

UNCHAINED FROM THE PAST

I recently watched a video called “What Elephants Can Teach Us About Human Freedom” produced by a man named Meir Kay. In the video, Professor Kay was counseling a young woman who was extremely discouraged as she struggled with the inability to produce a creative project. She had come to the conclusion that she was a failure. Professor Kay responded to her confession with the truth that **“failure is not fatal”** and shared the story of Thomas Edison who said as he struggled with creating the light bulb - **“I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.”** The truth is that failure is not who you are; failure is a part of the learning process.

What has that got to do with elephants, you may ask. When an elephant is little, the trainer ties a small rope around one leg. The baby elephant is not held by something big like a cage or strong like a chain; instead, he's held in place by a very small rope. Over time, he becomes conditioned to believe he cannot break away. Then when he is older and bigger, he can still be controlled by a small rope. The truth is that you are not limited by the events of your life up until now; you have been given the power to break free from the bondage that has held you in that old place.

Both of these examples demonstrate the power of the lie to hold us captive. What that young woman believed about herself – that she was a failure - became an insurmountable obstacle that kept her from accomplishing her goal. In the same way, the elephant was also bound by a lie – that the rope is more powerful than I am.

What are you bound by? What lie have you believed about yourself, about God or about other people that has kept you in chains? Is today the day Jesus is inviting you to leave the past behind and reach forward to what lies ahead? Are you willing to let go of the past so that Jesus can move you forward?

In January 2021, my husband of 53 years passed from this life on earth to a new life in heaven. As a person draws close to death, their desire is to hold on to life – their commitment to the responsibilities they have carried throughout their life on earth is very strong. In order to pass on, they have to let go. As Don's final days were coming to a close, we experienced his having to make that decision. He had to choose to leave the earth behind and accept the truth that his assignment on earth was finished. He had to reach forward to what waited for him in heaven – to be in the presence of God and experience his unlimited joy for all eternity.

After Don passed, I was told that I would experience grief, and that I could expect some deep valleys. Several months later, I considered the valleys I had passed through over those months. Up until then those valleys had not been the deep distress I had imagined in my mind. I asked the Lord if there were deeper valleys coming that I would have to walk through. This is what He said to me:

"Grief focuses on the past, on what you have lost, on what you can't do, on where you can't go. It is characterized by regret, by the "what if's" and the "if only's". But joy focuses on the present and the future and all the unlimited possibilities I have in store for you. AND.....it is your choice!"

Grief and regret, doubt, and the questions of what if and if only are all chains that can hinder your forward movement. Agreement with those things will alter your

brain in the same way the baby elephant was conditioned to be bound by a small rope.

I chose not to be bound by the chains of grief, regret and doubt. I chose not to be bound to the past or to the loneliness that circled around me and threatened my peace. Instead, I chose to focus on the joy that was set before me and all that God had in store for me. His Word says: ***the joy of the Lord is my strength (Nehemiah 8:10, NIV)***. His Words says: ***in His presence there is fullness of joy (Psalms 16:11, NIV)***.

Jesus made that choice too. Hebrews 12:2 tells us - ***that for the joy set before Him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)*** The cross with all its cruelty, pain, and indignity was the way He chose to go in order to break all the chains that held His children captive; so that we could enjoy an abundant life in Him while we are yet here on the earth as well as the glorious hope of being with Him in heaven.

Today we celebrate the final breaking of every chain of the past. ***“The old IS gone; and the new HAS come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV)*** The lie has been exposed (past tense) and the truth has triumphed (it is a done deal)! When Jesus rose from the grave, it was the final blow to the lie Satan had woven into the story of mankind from the moment he deceived Eve in the garden – the lie that if the man chose to do things his way, rather than doing things God’s way, he would not die; instead, he would become like God with unlimited knowledge. God had said that if they chose to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. But the father of lies called God a liar and offered an alternative – a lie - instead! Adam and Eve believed the lie, acted upon it, and received the

punishment their sin deserved. ***For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23, NIV)***

All through history, mankind has struggled because of the lies he has believed. The lie became a chain that held him captive to both spiritual and physical death.

In Romans 7:24 Paul asks this question: ***“So who has the power to rescue this miserable man from the unwelcome intruder of sin and death?”*** And in the next verse, he answers his own question. ***“I give all my thanks to God, for his mighty power has finally provided a way out through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One!” (TPT)***

In ***Romans 8:1-2*** Paul writes: ***“So now the case is closed. There remains no accusing voice of condemnation against those who are joined in life-union with Jesus, the Anointed One. For the “law” of the Spirit of life flowing through the anointing of Jesus has liberated us from the “law” of sin and death. For God achieved what the law was unable to accomplish because the law was limited by the weakness of human nature.”(TPT)***

I have often been amazed at how God introduces an opportunity and then when mankind makes the wrong choice and becomes bound by the consequences of his own sin, it does not prevent God from rescuing him and bringing everything back together in a more perfect condition. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to share some thoughts at a sunrise service that demonstrated this facet of God’s character. My presentation focused on the first person to know that Jesus was not in the tomb – the woman to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection. That woman was Mary Magdalene.

