



Empowering People to Change the World

**Freedom
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On this 4th of July weekend, we celebrate true American Independence: the right to self-governance and freedom from governmental overreach.

This is precisely what was gained last week in the overturning of Roe v. Wade:

- Freedom and protection for the defenseless
- The right for the individual governing bodies to practice true democracy

This is what our great country was founded upon and to which we desire to return. Yet, those of us who dare desire true freedom are considered radicals by so many.

This however, is not new. In researching Independence Day, I found:

- “When the initial battles in the Revolutionary War broke out in April 1775, few colonists desired complete independence from Great Britain, and those who did were considered radical.”

Why would it be considered radical to desire complete independence? Why wouldn't they want complete independence?

We must first ask ourselves, **why did they want independence?**

- The government was **overstepping**.
- They were raising taxes on the colonists to pay for the war against the French and the Indians.

Initially, this does not sound so bad. The government had just fought this war on their behalf, so the colonists should **have some skin in the game**. But that wasn't what the king was shooting for; he wanted **complete** control.

Just as God warned the Israelites when they asked for a king, a king would rule over them like a tyrant with **complete** control over their lives.

Yet some of the original colonists, much like the Israelites, were okay with the king having complete control over their lives. Why? **A false sense of security.**

- Like, “I know he’ll probably become a power-hungry maniac, but at least I’ll have a sense of safety and belonging.”

And for so many of us, we **entrust our security** and comfort to things **far less than the Lord**, things that imprison us and destroy the freedom God desires for us.

God has had me on **a journey lately of discovering** things that hold me captive and keep me from His freedom. And the number one thing in my life that keeps me prisoner is what? Well, it’s been **different things at different** times. Some of them I have graduated from and conquered by the grace of God, but the one that has lingered the longest is worrying about finances.

I grew up in a family of 10. We didn’t have much money; my response was to become a **money hoarder**. I would store it up as much as possible. Why? Once again, **false sense of security**: the wrong king with far too much power over my life.

If the bank account went up, my sense of security went up; if it went down, my security went down. The whole time, no matter what the bank account looked like, there has **always been a sense of worry** that we were going to go broke; total poverty mentality, constant worry, tension, angst, fear; **totally doubting God and trusting in money**. Very far from the freedom God intends for me and for you. Little honesty in church; **anybody else been there?**

This isn’t a sermon about money. It’s about freedom; freedom from the things that imprison us, **such as** money, addiction, fear, shame, worry, drugs, porn, anger... You name it, the enemy will use it against us. And hopefully, **the Holy Spirit is beginning to highlight** to you anything that is keeping you from true freedom.

Because we’re not here to just play church but to actually grow and conquer, let’s take a moment and **ask Him to reveal** to us what, if anything, is keeping us from total freedom in Christ.

God's been teaching me about true freedom in the book of **Acts, chapter 12**.

- This is the story of Peter sitting in prison.
- Why was he in prison? Because **the king wanted him to be**.
- An evil, ungodly king with far too much power, total overreach, does whatever he wants, reaches out and says to put that guy in prison.
- The point here is that **if** we let him, the enemy will have far too much power in **our** world and do whatever he wants with us.

Our country made a **great leap** in the right direction last week; but both in our country and in our personal lives, there is **still great work to be done**.

Acts 12:1

“Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.”

- Make no mistake about it, the enemy has stretched out his hand to harass you.
- He has come to **steal, kill, and destroy**.
- He **prowls about** like a roaring lion seeking those whom he can devour.

“But God!”

I love that God's Word says both that the enemy **prowls about** like a roaring lion seeking those whom he can devour; but it also says the **eyes of the Lord** go to a fro searching for those who are committed to Him and whom He can strengthen.

In **every situation**, you face on a day-to-day basis both the enemy and the Lord **watching you** to see how you will react.

This speaks to the saying that life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond.

- The **enemy is looking for you to pout**, get down on yourself, and give up, so that he can devour you.

- And the Lord is looking for you to **stand firm** in the Truth you know from His Word, to be **strengthened in the faithfulness** He has shown, and to **conquer this trial**.

Which will you choose?

Life is not a **pinball game with fate** where you just bounce off what comes at you and see where the results lead you.

No, quite the opposite. Life is a **series of tests**, and you choose how you respond to each test.

