

Go Forth • Isaiah 48:20-21

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Houdini*

1. Harry Houdini, the famed escape artist from some years back, issued a challenge wherever he went.
2. He could be locked in any jail cell in the country, he claimed, and set himself free in short order.
3. Always he kept his promise, but one time something went wrong.
4. Houdini entered the jail in his street clothes; the heavy, metal doors clanged shut behind him.
5. Then he took from his belt a concealed piece of metal.
6. He set to work immediately, but something seemed to be unusual about this lock.
7. For thirty minutes he worked and got nowhere.
8. An hour passed, two hours, and still he had not opened the door.
9. By now he was bathed in sweat and panting in exasperation, but he still could not pick the lock.
10. Finally, Houdini collapsed in frustration and failure against the door he could not unlock.
11. But when he fell against the door, it swung open! It had never been locked at all!
12. In his mind it was locked, and that was all it took to keep him from opening the door and walking out of the jail cell.

B. *Freedom*

1. At the inauguration of His public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus said that He had come to set the captives free
2. The Christian life is a life of freedom
3. How unfortunate it is that so many believers remain in bondage when Christ has opened the prison door

II. TEXT

A. *Set Up*

- 17 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.
- 18 Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, And your righteousness like the waves of the sea.
- 19 Your descendants also would have been like the sand, And the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off Nor destroyed from before Me."
- 20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His

servant Jacob!"

21 And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

1. All of Chapter 48 is the message of God through the prophet Isaiah to a group of people who would live over a 150 years later
2. These are words spoken to the Jewish captives in Babylon
3. For those of you who are new to the bible and to our study in Isaiah, let me very briefly set the scene for what we are looking at here
4. The people of Israel were living safely in their land
 - a. but despite the tremendous blessings God poured out on them, they turned away from Him to worship idols
 - b. God warned them that they must return to Him, and if they wouldn't, then they would be judged
 - c. they rejected this warning, and so the mighty Babylonians came and conquered them
 - 1) destroying their cities, including Jerusalem, their capital
 - 2) and then deporting virtually the entire population to Babylon
 - d. after 70 long years of captivity, the Persians came and conquered Babylon, setting the Jews free to return to their land and rebuild their devastated nation
5. In the chapters prior to this, God was telling the people that it was He who had raised up and favored the Persians in their victory over Babylon
6. He did all of this to deliver them from their bondage, and now it was time for them to return
7. And though the doors to their prison had swung wide open, the majority were reluctant to leave

B. Vs. 17-19

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1. Isaiah looks back at their history here
2. The whole reason they had experienced judgment and loss in the first place was because they had rejected God's leading
3. If they had only followed Him, listened to His voice, done what He said, they would have known overflowing peace and wave after wave of goodness
4. They would have prospered and grown strong
5. But because of their selfish stubbornness and willful ways, they had been reduced to a mere handful, compared to their earlier numbers
6. The point is – don't repeat the same mistakes!!!
7. Learn from the past – and move forward – so he says . . .

C. Vs. 20-21

20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"

1. God had to command the people to go because there was a bunch who didn't want to
2. In fact, despite this command, the majority *stayed* in Babylon
3. The record of the returns in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah reveal that only a very small remnant of the people actually made the return
4. The majority opted to stay put
5. Now, it's understandable why they would
 - a. they had been living in Babylon for 70 years
 - b. they had settled down and built homes and families and businesses
 - c. in fact, it is thought by many historians that it was in Babylon that the Jews became highly successful as merchants and bankers
 - d. the point is, life had become pretty comfortable in Babylon
 - e. they were in bondage, yes – but the cage was gilt with silver and gold
 - f. and many preferred to remain in a pleasant bondage than to face the hardships and responsibilities of freedom
 - g. in talking to several Russians, I discovered that come of them were a bit unnerved at the prospect of the level of freedom we enjoy in this country
 - 1) for so many years they had known such tight control of their lives by the Communists,
 - 2) that the prospect of having to make all their own decisions and then face the consequences of those decisions was too scary
 - 3) they were afraid of what the reforms in Russia meant and wanted to retreat to the security of prior days
 - 4) in fact, there is a growing movement in Russia today to return to the days of Communism – because people do not know how to handle the freedom they've been given
6. God here warns those tempted to remain in Babylon that they will never see His miraculous intervention and blessing; look at v. 21 . . .

