

“MY LORD AND MY GOD”
Acts 5:27-32, Revelation 1:4-8, John 20:19-31
April 23 & 24, 2022

“One Easter, Dr. Gordon, the pastor of the little country church, brought up an old beat-up bird cage and sat it next to the pulpit. As he gave his sermon that Easter morning he held up the cage and said, ‘You might be wondering why this is here. As a matter of fact, that’s not the normal part of an Easter service, having a bird cage here. Let me tell you the story of it,’ he said.

“Several days ago I was noticing a little boy in tattered and torn blue jeans and a dirty T-shirt, with his cap off to the side, whistling, walking down an alley, and swinging this bird cage. Clinging to the bottom of the cage were little field sparrows he had caught. So I stopped him and asked, ‘Say, sonny, what do you have there?’ He said, ‘Oh, I’ve got some birds.’ ‘What are you gonna do with ‘em?’ I asked. ‘Oh, mess around with them, tease ‘em, something like that.’ ‘Well,’ I asked, ‘when you get tired of ‘em, what are you gonna do?’ He thought a moment and said, ‘Well, I got a couple of cats at home and they like birds. I think I’ll just let them have at ‘em.’

“Dr. Gordon said his heart went out to the little birds so he made the little lad an offer. ‘How much do you want for the birds?’ Surprised, the boy said, ‘Mister, these birds ain’t no good.’ ‘Well,’ Dr. Gordon said, ‘regardless, how much would you like for ‘em?’ The little fellow said, ‘How about two bucks?’ He said, ‘Sold.’ So he reached in his pocket and peeled off two dollar bills. The little boy shoved the bird cage forward pleased with his stroke of good fortune.

“When the boy left, the pastor walked a good distance away, lifted open the little cage door and said, ‘Shoo, shoo.’ And he shoved them out of the door and they flew away, free.’

“The empty bird cage was the perfect illustration of how Satan had the human race trapped and frightened. **Jesus Christ not only paid the price for our freedom; He has set us free.**”¹ Jesus has broken the cages that prevent us from experiencing real life. He has provided a way for us to become set free from addiction, freed from unhealthy lifestyles, free from worry or fear, free from the eternal

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 171)

death that comes from our sinfulness. Jesus has done the work needed to free us from Satan's schemes that hold us captive and torment us.

Sadly, however, many of us quickly fly right back to our old ways of worldly living, being captured once more by Satan to continue to be tortured and abused. Though Jesus has paid the price for our freedom, though He died and rose again to set us free from sin and Satan's snare, we fail to really believe that our freedom is available, so we go right back to what we were doing. We do not claim the freedom that Jesus provides because we are so engrossed in our own ways, in the delights and pleasures of this world. Some even doubt that Jesus' resurrection is really true. So we find ourselves back inside the old beat up cage of Satan's dungeon, beaten up, abused, and addicted by all of His lies.

But when we come to finally realize what the freedom of Jesus looks like, when we finally accept Jesus as our Savior Who has purchased us from death, we come to realize the tremendous power that is available to us. **We are set free from the deceitful ways of Satan, and our sins are paid in full, to give us brand new life through Jesus Christ.** But it demands that we believe in Jesus, claim Him as our Savior, and then follow His ways every day of our lives.

I invite you to listen to the change in attitude we must have once we encounter the risen Lord for our own. This is John 20:19-31. (READ John 20:19-31)

Thomas had gotten so wrapped up in the thinking of the world that he refused to believe the other disciples and eye witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. Regardless what the others told him of the wonderful experience they had had with Jesus, Thomas could not let go of what he thought was reality - death meant really being dead, forever and ever. He needed the first person experience with Jesus in order for him to put his faith in the risen Christ. Until he had that experience, he would not let himself dare to hope that Jesus was really alive. The eternal Christ Jesus, once more inhabiting human flesh after He had once been killed, was just too much for Thomas to grasp, or even trust.

Yet **Jesus did not want Thomas to be lost in the world of uncertainty**, so the week after He had shown up in the locked room with the other followers, Jesus suddenly appeared once more with

them. Notice that the door of the house was still locked. They still hadn't gained the courage of the Holy Spirit, even after a week of knowing that Jesus was alive again. It took time for them to build their faith.

Jesus, however, focuses in on Thomas, making sure that he had all the physical proof he needed to believe. Only then did Thomas respond, "*My Lord and my God!*" (John 20:28). No more doubts. No more reservations. No more hesitation. No more fear! Thomas believed! And I'll bet the others there were smiling great big, saying to themselves, "Told you so, Thomas!" At that moment there was once more great joy in the room because now everyone there believed. **They had all seen the risen Lord, and they would never be convinced otherwise.** Each person there would go to their own grave knowing for sure, 100% convinced, that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, risen from the dead for the salvation of all humanity. They were eye witnesses to it, and they would never deny it.