- Do you glorify the Lord or do you glorify the enemy?

Your choice will very much **so determine your future**.

- You see people who face **impossible** circumstances, such as, the loss of a child, sexual abuse, or cancer; and they stand up with great faith and glorify the Lord.
- Similarly, you see people who face fairly minor circumstances, and they go home and pout; or they let every ounce of **adversity determine their fate**. Like if they're on their way to do something and absolutely anything goes wrong, they give up and say, "Well, **I guess it just wasn't God's will** for me."
 - Coffee pot broke this morning; I guess it wasn't God's will for me to go to church.
 - Car broke down this week; I guess it just wasn't God's will for me to tithe.
- The problem with that mentality: if adversity makes your decisions for you then **adversity is your God**. And the enemy tallies another victory.

I **confess** to having been a whiner in the past and to letting adversity steer my decisions. But by the grace of God and the choice to walk in faith, we **grow and move from being whiners to being conquerors**.

There's no time for pouting, self-pity or asking why. **Let's be conquerors, not whiners**.

Acts 12:2-3

“Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also...”

This guy **is just having fun here**. No big deal; just kill one guy and imprison another; just playing puppets with the people doing whatever he wants; and “what are you going to do about it, I’ll do whatever I want, I’m king!”

And if we let him, satan will do the exact same thing. He’ll make a **mockery** of our lives and parade it for all the world to see. We’ve seen that plenty of times among Christians, haven’t we?

Acts 12:3-4

“Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread. So, when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him...”

A squad was comprised of **four soldiers**; so, **four squads were 16 soldiers** to guard one guy. And they would do a shift change every three hours in order to guarantee **maximum alertness**.

Why so many soldiers, Herod? **Chicken. What’s he scared of?** He’s scared of exactly what’s about to happen. And he has likely heard from the Jews he is trying to please. The story back in **Acts, chapter 5**, when the jealous Sadducees put the apostles in prison, and yet the next day there they were in the temple preaching the Gospel!

You see, the good news is that even **if there are multiple guards**, multiple things in your life keeping you imprisoned, **that is nothing to the Lord**. Is there anything too hard for our God? Do you believe it? I don’t care how **long your list is**, how many prison guards there are around you, or how long you have been in this place. This probably won’t be the first time He’s set you free, and it **definitely won’t be the last**.

Acts 12:5

“Thus Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer was fervently being made to God by the church for him.”

Notice this: **You need the church**; you need a group of bloodstained allies around you to be praying on your behalf.

So many of us have **fought our captors on our own for years to no avail**. And you will likely find no victory until you **get some soldiers on your side**.

I have my **go-to people** for when I am struggling with something. They're the type who will hear me out, let me vent for a few minutes, and then say, "alright **Kyle, time to stop whining** and wait in faith while the Lord delivers you again just like He has all the other times."

I want to **read you some of the text** that one of my friends from Chicago sent me while I was wrestling through my most recent money worry.

- He said, "God was always going to be faithful; He's proven that. So, there's no need to try to measure His faithfulness."
- He continued, "The kind of stuff we measure is:
 - How did you do in faithfulness and 'yes' to the Lord when the odds were against you?
 - Was your 'yes' still 'yes' to the Lord when it included your lack?
 - Was your gratefulness still aimed toward the Lord in moments of frustration?
 - Did you conquer fear of lack with a consistent 'yes' to the Lord?"

This is the **stuff we measure**; and when we have come to the other side of a trial and the Lord has delivered once again just as He always does, we look back; and if we pouted our way through the whole trial, we feel like a big sissy; but if we look back and can answer these types of questions with confidence, we see that the Lord is growing us in our faith.

I always think **if they were still writing Scripture today** and my life was being scribed, would the readers look at my character and say,

- "You bozo, why did you doubt God once again?"

Or would they say,

- "Man, Kyle stood in faith in the most impossible circumstances."

We look at the Israelites so often and think, “**You faithless bunch of whiners**, quit circling the same mountain. Learn the lesson and move on.” And guess what my buddy from Chicago texted me two weeks ago. He said, “Kyle quit circling the same mountain; get it through your thick skull. God is going to be faithful, just like always.”

You need friends like that.

One more story.

