

EASTER SERIES: FREEDOM
PART 2: BREAKOUT

HAPPY EASTER, EVERYONE. HE IS RISEN: HE IS RISEN INDEED. In John 10:9-10 Jesus says this. **“I am the gate. Those who come in through Me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures.”**¹⁰ **The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”** Loved friends, I want to talk with you today about the most important door in your life you will ever choose to walk through—or to walk by it. This door has everything you need in life. Jesus says, **“I am the door (gate). Those who come through Me will be saved.”**

Doors and gates are metaphors for the purposes and opportunities God desires to see you experience in your life. In your life you will have many doors to choose from. Doors to happiness, or doors to sadness. Doors to success, or doors to failure. Doors to abundance and achievement, or doors to poverty and distractions. Doors to health, or doors to sickness. Doors to intimate relationships, or doors to loneliness and despair. All these doors are out there, and you need God’s wisdom, strength and power to consistently choose the right doors that God has created for you to walk through.

Your success in fulfilling God’s purpose for your life is largely determined by the doors you walk through and the

doors you walk past. The dilemma is we too often go in the wrong doors. We've all done that, and the problem is it can take you months, and sometimes even years, to get back on track. Some of these doors are opportunities, and others are traps or they are trap doors or they're detour doors. Most people miss the right doors God has for them for at least three reasons: **1) They don't recognize them; 2) They're not prepared for them; 3) They lack the courage to walk through them even if they do recognize them.** Our Easter series, which started last week, is called Freedom. Today I want to talk to you about how to Break Out of the different prisons you might find yourself into the Freedom that only the resurrected Jesus can give you. I put in your outline three examples of where God opened prison doors for people, and He wants to do that for you and me. Psalm 105:19-20 says, **"Until the time came to fulfil his dreams, the Lord tested Joseph's character. ²⁰Then Pharaoh sent for him and set him free; the ruler of the nation opened his prison door."** Notice God allowed him to stay in prison because He was testing his character. Did you know that often times the only way true character, godly character, can be developed in us is through difficulties? Notice in this case God used Pharaoh to get him out of prison. In Acts 5:19 God sent angels to release the apostles from prison. In Acts 16:26, the Lord chose to set Paul and Silas free from their prison by an earthquake. God has many different ways to set you free from whatever prison you're facing, but all the deliverances were made possible because of their faith in Jesus Christ who has conquered death, the grave and satan.

I don't know how many of us here today have spent time in prison, but I want to suggest we're all in prison either Spiritually, Emotionally, Relationally, Financially, Vocationally, Intellectually or Physically. You might even find yourself in one or more of these prisons today. I am so glad you're here. The biggest prisons in life are not physical prisons, they're mental prisons in your mind. A relationship can be a prison. You might have said, or you've said it recently, I feel trapped. I can't get out. I feel stuck. This is a relational prison. Debt can be a prison. I'm in so much debt I feel like I'm suffocating. A destructive habit can be a prison. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, food, anger, worry, or other addicting thoughts and behaviors. Expectations of others can be a prison. I've got to do what my dad, mom, husband, wife, or someone else wants me to do. You're not living the life God wants you to live; you're living your life for someone else. This is a prison. Traditions can be a prison. It holds you back and it confines you, and it doesn't let you go out into the wide-open spaces of life and the freedom that God wants you to have. Painful memories and traumatic events can be prisons for many of us. You're locked up in a mental prison and you're stuck in the prisons of grief, or failure or fatigue. Any negative emotion can be a prison. Depression can be a prison or discouragement, disappointment or despair. You can be in a prison of shame.

