

## Matthew 20:18

“*Unbind him and let him go.*” After Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus gave this command to those who were standing near. The poor man was all wrapped up in his burial cloths. What good would it have been to have been raised to life only to have had to go through life bound up like a mummy! The command to unbind him, therefore, was as necessary as the command which brought him out of the tomb.

You have been brought out of the tomb. At your baptism, Jesus gave the command and you, like Lazarus, were raised to life. As his sisters, Mary and Martha, were there to receive him with joy, so your family was present when you were raised through the life-giving waters, and they received you with much joy and celebration.

Now if sin and Satan would cooperate, that baptismal command is all we would need. But these great enemies never cease to attack us. Satan tempts us to return to the darkness of the tomb from which we came. Our flesh is weak, and so our sin daily wraps us up, binding us, preparing to carry us back into Satan’s domain. The command to unbind sinners like you and me is crucial, therefore, and necessary for our life and salvation.

Jesus gives this command to His church and to the pastors of His church; to those standing near to Him. “Unbind” He commands. “*Loose*” is the word He uses in our text. “*Forgive*” is the word He used on Easter evening. The meaning is the same. Jesus will not have you going through life bound up like a mummy. That is not the life to which He has called you.

And this is not the purpose for which He was sent. Rather, He says of Himself, “(I am) *to proclaim liberty to the captives...to release those who are oppressed...*” This is what He did. Lepers and all who were sick came to Jesus. He freed them from what was tightly binding them. Demoniacs who were bound by the demons that had wrapped them up, were unbound when Jesus spoke the word of command. Sinners like Zaccheus and the woman caught in adultery were loosed from their sins at Jesus’ word. Even death had to relinquish its tight grasp when Jesus spoke the word of command to it.

It is the nature of sin to grasp and bind. Satan brought sin into the world. He is the Serpent who showed himself to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Serpents attack with their mouths; with the poison in their fangs. But then it is their nature to wrap themselves around their victim; not loosely, so their victim can escape if it tries hard enough; tightly. The serpent wraps his coils tighter and tighter with each breath its victim takes until its victim can breathe no more.

This is how our great enemies: sin, death, and the devil, work against us. Sometimes this is easily seen, as with an addict who cannot free himself from the coils of drugs that have wrapped him tightly in their grasp. Oftentimes it is not so easily seen, as with anger, greed, lust, stubbornness, and pride. As these protrusions of sin wrap up their victim, the poor sinner may deny the truth that he is tightly bound and unable to free himself.

One thing about Lazarus is certain...he could not unbind himself, and the unbinding took place only at Jesus’ word of command. But we give ourselves more credit than Lazarus. We go through life with the false notion that we are stronger than our enemies. And so we play with temptation, not too concerned at all that it could suddenly strike and wrap us up so tightly that we would be held helpless in its death grip.

Most of us have an aversion to snakes. But it might be a good thing for us to watch a nature show now and then in which a snake strikes with lightning speed, and then quickly and proficiently wraps its coils around its helpless victim. That victim is us whether we care to admit it or not. Do you deny it? Then consider this... If you and I will not be able to free ourselves from the coils of death one day, why do we think we are able to free ourselves from the coils of sin today? They, sin and death, are equal in power. Yet somehow we go through life ignoring the coils of sin that have us bound up like mummies.

To those who ignore their sin, who think little of it, are unconcerned about it, such sinners are not to be released from their bonds. Jesus, rather, gives this command: *“Do not forgive them.”* “Bind them...(for) *whatever you bind on earth,*” He says, *“shall be bound in heaven.”*

Lazarus was not bound up in his burial cloths while he was alive. He was bound after he died. You do not bind the living but the dead. Those who are unrepentant are dead...spiritually dead. These are the ones who must be bound by the church; bound, not in anger, but in love; bound tightly to their sin of which they refuse to acknowledge and repent; bound so that the coils press them sorely, so that, like King David, they see their sin and repent. Watching the news about Hurricane Irma Friday, we saw the police binding the homeless in Florida with handcuffs and taking them away in their police cars. An act of hate? No. To save these homeless from the approaching disaster, they had to be bound.

Those who are unrepentant sinners are like these homeless. They refuse, nor are they able, to save themselves from the approaching disaster of Judgment Day. Unless they are bound by the church, they will be swept away when Christ returns in glory. A congregation that truly loves each and every member must be willing to work with the pastor and elders in binding those who are unrepentant in their midst, for this is a labor of love, as cruel as it may appear to be. Far better to be bound today for the purpose of repentance and mercy than to hear Jesus say on Judgment Day, *“Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness!”*

*“Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”* No one is bound too tightly that Jesus cannot unbind the coils and set the sinner free. If you are not bound by sin, then why are you here? This is where Jesus unbinds poor sinners. This is where Jesus gives the word of command, and you and I are set free.

Only Jesus can give this command, for He is the only one who became bound on the cross by your sin and mine. He became bound by the coils of Satan. He was bound up in burial cloths and placed into a tomb. But He burst open all these bonds. Not to show us how; to become the One who unbinds us. Jesus was bound on earth, and *whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven.* His Father in heaven declares you forgiven, unbound, loosed of your sin, for Jesus was bound in your place. He was bound hand and foot in the outer darkness of the cross. There is nothing, therefore, which can bind you that Jesus did not defeat for you. Every enemy of yours, no matter how strong, has been overcome by Jesus' death and resurrection.

You are baptized into that death and resurrection. You are free in Christ, therefore. The same command given for Lazarus is for you today. What is it that has you in its tight grasp? It cannot have you. You are redeemed by your Crucified and Risen Lord.

*“Unbind him and let him go,”* said Jesus to those standing next to Lazarus. They did, and Lazarus was free to live to the glory of God. You, too, my friend, are loosed of your sin. God has forgiven you. Jesus has set you free. Now you, unbound, can live each day to His glory and for the welfare of your neighbor. This is the life to which you have been called in your baptism. Amen.