One of the guys here at the church is a plumber. He and I were on a basement buildout I’m doing. We were breaking up concrete together; and somehow in the midst of breaking up concrete and moving pipes, God got us into a conversation about the victory he had experienced over worrying about finances. He gave me a book; my wife and I are reading it together, and God’s using it to set us free.

He is the type of friend with which we need to surround ourselves.

- **You need the church**; you need bloodstained allies, if you ever want to get free.
- If **nobody around you knows about your greatest struggle**, then you are pretty much dead in the water.
- Get some close friends around you. **Let them in on your journey** and let them help you walk it out.

Acts 12:6

“Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and guards before the door were watching the prison.”

The guy is about to be brought out and executed the next day; and here he **is just snoozing away**.

There are a few things that Peter sleeping soundly in prison could indicate:

- First, Peter was a **quirky dude**. I imagine he was like the adult version of that kid you see at the playground who has **enough personality for four kids, and he’s kind of strange but also the fun one**. You know who I’m talking about? Who here was that kid? I

wasn't that kid. I was the slick hairdo kid trying to play it cool and checking out the girls. **Peter was definitely the quirky kid.**

- So, with that quirkiness, I have to imagine he was one of those guys who could just **fall asleep anywhere**. I'm talking about a person who can **fall asleep mid-sentence**, or mid-cigar. I've even seen guys stopped at **a red light asleep at the wheel**.

So maybe that was the case for Peter. He's the person who is like, **sweet prison, snore**.

But I think it was something more; **two more possibilities**. The first is our **end goal, and the second is more familiar** to a lot of us.

- The most likely answer is that Peter had **been truly set free in Christ**; and so, it didn't matter if he was in prison or on a mountain top, whether **sleeping in his own bed** or chained up in a prison between guards awaiting execution. It didn't matter if he was in **physical prison; he was spiritually free**.
 - This is the goal for each of us; that our **circumstances would have no bearing upon our freedom and victory**. Paul said to live is Christ and to die is gain. He was saying it **doesn't matter what you do to me; I win**. I pray that would become our true perspective.
- Peter walked with the Lord and **was on mission for Him**. So, he probably didn't view the prison as an adversary that was going to stop him. He probably just saw it as **yet another opportunity to glorify Christ, and a free place to sleep**. Sweet prison, snore. And may we all be **so on-mission** for Christ, so disinterested in our own comfort, that it doesn't matter if you lock us up. **We walk in eternal freedom**.

Unfortunately, for many of us, the third possible explanation is true, and that's that **perhaps Peter had gotten comfortable in prison**.

- I don't think it's true of Peter. But I think many of us get comfortable in our prison, again, because of a **false sense of security**.
- We've lived with our imprisonment for most of our lives, and so at this point it's just safer to stay there.

For me worrying about money, though uncomfortable, became **safer than letting go** and fully entrusting my finances to the Lord. So, I remained in that prison; so much so that I reasoned with it and just said **this is who I have always been. It's the personality God gave me, so I'll just learn how to live with it.**

Let me tell you, that is a lie from hell. **It's not who you are**; it's not who God designed you to be. Think about it, do you **really think God designed you to be addicted to the sin for which He sent Christ to die?** Of course not. It's NOT who you've always been; it's NOT who you'll always be. It's what the enemy led you into and from which the Lord is going to free you.

Whether your prison is one of money, shame, fear, worry, porn, drugs, sex, you name it, **that's not what God has for you.** It's not how He designed you. That's an excuse, and He wants to set you free. Do you believe it?

The Lord wants freedom for you, but He **cannot break you out of a prison you want to be in.**

Acts 12:7-8

"Now behold an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shone in the prison; and he struck Peter on the side and raised him up, saying, 'Arise quickly!' And his chains fell off of his hands. Then the angel said to him, 'Gird yourself and tie on your sandals'..."

If you want freedom from your prison, **you need to get up, put on your shoes, and start walking.** God will do the supernatural part of it, but you need to do the natural part.

This is a journey with the Lord. It's not one in which He is going to drag us to freedom against our will or without our doing our part.

Scripture **says as you have received Him, so walk in Him.** God does His part, but it is our job to walk with Him.

Acts 12:9

"So he went out and followed him, and did not know that what was done by the angel was real, but thought he was seeing a vision."

He thought he was dreaming; like, no way this can be possible.