I. Jesus has released you from the different prisons that you experience in your life

This idea of freedom is a leading purpose that God has in mind for your life. Father God doesn't want you living an imprisoned and enslaved, captive life to anything or anyone—to guilt, or to resentment, grief, or to anything else. Jesus Christ wants you to live your life in the freedom that He has purchased on the cross for you. He wants you to Break Out into all the freedom you were created to live in. In Luke 4:18 Jesus quotes a leading Isaiah Messianic Prophecy which He was fulfilling through His life and ministry among them. **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free.”** Jesus wasn't just talking about people incarcerated. He's talking about the prison that you and I are in on a daily basis. Jesus says in John 8:31-32, 36, **“Jesus said to the people who believe in Him, ‘You are truly My disciples if you remain faithful to My teachings. ³²And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.... ³⁶So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free.’”** Here, Jesus is saying only He can set you free from your slavery to sin. If you are truly a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, there are two things that must happen. First, that you know the truth of Jesus' teachings, which means that you will order your life after His words and thoughts. Secondly, as you interact with Jesus and His truth you will truly be set free. D.A. Carson writes, **“For Jesus, then, the ultimate bondage is not enslavement to a political or economic system, but vicious slavery to moral failure, to rebellion against the God who has made us. The despotic master is not Caesar, but shameful self-**

centeredness, an evil and enslaving devotion to created things at the expense of worship of the Creator. This is why Jesus would not let Himself be reduced to the level of a merely political Messiah. It is not that His claims have no bearing on questions of social justice, but that the pursuit of social justice alone will always prove vain and ephemeral unless the deeper enslavement is recognized and handled. In Jesus' view, Caesar himself and any political leader is a slave in need of His salvation and freedom.” slide11

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

Because of Jesus' resurrection, God has and is making real freedom available to you. The more of Jesus you have in your life, the greater the freedom you will experience. Today, we have fake everything. Fake flavors, fake fur and fake news and fake people. God wants you to be free so you can receive His love and love others with His love and power.

For the next few minutes on this marvelous Easter morning (afternoon) I want to look at the fact that Jesus is the door to our freedom, but you might ask the question “The door to the freedom from what?” That's a great question. Let's look at Point II.

II. Three areas that Jesus' resurrection will help you break out of any prison you find yourself in

A. Break out from the prison of pretending

When we pretend to be someone we're not, we're being fake. It creates a deep sense of insecurity and inferiority. This is a leading prison that so many people are trapped in. You spend so much time, money, energy, and effort trying to fake it, trying to be someone that you're really not. It forces you into a lifestyle of being inauthentic and disingenuous. You're weighed down with worry that people might not like you if you're the real you. This creates enormous stress—especially with what is going on in our culture today. Many people are not willing to say what they really think and believe because they fear being criticized, ostracized and censored. One of the negative results of pretending in all the different areas of our lives is you begin to doubt who you really are. You're pressured into the prison of pretending. When you wear a mask, it becomes exhausting. Fear of being discovered for who you really are is draining. What causes us to fall into the trap of the prison of pretending?

There are two things that lead us down the paths into the prison of pretending: **1) People Pleasing.** Proverbs 29:25 says, **“Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety.”** What the Bible is saying is that when you fear human opinion, it is disabling. When you worry about what other people think and what they say about you, it can be extremely disabling. It is a form of a spiritual, emotional, relational, and mental disability, because it constricts what God wants to do in your life. People pleasing is living for the approval of others. You are always trying to be what other people want you to be. You strive to meet others' expectations, and you try to fulfill their purpose for

your life. God loves you, and everyone else has a plan for your life. You get pulled this way and that way. In our daily Bible reading on the 8th, God was rebuking Eli the head priest, and the issue was over trying to please his sons instead of being pleasing to God first. In 1 Samuel 2:29b God says to Eli, **“Why do you give your sons more honor than you give Me.”** It did not end well for Eli and his sons and family. The truth is you don’t need people’s approval to be happy and live a significant value-filled purposeful life. The dirty little secret about people pleasing is you are the only one that knows you’re in prison. When you’re people pleasing you’re driven to help other people, but the problem is you’re doing it out of fear, not out of love. You’re serving because you want them to like you. That’s not real service or love. That is people pleasing. What often looks like altruism on the outside is fear and self-centeredness, because I can’t stand to think of the fact that you might not like me, so I will do whatever it takes to get you to like me.