21 And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.

7. Sure the return from captivity in Babylon to freedom in Israel would be tough
8. Freedom would present new challenges
9. But as they left their gilded cages in the land of the Chaldees, and began the wilderness journey back to their homes, God would go with them and provide for them in miraculous ways
10. They would see His power demonstrated before their very eyes
11. The stories they had heard about how God provided water for their ancestors in the Exodus, they would see re-created – they would drink the very same water!
12. And once they were back in their land, God would strengthen them to rebuild
13. They would know His presence right beside them as they worked

D. For Us

1. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that the history of Israel was an abiding lesson to God's people in every age [\[1\]](#)
2. So while these words have as their primary focus the Jewish captives in Babylon, they speak to us as well
3. We may not be in forced captivity today, but we do live in the midst of a time and realm that is contrary to the Kingdom of God
4. And the great danger all of us face is that we might begin to define our lives and living by this world rather than the Kingdom
5. Jesus Christ has set us free from bondage to sin and death
 - a. He's delivered us *from* this present evil age and *into* the Kingdom of God
 - b. but how many have risen to "Go" there?
6. I wonder if what we find in these verses isn't indicative of the way it is with the people of God in *every* generation.
 - a. God has many, *many* people with whom He's entered into the covenant of salvation.
 - b. but of that total, only a *handful* actually press in to all that God has opened to them.
7. As we look back over history, we think of certain men and women who seem to have a special power, whose lives made a difference far and above their peers.
 - a. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Deborah,
 - b. David, Jonathan, Elijah, Elisha,
 - c. Ezra, Nehemiah
 - d. in the NT, we think of men like, Stephen, Paul, Apollos, John, Peter.
8. Now, the bible is clear, none of these were perfect people – far from it.
9. But they stood out from the rest because they were willing to push past the *mediocrity* that grips everyone else's life and go for it with God.
10. They took Him at His word, and without hesitation, decided to let God be God in their life and circumstances.
 - a. they didn't always do that perfectly
 - b. but they did do it consistently
 - c. and as a result, they effected the very course of history itself
11. Tell me: Is the God of King David or the Apostle Paul any less powerful today?
 - a. has His will changed?
 - b. is He not looking as much today for such people as He was in their day?
 - c. maybe even *more* He is looking because these days are so critical as we approach the return of Christ.

E. Two Bondages

1. What keeps the majority locked in mediocrity?
2. Why are there only a handful that press into the freedom God has opened wide to them?
3. I think it boils down to two things:
 - a. bondage to the status quo
 - b. bondage to sin
4. Let's consider each of these . . .

F. Bondage To The Status Quo

1. I 've talked with so many people over the years who sense God's call on their lives to complete surrender, but they're reluctant
 - a. they say that they're afraid if they were to give in,
 - b. God would then make them do something really wild,
 - c. like go as a missionary to Zimbabwe
 - d. and when they compare the *lifestyle* of a missionary in Africa with their cozy life here, they opt to play it safe --
 - e. they cling to the status quo
 - f. listen friend, if God calls you to be a missionary, then He will give you the *desire* along with the call
2. Don't let the bondage of comfort in a modern day Babylon keep you from moving into the place where you see the hand of God doing miraculous things in and through you
3. In his book, *Free As A Bird*, W. L. Barnes tells the story of how he put up a hummingbird feeder with four feeding stations.
 - a. almost immediately it became popular with the hummingbirds that live in the area.
 - b. two, three, or even four birds would feed at one time.
 - c. he refilled the feeder at least once a day.
 - d. then suddenly the usage decreased to almost nothing.
 - e. the feeder needed filling only about once a week.
 - f. the reason for the decreased usage soon became apparent.
 - g. a male bird had taken over the feeder as his property.
 - h. he was the only hummingbird who used the feeder because he chased all the other birds away.
 - i. he would feed and then sit in a nearby tree, rising to attack any bird that approached his feeder.
 - j. guard duty occupied his every waking hour.
 - k. the only time another bird got to use the feeder was when the self-appointed owner was chasing away an intruder.
 - l. by choosing to assume ownership of the feeder, that hummingbird was forfeiting his freedom.
 - m. he was no longer free to come and go as he wished.
 - n. he was tied to the work of guarding his feeder.
 - o. he had become possessed by his possession.
 - p. that bird wasn't in a metal cage – but he had caged himself by his own choice and the situation he himself had created.
4. How many of us are in bondage to our *possessions*?
 - a. or to the comfy *position* we've carved out for ourselves
 - b. how many of us are just like the majority of those who remained in Babylon simply because the status quo is familiar and we don't want to be troubled with the unknown?
5. But those who stay in Babylon never drink water from the rock
 - a. those who stay in bondage to the status quo will never see the mighty hand of God stretched out for them