I don't know about you, but for me, at times, it has **seemed absolutely impossible for the Lord to set me free**. Like, I must be dreaming; this is so engrained in me, there's no way He can change me. But even in those moments, you just follow the Lord and **watch Him make the impossible possible**.

Acts 12:11

“And when Peter had come to himself, he said, ‘Now I know for certain that the Lord has sent His angel, and has delivered me from the hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the Jewish people.’”

What were the hand of Herod and the expectation of the Jewish people?

- The hand of Herod was the **power of evil to do whatever it wanted to him**.
- The expectation of the Jewish people was for him to be executed.

Peter was just set free from prison. But **not by his captors, by the Lord**.

So, what does that mean? Most likely, as soon as Herod and the soldiers find out he's missing, they're going to come looking for him. So, what's the **most reasonable thing to do right now**? RUN! Run for your life, get out of town as quickly as possible and keep an eye out to make sure they don't find you.

But what does Peter do? **He goes to a local prayer gathering**. Totally normal.

Acts 12:12

“...when he considered this, he came to the house of Mary... where many were gathered together praying.”

The **real miracle here** is not that God broke him out of a physical prison; yes, that's great, but that's nothing to God. The real miracle here is that **Peter was spiritually free**. If he takes off running right now and is constantly watching over his shoulder to see who is trying to capture **him**, **then he's not free at all, is he?** He would be out of the physical prison but still very much so imprisoned to fear.

Peter is truly free. Why? Because **whom the Son sets free is... free** indeed, is truly free. Whom the son sets free is **free no matter what's happening in the physical realm.**

Only Christ can give us that type of freedom.

- **Your pastor** can't give you that kind of freedom. If you're living your relationship with the Lord **vicariously through your pastor**, you will never find true freedom.
- **Your parents** can't give you freedom. If you think you're free because your parents had **you dunked in a bowl of water and prayed over as a kid**, you don't know real freedom yet.
- **Paraphernalia can't set you free.** Those are the things you turn to for relief, be it money, coffee, porn, drugs, success, more stuff; they can't set you free.

Only the High Priest can bring you true freedom.

We have only one Savior. **The only One Who is worthy of universal power over our lives** is One Who is perfect and blameless and holy and can never get it wrong! He can never misuse His power because there is no wrong in Him. His very nature is holy and not just that, but holy, holy; and even that isn't enough to describe Him. He is yet holy, holy, holy.

Have you ever thought about the question, **"Is there anything God can't do?"** My daughter asks me that all the time.

The answer is yes; He can't make a rock so big He can't lift it. More importantly, **He can't do wrong.** There exists no capacity within Him to screw it up. It's simply not possible.

We've been singing the song, "There's Nothing That Our God Can't Do." Within the context of the song that is true, but the whole truth is that there's nothing that He can't do... **except mess up.** That would be the far less "singable" version.

Our God can't do wrong, and so He is the only One worthy and capable of handling such power over our lives.

In fact, **true freedom** in your own life actually means a **total surrender of all power to God**, that He would have complete “overreach” in your life. And that anything He says goes. No questions, no hesitation; simply immediate obedience.

The juxtaposition of becoming a **slave or prisoner of righteousness** as Romans 6:18 calls it.

- To be set free from slavery to sin and become slaves of righteousness.
- **To be totally surrendered to the Lord, and therefore, truly free.**

The Lord has that for you and wants to lead you there. That is true freedom.

Imagine having the One Who **designed the whole universe** calling the shots in your life. **No guess work, no skewed vision due to sin**; simply walking with the Lord, hearing, and following Him. **That's freedom if I've ever heard of it.**

Many of us came to Christ a long time ago, **but sin and temptation have crept in to imprison us**; and the Lord wants to free you from that bondage today.

Some of you have **never even had a taste of true freedom**. But Scripture says today is the day of salvation.

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart, but surrender and come to the Lord. Come find true, everlasting freedom; **a freedom that surpasses all physical circumstances and outlasts even time.**

Give God complete control in your life, and then no thing and no person will ever be able to imprison you.

He died for your freedom. It is for freedom that you have been set free. As you received Him, so walk in him.

Don't trade freedom in Christ for something less. Any king less than Christ is a captor. Amen?

I know of no other king who lays down His life for His subjects. All other kings want something **from** you. Our King wants freedom **for** you, and He laid down His life for you to have it.