John 20:1-2: Very early Sunday morning, before sunrise, Mary Magdalene made her way to the tomb. And when she arrived she discovered that the stone that

sealed the entrance to the tomb was moved away! So she went running as fast as she could to go tell Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. She told them, "They've taken the Lord's body from the tomb, and we don't know where he is."(TPT)

Of all the people God could have chosen to discover the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the resurrection, a knowledge too wonderful to comprehend, He chose a woman. He chose a woman whose past had been anything but holy.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus broke the chains that held her captive when He cast out seven demons from Mary of Magdala and set her free to follow Him and love Him with her whole heart. Though she had once been a victim, God didn't let her past keep Him from selecting her to be the one who would tell His disciples that the tomb was empty. Her conclusion of the evidence she saw was limited by her human perspective at that moment. She was desperate to find Jesus' body so she could complete the final burial ritual for the One she loved, but she knew she could not do it alone. She would need help to find Jesus body and then she would need help to move the body to a safe place. She knew she had to get Peter and John to help her. They would know what to do.

We know that Peter and John ran to the tomb and that John stopped at the doorway and looked inside while Peter rushed in and found the empty grave clothes. Both men were puzzled by what they had seen, but they didn't hang around to get to the bottom of things. Instead, they both left the tomb and returned to their homes. Meanwhile...

John 20:11-18 (TPT): Mary arrived back at the tomb, broken and sobbing. She stooped to peer inside, and through her tears she saw two angels in dazzling white robes, sitting where Jesus' body had been laid – one at the head and one at the feet. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" they asked.

Mary answered, "They have taken away my Lord, and I don't know where they've laid him." Then she turned around to leave, and there was Jesus standing in front of her, but she didn't realize that it was him!

He said to her, "Dear woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Mary answered, thinking he was only the gardener, "Sir, if you have taken his body somewhere else, tell me, and I will go and..."

"Mary," Jesus interrupted her.

Perhaps blinded by tears and the fear she would not be able to find Him, she failed to recognize Jesus when He stood before her. His voice may have sounded familiar, but in her distress, she missed that clue. But then, He called her by name. Perhaps it had something to do with the way He spoke her name. Perhaps it was God's plan to reveal Himself to her at that moment. ***Turning to face him, she said, "Rabboni!" (Aramaic for "my teacher")***

Jesus cautioned her, "Mary, don't hold on to me now, for I haven't yet ascended to God, my Father. And he's not only my Father and God, but now he's your Father and your God! Now go to my brothers and tell them what I've told you, that I am ascending to my Father – and your Father, to my God – and your God!"

Then Mary Magdalene left to inform the disciples of her encounter with Jesus. “I have seen the Lord!” she told them. And she gave them His message.

How Mary must have rejoiced! Jesus was alive! All the questions about how, what, where, when and why would have to wait for answers because Jesus gave her an assignment. Now that she was free from her grief over losing Him, she needed to be about her Father’s business. She quickly obeyed his instructions, and had the privilege of delivering the triumphant message to Peter and John and the other disciples, “I have seen the Lord!”

As I meditated on this story, I was struck by the connection between Eve and Mary of Magdala, the contrast of their response to the love of God, and how their responses shaped their future destiny.

Eve had been deceived by satan which resulted in her being held captive by the lie that she would never be free of the shame, that her life would be a struggle filled with pain, sorrow, and finally, a grave. I suspect Eve’s perception of herself was that she was a victim, no longer free, no longer in charge, and filled with grief over what she had lost. I was watching Jesse Waters show on Fox the other night and he gave a definition of “victim” I had never heard before. He said a victim is life without free will.

Eve had begun her life in the presence of God, in perfect relationship with Him, with free will. But Eve chose to use her free will to follow her own desires. Eve’s choice separated her from God and resulted in her being under the curse of death. Not only that, but also her role as the woman was diminished. Prior to the fall, she had occupied a position equal to that of her husband in the hierarchy of God’s Kingdom. After the fall, she would be required to live under her husband’s

covering for her own protection and he was assigned the responsibility of governing her. Her free will would now be exercised only under her husband's watchful authority and with his approval.

I suspect Eve's focus was only on herself and the drastic change that had come into her life. I doubt she heard God's promise to her in the midst of her shame, that there would be a day in the future when she would be delivered from the curse of death; that there would be a day when she would be restored to that position of equal standing before God; that there would be a day when she would be free from the chains of the past.

