

## BOUND FOR US

Luke 2:21

Perhaps you made a New Years resolution—no late night snacking, going on a long walk three times a week, or watching less TV. Though we live in a free society and in a free country, you have bound yourself to that resolution. Yet behind that is that we have bound ourselves to bad habits like eating too much and too much of the wrong kinds of food, being too lazy to exercise, and spending too much time in front of screens. No matter how we talk about freedom and independence, we have all bound ourselves.

We have bound ourselves to rules and regulations. Just ask anyone involved in a small business. Regulations may protect employees and the environment, but they become very costly in both time and funds to fulfill. This causes businesses to shrink, much less hold even.

We are bound to economics. We have to work too many hours to get just what we need to pay the bills. There isn't a lot of flexibility about getting a job elsewhere, so we are bound the job we have and the house we have a mortgage on. We are bound to high health care costs because of the expectations we have about modern medicine. This places a real burden on small businesses and drives jobs overseas.

We are bound to our health. Maybe we don't have to take an oxygen tank or walker along with us all the time like people who are ill, but when we get sick, we aren't ourselves. We have pills to take, sometimes keeping them in special holders to keep tracks of how many we take at set times of the day.

We are bound to our environment as the low thermometer readings keep us inside and alter our travel. We have to spend extra time scooping snow off driveways and scraping frost from windows. We walk in unnatural ways to avoid slipping on parking lot ice. We plan on more time to travel in case of bad weather.

We are bound by relationships. We are responsible for taking care of the aged. Parents, aunts, and uncles. We have to take care of our children. We bind ourselves to our husband or wife in marriage. That marriage affects the kind of job we have, where we live, and what we do in our free time. We have to deal with in-laws and rebellious teenagers. We are all bound to so much.

God told Abram to do something to bind himself and his family to God. He was told to take himself and all the males and circumcise them. This was to be done by all of Abram's descendants after him. At the eighth day of a boy's life, he was to be circumcised. That bound that boy to God by a special relationship called a covenant between God and Abram and all of Abram's family. Covenants were done in the ancient world to bind people to each others' promises. They always involved the shedding of blood. In the Hebrew of the Old Testament, a person does not "make." Literally a person "cuts" a covenant. Animals would be "cut" and sacrificed. In circumcision the boy was "cut" to "cut" the covenant between God and that boy. That boy was then bound to God and that covenant.

We aren't bound to that covenant. We don't have to worry about eating kosher foods or remembering the Passover, or resting on the Sabbath, or any of the other ceremonial laws of the Old Testament. But we are still bound to what we do in our lives. We decide to overeat. No one else forces us to do that. The temptations may be out there with all the food advertising, the amounts seen in grocery stores, and even what we see in our refrigerators. But still we are the ones who overeat. We become bound to the consequences of what we want or want to do. We bind ourselves to being too negative or focusing on other peoples' problems. We bind ourselves by lying to stay out of trouble or get what others have. We bind ourselves by the excuses we use to not help others. The result is that we are bound, bound to sin.

But Jesus is bound to nothing. He is God. He is truly independent. He doesn't need like you or I need. Yet the independent, totally unbound God bound Himself. As the law commanded, as God told Abraham, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and given the name Jesus. We celebrate that today, not because this is New Years, but because we are eight days after Jesus' birth on Christmas. And that bounding was made "official," it was "cut," as Jesus was first cut and bled for us.

CAT and MRI give us the ability to be a lot more accurate and precise about the what and where of an illness in the body, but it can be quite confining to have one done. Some people have to be anesthetized to

be able to go through it. Imagine being buried alive, with no room to move like the victim of an earthquake or someone trapped in an auto wreck before the “jaws of life” cuts you out.

That is just the slightest fraction of what Jesus went through to allow Himself to be bound for us. Every jot and detail of the Old Testament law bound Him. If you have mildew on anything, you have to take it to the priest to examine it. Only kosher food is allowed—no bacon and only seafood if it has scales on it. But far more than that, Jesus kept the Ten Commandments. He bound Himself to the life that you and I should live, but fail. And he bound Himself to the results of what we have done and failed to do. He bound Himself to our sin and all its consequences. He was bound, so that He could die with it on the cross. And we can walk away free.

Now we are free, free to be bound to God in a new way—by love. Why would we want to be bound to

anything? Doesn't that just destroy our freedom? It would if freedom meant being by ourselves. But as humans, freedom means living in loving relationships. Jesus bound our sins to Him so that we can be bound to God and each other. The difference is that we are bound in a new way, not by what we “have to do,” but what we “get to do.”

Jesus was cut to bond Himself to our responsibilities, but to also bond us to a new life. We get to be involved with the life He lived. We get to turn the other cheek and not insist on revenge. We get to return evil with good. We get to give without expecting in return, to be pious without it being a show to others. We get to stoop over and wash feet just as Jesus did. It is freedom when you are on the right plane, in the right class, receiving the right medication, doing the right thing. It is the right thing to be bound to Christ as He was bound for us.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman  
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