this idea.

Acts 12:5-11 NLT

5 But while Peter was in prison, the church prayed very earnestly for him. 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. 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!"

Ok. We see Peter in prison...*fast asleep*. An angel shows up...says..get up ...and suddenly.. his chains break...and he walks out of that prison cell with ease...and continues to walk in his God given destiny. That's what we all want, right. More and more personal freedom to live out our purpose in life. And...that is what God wants too.

It was our.. personal freedom.. that Jesus died for. It is the mandate of God to set the captive free. And he who the Son sets free is free indeed. But why then.. are there so many Christians still chained with fear or shame or worry or anxiety? They love God and even serve God but still trapped in a personal prison. When they walk out of the doors of their church...after spending time in the presence of God...they are still troubled and trapped in their soul. See. In that story....if Peter was still bound *when* the doors opened...he would still be bound at the next place. What I've learned is....before Jesus delivers me out of something.. he delivers me in it. The chains fall off of me.. first.

This is a message to those who feel trapped by an enemy of fear on the inside. This is for those who are living with worry and anxiety within. And this is a message to those who are crying out for deliverance and freedom. Again. This is a deliverance message. Because like I said last week..all that fear, worry and anxiety.. is not good for your health.

One more time with this theme. Deliverance doesn't mean the chains fall off of the situation first. It means the chains fall off of you first. Because...we might be saying...Lord, fix my job..*and then*.. I'll be happy. Fix my situation...*and then*.. I'll be free. Fix my problem..*and then* I'll walk in my purpose. Let God fix you or me... in it.

So...God ordains certain situations..in our journey with Him...where He can truly.. set us free. And those situations tend to be like Peters at times. Chained and wedged between two guards...surrounded by locked iron doors. Can anybody relate? It was tight. It was awkward. And..it looked impossible.

See..what I've learned throughout the years is this. God will lead us into situations.. where only *He*.. can get us out..so that *He* can do a work within. And..so that *He*..can get all the glory. I've also discovered that...God will.. give us more than we can handle...so that we will finally let Him handle it. Because..if you and I could handle everything.. then we wouldn't need God. The truth is that God will not give us more than.. *He*.. can handle.

And sometimes, God will allow certain situations....to play out...just to prove to you and I... that He's God. For example. He could have kept Daniel out of the lions' den. He could have stopped Shadrach, Meshach and Abedego..from going into the fiery furnace. He could have...left young David behind ..in the field.. and let someone bigger and more

important..defeat Goliath. But He didn't. Because God allows certain situations.. in order to display *His* power around us... and within us. When Peter was asked to walk on water..it was *in the middle of a storm*...not on a sunny day. In other words...we don't wait for perfect weather to walk by faith. If your situation is difficult ...this is the perfect time for a miracle. Many times...our deliverance comes.. in the most difficult places. In places when things seem to be breaking. But that's when God is actually building. Building something in us that lasts forever. There's a fight involved for obtaining what you were born for. And many times we think that battle is interpreted as we are doing something wrong. Opposition comes because of the destiny and word over your life. We will never know the strength of Gods word and the purpose over lives..until it's opposed. That's when it becomes real.

And those battles or troubles in your life are not just about you. It's to make a statement to the people around you. Nothing speaks louder than... when people see the power, love and favor of God on your life. When they see you.. *with God*.. overcoming personal obstacles that should have held you back. Defeating giants that were much bigger than you. Accomplishing something that seemed impossible. It will cause them to stop.. and take a look at the mighty God... who lives in you.

And sometimes...these situations happen because .. God asked you to do something a bit crazy. Something way out of your comfort zone. Something way above your pay grade. Because...if everything in your life is easy or looks sane...or all put together...or nicely arranged....and nothing ever requires faith...how will anyone ever know you're walking by faith. Those walking by faith situations. Those uncertain circumstances.. are a catalyst to freedom. I am learning that...my freedom is not found in certainty....but actually

relaxing and surrendering to uncertainty. When I don't know what I'm doing or where I'm going.