Mary, in contrast, began her life without God, used and abused by men and tormented by demons, chained to a miserable existence of just trying to get through the next episode while everything in her – her thoughts and feelings cried out for deliverance and for someone to truly love her. But there was no deliverance and there was no one who would love her. I wonder how old Mary was, how much of her life had been spent imprisoned by her past, when she first experienced the unconditional love of God extended to her through Jesus. All the past was gone in an instant and she made the choice to follow Jesus – to move forward in this new life of love and peace and security. Mary's choice was to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus, and leave her past life behind. As a result, we read the stories of her transformed life - a life lived in joyful appreciation of what God had done for her.

In the beginning, Mary Magdalene had been chained to the lie that she was unworthy of love because men did not take the time to know her, they just used her for their own pleasure and then threw her away. They didn't even know her

name. But Jesus knew her name. Isaiah 43:1 - ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine!” (NIV)*** John 10:27 - ***“My own sheep will hear my voice and I know each one, and they will follow me.” (TPT)*** The Greek word translated “know” in this verse is *ginōskō* (ghin-ocē’-ko)– which means “to know experientially especially through *personal experience*” (Strong’s 1097)

Jesus knew both Eve and Mary experientially from before the foundations of the earth were laid, and He chose to offer Himself as the one, complete and perfect sacrifice that would purchase their freedom. Because God chose to reveal the reality of the resurrection to Mary first - a woman rather than to the disciples, I like to think that was God’s way of going all the way back in history to the moment when Eve lost the glory she had in the beginning so that He could reconcile her to that position of equality He had given her before the fall. I see in that God’s special love for the woman and all her children, and it’s like God was saying, “I have redeemed all those who sinned all the way back to Adam and I am restoring all that was lost.”

Both Eve and Mary Magdalene once lived under the curse of the law which condemned their sin. That was the purpose of the Law – that we would know what sin is. The curse of the law was that it carried a penalty for transgressions and the penalty was death. Both women were freed from the curse of the law when ***“the seed of the woman crushed the head of the serpent”*** (Genesis 3:15) at the cross. The resurrection of Jesus Christ declared their victory over death was an absolute fact. How do we know this? In the 27th chapter of the gospel of Matthew, we read the following beginning with verse 50:

Jesus passionately cried out, took his last breath, and gave up his spirit. At that moment the veil in the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth shook violently, rocks were split apart, and graves were opened. Then many of the holy ones who had died were brought back to life and came out of their graves. And after Jesus' resurrection, they were plainly seen by many people walking in Jerusalem. (TPT)

When the veil in the Holy of Holies was torn in two from the top to the bottom, it signified that the Old Covenant God had made with the nation of Israel when He gave the Law to Moses was no longer in effect because all of its terms had been fulfilled through the sacrificial offering of Jesus on the cross. Both Eve and Mary Magdalene were victims under the Old Covenant, but they became victorious when the New Covenant was instituted through the shed blood and torn body of Jesus.

Through their stories we see what they were before Jesus came and who they became after Jesus completed His work. When He sat down at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms, their chains were broken - they were set free from the lie that had bound them. In Jesus, they both received their true identity – that they were worthy of the highest form of love – the ***agape*** love of God. Both of them were restored to their rightful inheritance – they had equal standing before God and they were co-heirs with Christ of all Christ possessed. And both of them were assured of their absolute destiny. That is what Jesus was emphasizing to Mary in John 20:17 when He said, ***“And he’s not only my Father and my God, but now he’s your Father and your God!”***

It is the Truth that separates and delivers us from the lie. They were set free by the Truth – ***that God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16, NIV)***

Bondage began with Eve, but it continues today - countless numbers of people who are bound by the chains of a lie they have believed. They believe they have no hope, no future, no value and no standing before God. They do not know that all that changed when Jesus rose from the grave. His resurrection was the evidence that the Old Covenant that had exposed what sin is, but could not effectively remove the sin and its guilt, had been replaced with a New Covenant – a covenant signed in the blood of Jesus and sealed by the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that every jot and tittle of the New Covenant would be accomplished by the Maker of the Covenant, God the Father. All mankind had to do was to choose to accept the terms of the New Covenant clearly stated in Romans 10:9 - ***“that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (NIV)***

The New Covenant was retroactive and covered all of mankind who had chosen to love God from the beginning all the way through the end of the age. That is how complete a work our Father did for us in eternity past, a work we witnessed taking place over the span of three earth days.

The Cross was where God dealt with our sin. The blood of the perfect sacrifice was shed for us. We are no longer bound by sin that we should continue to walk in it.

The Resurrection was the evidence that God accepted the sacrifice Jesus was. It was the power of His satisfaction that raised Jesus from the dead and sat Him

down at the right hand of the Father. The fact that Jesus is seated communicates that the work of propitiation was fully accomplished: the wages of sin is death – but the debt has been paid. ***Romans 6:4 – Sharing in his death by our baptism means that we were co-buried and entombed with him, so that when the Father’s glory raised Christ from the dead, we were also raised with him. We have been co-resurrected with him so that we could be empowered to walk in the freshness of new life. (TPT)*** Jesus was raised to newness of life and so have you been raised to newness of life.