- b. all they will ever see, is what they have seen!
- 6. Some of you have been sensing God calling you to a deeper walk with Him for some time
- 7. It's like the Spirit is calling you to rise and meet the Lord
 - a. to *go out* of where you're at right now
 - b. and *into* something *new*, something *different*
- 8. But the prospect of the *unknown* scares you – so you stay in more familiar territory
- 9. Even when that territory isn't really all that great
- 10. A spy was captured and then sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army.
 - a. this general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and walking through a big, black door.
 - b. as the moment for execution drew near, the spy was brought to the general, who asked the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?"
 - c. the spy hesitated for a long time- it was a difficult decision.
 - d. but in the end, he chose the firing squad.
 - e. moments later shots rang out confirming his execution.
 - f. the general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we gave him a choice."
 - g. the aide asked, "What lies beyond the big door?"
 - h. the general replied, "Freedom; though I've known only a few brave enough to take it."
- 11. And that leads us to the second bondage; the bondage to sin

G. Bondage To Sin

- 1. Some resist the call to freedom because they know it means having to eject some *sins* they've been holding on to that are getting in the way
- 2. And so they redefine freedom as bondage and bondage as freedom
 - a. they view obedience to God as a kind of slavery
 - b. while bondage to their sin they claim is freedom
- 3. A bird's proper domain is the air and it's free as long as it remains there.
- 4. Place a bird in the water and it has lost his liberty.
- 5. A fish is free in the water, but leave it in the air, and it perishes. It is out of its realm.
- 6. The proper domain, the right environment of the Christian is the will of God and he or she is free only when obedient to God's command.
- 7. This is as natural a realm for God's child as the water is for the fish, or the air for the bird.
- 8. But we come under bondage when we seek to live by the dictates and desires of this world.
- 9. God has redeemed you; Jesus has saved you
 - a. don't be content to stay in the place of bondage
 - b. God has opened wide the doors and calls you to go *out* of a lifestyle

- dictated by this world, or by lust
- c. and *into* the fullness of His promise
10. Slavery was abolished in Jamaica in 1838
- a. it was set to take effect on August 1
 - b. on the evening of the last day in July, a large group of former slaves gathered on the beach for a solemn, yet joyous, occasion.
 - c. a large mahogany coffin had been constructed and placed on the sand next to a huge hole in the sand.
 - d. all evening the soon-to-be-freed slaves placed symbols of their enslavement.
 - 1) there were chains, leg-irons, whips, padlocks, and other similar symbols of slavery.
 - e. a few minutes before midnight, the box was lowered into the hole
 - f. then, pushing the sand into the hole to cover the coffin, all joined their voices with one accord to sing praises to God
 - g. they were free from their slavery.
11. What an incredible picture of the freedom Christ purchased for us.
- a. the cross was the ransom price paid to set us free from slavery to sin
 - b. what we ought to do is what those slaves did
 - c. take something that is emblematic of *YOUR* slavery, and bury it
 - d. put it in the garbage can - purge it from your life
 - 1) is there old drug paraphernalia lying around you ought to get rid of?
 - 2) old videos, magazines, books, games, clothing, that you once used when a slave to sin?
 - 3) why do you still have it?
 - 4) didn't Jesus die to set you free from that stuff?
12. God is calling your to freedom!

III. CONCLUSION

A. Go!

1. Let's read v. 20 one more time . . .
- 20 Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"**
2. God had to tell the people to go because it was their natural inclination to stay!
 3. The world had clamped a tight lid over their lives so that they had dumbbed down their spiritual expectations
 4. God had to come to them with the jarring command – “GO – FLEE!”
 5. It's said that a flea can jump several feet
 - a. but if you put a flea in a jar and close the lid,
 - b. it won't take long before it will learn to jump only as high as the inside of the jar
 - c. hitting it's head a couple of times against the lid, it's learns to live within the limits of its environment
 - d. many Christians live like that;

- e. they live within the expectations and limitations of the world, of their family, of their friends
- f. they settle for mediocrity when God is calling them to something miraculous!
- g. get out of the jar, Christian! Flee worldly limitations
- h. God has unscrewed the jar of this world – He’s blown the lid off, and invited you to nothing less than freedom in Him that knows you rising to the incredible potential of all you were created to be

B. No More Mediocrity

1. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to follow the conventional crowd that comprises the bulk of the people of God.
2. I want to be one of the minority, one of the handful that takes God at His bare word and instead of coming up with all kinds of reasons and excuses why I can’t do this or that, just does it because God says “GO!”

[\[1\]](#) 1 Corinthian 10:6,11