Now regarding your situation. In my view. It doesn't really matter how you got there. What matters is...Jesus can get you out there. But...before that happens..you may have to stay there for a minute...for God to break a few chains. And.. for God to deposit something powerful in you. Look.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NLT

17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet.. they produce for us a *glory* that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! 18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

I want to run when things start get hairy. But what if Gods goal in your present situation..isn't immediate relief...but resiliency though it...because it's producing something beautiful and glorious...in you.

See. Your trouble is.. producing...Glory. Meaning. It is.. producing a beauty, the favor of God, the blessings of God, honor from God, and the proof that you belong to God.

Ok. I noticed some things in our story that I see as keys to our personal deliverance. First.

People were praying

People were praying for Peter to be freed. As a matter of fact...they were constantly praying for him. And their praying is described...in the Greek this way. A stretching forth.. and at the same time.. dropping an anchor. Thats the visual description of how they were praying. In other words...

their prayer was specific.. and solid. It was certain and confident. It's like you hunters. You don't just step into the woods and shoot randomly...hoping to hit something. No. You are aiming for a very specific point on that target. You are stretched out and locked in. Hey. Are you praying that way? And even more importantly...are you praying for someone else's freedom that way? They were praying for Peter. Never give up on praying. Your prayers...just like Peters story...will.. summon an angel of the Lord..to come and set the captive free.

And when we pray we can't rush. We must learn to wait for God to move. And sometimes He doesn't move in 24 hours. Sometimes He doesn't move in a week or a year or even longer. Don't fall for the trap of trying to get ahead of God to fix everything else..in your own strength and your own way. Even if He doesn't change things right away..He's shaping you into someone stronger and more mature. See. The purpose of prayer is not to change.. God but change the one praying.

They were praying. But..they weren't begging God. Because.. praying is not begging. It's like our kids waking up in the morning and begging for food. How odd that would be. No. It's either.. "what do you want"...or..."you know where the cereal is". "Go get it." And now...even though their older... when they come home to visit... we get things ready. Bed made...the food they like...they can even use our car if needed. Everything is already there. Prayer isn't begging... it's just believing. Praying...is just believing that God has already provided the way out. That He's already prepared everything that is needed...for your situation. The people were praying for Peter to be free.

See. The soldiers, the chains, the guard posts, the iron gates were all *nothing* to God...as God was with Peter..and people

praying for him. This house is a place where others can pray for you...and break a few chains if needed.

See. When every other gate is shut and locked, the gate to heaven is wide open. That's when we take advantage of that open gate through prayer. That's when angels come. That's when chains break. They were praying.

And one last thing regarding prayer. Look how this story ends.

Acts 12:11-16 NLT 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!" 12 When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. 13 He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" 15 "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." 16 Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they *finally* opened the door and saw him, they were amazed.

Lord, help us to believe...that you are a God of deliverance. Help us to open the door immediately when we.. *hear* your voice.

But here's what I love about this story. These believers who were praying for Peter...were amazed..when they saw him. They couldn't believe it. So apparently...the faith they were praying with was kinda marginal. They couldn't believe it actually worked. And yet, God answered their prayers. This is very encouraging. I guess that prayer had more power than

they thought it had. In other words. Your little prayer has more power than you think.

Because...we don't always feel the strongest. We don't always do the things God wants us to do. We don't feel like we've got it all together. But when we simply depend on Jesus and lean on Jesus and pray.. we will be amazed at how He continues to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask or think or imagine. I guess...take all the pressure off yourself and place it on Him...and His mighty power.

Ok. Now. There is another thing I noticed in Peters story... that I believe is significant regarding deliverance.

Peter was sleeping

He was sound asleep. In fact..Peter was so sound asleep...it took an angel from Heaven to come down and wake him up. He was out like a light! Peter is bound with chains, heavily guarded, probably awaiting execution. His close friend James had just been put to death by Herod. Yet, here he is, asleep! He should be freaking out, right? Fear should be gripping him. I don't know about you.. but if I had a trial the next morning...and was facing death.. I wouldn't be sleeping like a baby. And on top of that...Peter was wedged and chained between two dudes. Listen. I'm not sleeping a wink. But it doesn't seem Peter was worried or stressed....or fearful...at all. Reminds me of this from David.

Psalm 34:4 NLT 4 I prayed to the Lord, and he answered me. He freed me from *all* my fears.