So then we skip over to Acts 5 and see how different the disciples were after they received the Holy Spirit into their lives. Where once they were fearful, hiding out behind locked doors, now they were brazenly bold in their faith, wanting everyone at the Temple to know that Jesus was the Messiah. The Apostles were performing "*many miraculous signs and wonders among the people*" to the point that "*people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed*" (Acts 5:12, 15-16).

Because they believed in Jesus Christ as the risen Savior, these men were doing just as Jesus had done, with all the authority of Jesus over sicknesses, diseases, and even evil spirits. It was very evident that these men had been with Jesus, because everything they did focused on following His ways and His teachings. No longer shy, fearful, or unable to do anything, these men were working marvelously in their city to prove that Jesus Christ was the risen Messiah, the Lord and Savior of the world.

And it got the attention of the high priest and the members of the Sadducees. So much so, in fact, that the Temple leaders "*were filled with jealousy,*" and arrested the apostles and put them into the

public jail (Acts 5:18). The apostles were doing so much more than any of the leaders of the Temple that they were drawing all people through the Jewish tradition and leading them to follow Jesus. They were convincing so many people that Jesus had indeed risen and was and is the Messiah, that daily, *“more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number”* (Acts 5:14).

The chief priest and the Sadducees thought they had to put a stop to this or they’d be out of a job.

All the people would be converted to be followers of Jesus and no longer need them to teach them the ways of the Jewish traditions.

These Temple leaders were so stuck on the worldly rituals of their religion that they failed to see that Jesus had fulfilled all of the prophecies for the Messiah, and had performed the one important sacrifice that was needed to forgive sin - the perfect sacrifice. All they needed to do was to believe in their own Scriptures and trust that Jesus was God’s Son, just as He said He was, and they would have been among the growing group of believers, set free from their cage of personal ambition, religiosity, and pride. With all of their life’s training in the Hebrew Scriptures, think of what their witness would have been, confirming Jesus as God’s Messiah for the Salvation of the world. They could certainly have contributed to others coming to know about Jesus as the fulfillment of their own Scriptures all over the world and would have received God’s gift of eternal life. God could have sent them out like Paul to all the tribes of Israel so that they all could believe in God’s Messiah - Jesus. **Judaism would then have been the instrument that God would have used to convert the whole world.** That was the plan.

But rather than find real freedom in Jesus, rather than humble themselves to repent of what they had done to Jesus, rather than finally accepting Jesus as the risen Christ, these Temple leaders doubled down in their efforts to eliminate the competition. They were ready, not only to imprison the followers of Jesus, but to put them to death in order to stop the spread of the Truth of Jesus. These men hardened their hearts, refused to accept their own Scriptural basis for the Messiah, and outright lied to the people to keep them from leaving the Jewish religion in favor of following this new Messiah and trusting Jesus as the promised Savior.

But God had other plans. Since the Jewish leaders would not accept Jesus as the Messiah of God, then God would use those who followed Jesus to be the ones to proclaim to the world that God had brought to us His Salvation through His own Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Because they had seen Him alive again, these followers, and all who would believe because of their witness, even without seeing Jesus, began to turn the world up-side-down with the Good News of God in Jesus Christ. That's what the apostles were doing when they were arrested by the captain of the Temple guard and his officers. **They were sharing this Good News of the salvation of the world through Jesus.** And that night, having been released from the jail by an angel of the Lord, they did as they were told, *“Go, stand in the temple courts, and tell the people the full message of this new life”* (Acts 5:20).

So the chief priest and the other leaders of the Temple commanded them to stop teaching in Jesus' name. *“You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood”* (Acts 5:28). How quickly they forgot the words they had said to the Roman governor, Pilate, at Jesus' "trial" before him. When Pilate consented to allow them to crucify Jesus, *“he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man's blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’ All the people answered, ‘Let his blood be on us and on our children!’”* (Matthew 27:24-25). *“The chief priests and the elders [of the Temple had] persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed”* (Matt. 27:20), so they were indeed guilty of Jesus' blood. But they thought that by denying that fact, that they were innocent of His crucifixion.

So, thinking themselves innocent, you can understand the violent response they had toward Peter's words, *“We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead - whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him to His own right hand as Prince and Savior that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him”* (Acts 5:29-32).

The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit of God, so they were trying to convince the Temple leaders of Jesus' resurrection, but they would hear nothing of it. At this point they flat out

denied that Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah. Instead of considering this information, their response was to seek to kill the apostles on the spot. But being convinced by a Pharisee named Gamaliel not to do that, the apostles were whipped and given orders once more to stop teaching in Jesus' Name.