The chains of your past were broken on that Resurrection Day over 2000 years ago. You are no longer hindered from stepping out into your true identity and living a life of fullness and freedom in Jesus Christ. In Galatians 5:1, Paul put it this way: ***“Let me be clear, the Anointed One has set us free – not partially, but completely and wonderfully free! We must always cherish this truth and stubbornly refuse to go back into the bondage of our past. (TPT)***

All that is required is for you to make an individual choice – to exercise your free will to accept what Jesus did for you.

Religion with its rules and regulations is not the freedom God intended for His church to enjoy while we are yet on this earth! Religion came into being with the Law, when people misunderstood the invitation to a personal relationship that God was extending under the Old Covenant. The religious leaders added stuff that was not part of God’s intention – stuff that makes you feel good about yourself if you complete the checklist of “good” deeds or feel bad about yourself if you can’t achieve the performance standard. Religion is a chain that has kept too many through the ages bound to a man-made philosophy of self-effort when God

intended for us to live in the freedom of His provision: an enclosure of relationship characterized by His open arms, tender heart, gentle voice, and truth. God's intention was that we would feel good within the personal relationship we have with Jesus because God is good and His goodness follows us all the days of our lives.

So why do so many in the church choose to settle for checking boxes when they could be absolutely and gloriously free to serve God motivated only by their gratitude for what He has done for them?

The church (say, "I am the church") is not an institution; the church is each one of us individually who make up the whole of the body of Christ. The church has been set free by the New Covenant which was signed, sealed and delivered at the Cross and confirmed by the Resurrection. We are free to walk in the fullness of life with no fear of death, we are free to walk in the truth no longer bound by the lie, and we are free to be holy as He is holy.

We are no longer victims of satan's schemes. Whenever I hear a well-meaning fellow Christian whine about how the enemy is after them, I ask them, "Do you not know who you are? You are the blood bought possession of God and you have been endowed with Divine authority to trample on the enemy and take his plunder away from him. At the moment of your conversion you received a level of authority in the Name of Jesus that is greater than the level of authority held by the entirety of the demonic realm combined. Why then, are you giving so much credit to your enemy? Why are you focused on what you are afraid he might do to you? What you focus on you give power to. Focus your thoughts on Jesus, not on the enemy, and give God glory regardless of what you are going through. Every

trial should be approached from the position you currently occupy – ***you are seated in Christ in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 2:6, NIV)*** – and you should be asking the Father this question, ‘What is this and how do you want me to respond?’”

This is an Isaiah 60 verse 1 moment for the church, ***“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.” (NIV)*** It’s about time that the church stops apologizing for the freedom we enjoy and begins to openly and unabashedly celebrate that freedom – not just on this one Sunday every year that we call Resurrection Sunday, but every moment of every day we live on this earth. It’s time for the church to throw off the chains of the past, and reach forward to what God has for us.

Free people - free people. We have been set free from the law of sin and death and we now operate in the power of the Law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ. Because we are free, we have been given the assignment to free those in our sphere of influence with the same chain breaker that freed us – the Truth of God’s Word.

God can use what once chained you to share the gospel with others. That is what He did with Paul and Silas. They were falsely accused, thrown into a dark, damp prison and chained to the prison walls, with no assurance they would ever see the light of day or be free again – but an angel of the Lord broke them out of prison. God will do the same thing for you. Consider what Paul and Silas were doing when the Angel showed up – they were singing and praising God in the midst of their difficult circumstances. Are you waiting for God to deliver you from your difficult circumstances BEFORE you will consider praising Him? By their choice to break

through the bondage by entering the Presence of God, they set an example for the other prisoners and for us. Can you do the same?

You have been released from the chains of your past to walk in newness of life. You have a choice: you can wallow in grief, regret, the what ifs, and the if onlys – OR – you can live in the powerful Presence of the Lord where there is joy unspeakable and full of glory, a joy that wells up from the inside of you and pours out into the lives of those around you.

Deuteronomy 30:19 (NIV) - See today, I have set before you life and death. Now choose life that you and your children may live.

It is time for the church to turn the tide of the battle, get rid of the defensive posture we have used in the past and go full bore on the offensive, operating in the authority we already have in Jesus, using the tools we have been given to bind the enemy, silence his voice, cancel his assignments, and send him to the other side of the blood line that covers us.

What are you bound by? Your chains have been shattered by the love of God demonstrated through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. They no longer have any hold on you.

Leave the past behind! In the same way you once considered yourself bound by the things of the past, choose this day to be bound together in love and service to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let the love of God break through and out of you.