Glorious! Now...what may have helped Peter was the fact that...He had been in chains and in prison at least once before.. in Acts 5..for preaching the gospel, and God had miraculously delivered him then. Maybe he remembered that

moment...and believed that...if God did it once...He will do it again. We tend to have a long term memory regarding people mistakes.. and a short term memory regarding Gods miracles. And maybe Peter really believed that God was still in control..and there was nothing he could do about the situation anyway..so he simply went to sleep.

I don't know but.. Peter's predicament makes me think of so many other similar stories. Daniel in the lions den. David... facing a giant. Shadrach, Meshach and Abedego,..thrown into that fiery furnace. Paul in prison. Yet all of them...even though surrounded by trouble...did not let trouble...trouble them. Peter was in prison, but the prison wasn't in him. He was asleep. Daniel was at peace. Those three boys had hope. Paul in prison...was able to praise God. Jesus..in the middle of a storm...was sleeping.

He was lying down..resting..asleep.. in the boat when the storm came. You may of heard that story. Storm comes. Very capable fishermen become so fearful..that they go down into the boat and wake Jesus up. Jesus goes up...and rebukes the storm...and it stops. But I believe...initially..Jesus wasn't desiring to teach them to rebuke a storm. He was teaching them how to rest in the middle of it. Because. What if...they all followed Jesus' lead. Just snuggled up together down in that boat. And fell asleep. Kinda like Peter between those two burly men. Would the boat have arrived to it's destination...if they all just rested together? Yes! I think so.

See. I believe. Your personal deliverance isn't going to come by rebuking the storm.. but resting with Jesus in it.

That's why David wrote in Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. Or delivers my soul..In the middle of the valley of the

shadow of death... as I lie down. As I sleep. Peter was asleep...when he was delivered. Like I said last week..I believe...deliverance comes when we rest..even stand still... in the presence of the Lord. Not when we are rushed..or hurried..or worried...or anxious. Your deliverance is found in standing.. not striving.

Psalms 4:8 NLT“In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.”

Listen. Jesus makes everything easier and lighter and safer and more restful. Come to Me..He says...and I will give you rest. In the presence of Jesus...things just flow...when you don't even know it. See. When the angel slapped Peter on the side..he just got up and went. He obeyed without really knowing what was happening. Iron doors...just *automatically* opened. It was afterward...he would come to his senses. I guess if I ever come to the place where I have to have it all figured out...I might be in trouble. Because God doesn't ask you and I to figure it all out. He just says trust me. Try to have some fun. Jellyfish.

Your deliverance. Your breakthrough. Your healing will flow from that place. The place of trust. The place of rest. Of peace. When your anxious soul.. is finally sleeping. Hazel.

Now. Jesus *already* broke those chains. He already opened those iron gates. This is more about being able to find rest and receive the word...the truth..and just let those chains fall off. It's about letting the power of the Holy Spirit...demolish some strongholds...defeat some devils...and destroy some idols. Because even though Peter was sleeping...

God was working

He's always working. Especially in our messy situation. Listen. People can get it wrong. But God will make it right. He will always work it out and make it right.

And it's not hard for Jesus to do that. It just seemed like Jesus demonstrated His power in very easy and simple ways. With a word. With truth. With His breath. With His hand. With spit and mud. With His voice saying...stretch out your hand...or take up your mat and go. Maybe this is a moment of resting in His power..instead of rebuking the storm. Resting in what He has already accomplished on the cross. It is finished. My freedom has been paid for. My breakthrough is here.

You might be living in a painful situation...but God wants to heal the pain within you.

The angel woke Peter up...and simply *spoke*..“And the chains fell off *his* wrists.”

Peter was asleep...at rest..*when the angel* showed up. That was the secret? He was resting in God...instead of wrestling with worry. So the question is....even though there is trouble around you....is there trouble in you? Do you live with.. an anxious and worried heart? Let the Lord lead you out of any personal prison today and.. into some newfound freedom.

Emily comes up. See..I believe. God is more concerned with freeing the person before He fixes the problem. Deliverance doesn't mean the chains fall off of the situation first. It means the chains fall off of you first. Let God free you today. Let God break a few chains today. All it takes is a few words spoken from God.