But thanks be to God, the apostles never stopped teaching about Jesus, and now, even we are beneficiaries of God's grace through our own faith in Jesus Christ. **And it all starts as we give our lives over to Jesus with the same words of Thomas, "My Lord and My God" (John 20:28).** Our new life begins as we recognize the work that Jesus has done for us, that He died on the cross for the payment of our sins, and that He rose from the dead, victorious over our final enemy, providing us with eternal life when we trust in Him and live for Him.

And that is the assurance that we hear from the Apostle John in the very first chapter of Revelation. John boldly proclaims, "...*from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father - to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen*" (Revelation 1:5-6).

Almost 60 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, John is still passionate about telling others about the need to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit's fire in him still worked to help others come to faith in Jesus. Even when he was exiled on the island of Patmos, John still lived for Jesus, and God used him to warn the seven major churches to continue in their faith in Jesus.

You see, **there are dire consequences for us starting out our Christian life strong, only to become persuaded once again to incorporate the world's ways into our faith.** If we claim to be a follower of Jesus and yet try to merge the world with our faithful witness of Jesus, we only bring confusion to the church. And then as the church becomes confused, it is more likely to begin to believe the things of the world more than the things of God, thereby losing the true witness of Jesus Christ.

John tells us that Jesus "*has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father.*" **We're not to be a follower of Jesus to serve ourselves, to live any ole way that we deem fit, and to**

outright deny and discredit the power of God's Word by the way that we live and speak. We are to be faithful as believers in Jesus, remembering that it is He whom we serve, not other people. Christianity is not to be changed for our own convenience to fit into our culture, but that it changes the culture as we faithfully live it before others.

Tony Evans puts it this way. He says, "When a woman is pregnant, over time, it's going to show. Early on, it may not be clear to others. There will be things happening inside of her - changes hormonally, changes with regard to taste, and changes with regard to habits. But if the changes are happening inside, there're going to show up after a while outside of her, too.

"However, many of God's so-called children aren't pregnant with His love, because the changes aren't showing"² on the outside of their lives. They have not yet become convinced of Jesus' resurrection to the point of saying to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

You see, when we experience Jesus as the risen Lord in our lives, we CANNOT remain the same! Jesus changes everything about us - the way we believe, the way we think, the way we look at ourselves and others, and the way that we live in the midst of our society. If we're not showing Jesus Christ in the midst of our lives, we probably need to sincerely consider if we are truly a believer in Him as our Savior and Lord. If we are not outwardly showing love to our neighbor, or telling another about the love of Jesus, or teaching our children about the life of Jesus from the Bible, then are we really a follower of Jesus? If we are seeking to change the Bible to fit into our lifestyle, has God's Word really changed us?

We are to be the teachers of Jesus Christ to the world around us as priests of God, but if we're so worried about hurting others feelings or offending them with the Truth of Jesus, then are we really a follower of Jesus? Our faith needs to show in all that we say and do. It needs to show in what we believe and how we conduct our lives. Jesus needs to show up in every aspect of our lives, otherwise, can we really claim to be one of His disciples?

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans' Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 196, #581)

Jesus told His disciples in John 14:15, *“If you love Me, you will obey what I command.”* Then in just one chapter later, John 15:14, He says, *“You are my friends if you do what I command.”* We cannot say to Him, “My Lord and my God” and then live like the world. **Our life must demonstrate Jesus’ commands and teachings if we are really His friend who loves Him.** Our thoughts, our beliefs, our words and our actions must collaborate with one another, to show that we belong to Jesus, and Him alone.

I John 2:15-17 state it well, *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”* **We are to live in the world, but not of the world.** Our loyalty has to be exclusively to Jesus. No one else gives forgiveness of sins. No one else provides God’s grace. No one else grants us the Salvation that we desperately need for eternal life. Only Jesus Christ transforms our hearts and minds from the ways of this world to the ways of God. Only Jesus gives us real life.

So as we put our trust in Him, as we call out, “My Lord and my God,” let everything else of importance go, so that as you live, you live for Him. Then, the Holy Spirit will empower you to do wonderful and even miraculous things for the glory of God.

Let’s pray. Father, You have blessed us with Jesus as our risen Savior for the forgiveness of our souls. Yet the world that we live in continuously calls us to give up our faith in Him and follow the ways of our world. Oh, Lord, give us the courage to live what we believe, even to the point of standing before courts or tribunals or churches to boldly tell the truth of Jesus Christ. Let our faith be so strong in Jesus that we are able to accomplish all that He did, and even more, just as He promised. Give us the willingness to live as witnesses among those around us of the great love of Jesus, who willingly laid down His own life so that we could have life through Him. Don’t let Satan deceive us into thinking that we can say we are a follower of Jesus and then live according to the ways of the world. Give us a firm conviction that He is Lord, and that we are His servants, bringing honor and glory to You. Guide our hearts and minds according to Your Holy Spirit so that we might live for You, in Jesus’ Name we pray. AMEN.