The 2nd path that leads to the prison of people pleasing is **perfectionism**. This is where I believe I must be perfect to be loved. If this is true then none of us will ever feel loved, because none of us are perfect. The problem is you know while you’re trying to pretend that you’re perfect, you know you’re not. This causes us distress and despair and puts us in a mental, spiritual and emotional prison. In Luke 16:15 CEV Jesus says, **“You are always making yourselves look good, but God sees what is in your heart. The things that most people think are important are worthless as far as God is concerned.”** So, what is the antidote? How do I walk through

the door to freedom over the pain and the prison of pretending? I want you to write this down: **Switch my focus to what God thinks.**

Because Jesus has risen from the dead, He has the power to set you free from the prison of pretending and pretense. Jesus is the only Person who knows you completely, loves you unconditionally, and knows exactly what you're created to be and do—and that's God. If you will choose to live for God instead of the approval of others—it sure simplifies life. You were created to live for the audience of One. Psalm 119:45 says, **“I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to Your commandments.”** Studies after study have shown that Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and all the other social platforms are increasing the level of suicide, the level of depression and increasing the level of dissatisfaction and unhappiness the more you use it. Why? Because you're comparing yourself to everyone else. God says never compare yourself to anyone else. It's like comparing submarines and tangerines. They sound alike, but they're not the same. There is no one like you. When you buy into the lie of pretending, people pleasing and perfectionism you place yourself in a prison that only the Risen Jesus can free you from. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, **“God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.**

B. Break out from the prison of unforgiveness

You need forgiveness in your life. You need to ask for it, you need to offer it, you need to accept it, and you need to give it to others, because when I hurt other people and I feel guilty, I need to ask for forgiveness. When other people hurt me, I get resentful and I need to offer forgiveness. If you don't, unforgiveness becomes a prison that keeps you stuck, and you can't go through the other doors in life that God wants you to go through. Please hear me, loved ones, you cannot walk through the other doors of opportunity that Jesus has for you until you experience the breakout He has for you from the prison of unforgiveness. Jesus teaches us in the Disciples' Prayer to pray, **"And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us...."**¹⁴ **If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you.**¹⁵ **But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins."** (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). **There are three keys to breaking out of your prison of unforgiveness.** God has already forgiven me, and He expects me to **1) Forgive others for the sins they commit against me.** You will never have to forgive anyone else more than God has already forgiven you. Jesus canceled the debt of your sin against you on His cross and through His resurrection. There is no record of it at all because Jesus destroyed it. There's no condemnation. My refusal to forgive others blocks me from receiving God forgiveness. That keeps me in the prison of unforgiveness, and then the evils of bitterness, resentment, anger, and hatred take over and stop

me from experiencing the freedom Jesus died for me to experience. You must forgive others. I must forgive because:

2) Resentment makes me miserable. Loved ones, resentment will ruin your life. Unforgiveness leads to depression, disappointment and despair. You were never created to hold grudges and seek revenge from those who have wronged you. True freedom is the ability to trust Jesus Christ with your life and leave the discipline to God. In Matthew 18:33-35, Jesus says this in His parable about the unforgiving servant, “**“Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?”** ³⁴**Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.** ³⁵**That is what My heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from the heart.”** In other words, Jesus says you keep yourself in the prison of unforgiveness when you refuse to forgive. It’s important to notice that Jesus says that forgiving others because He has forgiven you is a choice. Forgiveness is an act of your will. **3) You will need forgiveness in the future.** You and I will continue to sin against others and hurt them. We all will fail in life when it comes to loving people. Someone came to John Wesley, a famous Evangelist in the 18th century, and said, “I could never forgive that guy!” John said, “Well, then I hope you never sin. Because if you refuse to forgive, you’re burning the bridge that you have to talk across to experience eternal life with Jesus Christ.” Friends, the bottom line is you cannot receive what you’re unwilling to give to other people. In Matthew 6:15, Jesus says, “**But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.**” Jesus came

to break you out of the prison of unforgiveness, but you must be willing to accept His forgiveness for your sins and then extend that forgiveness to others. Colossians 3:13 says, **“Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”**

C. Break out from the prison of fear

Fear is a prison. You might call it worry, anxiety, stress, but it is still fear. Fear always locks you up in a prison. Over 2,000 years ago, on the first Easter, the Bible says, **“That evening, the disciples met behind locked doors out of fear of their religious leaders. Suddenly, Jesus stood among them! ‘Peace be with you.’”** John 20:19 Notice the phrase, **“...met behind locked doors out of fear”**. Fear always locks people out of your life. Who have you locked out of your life because of fear? “I will never let another man hurt me like that again.” “I will never let a woman hurt me like that again.” That is not a smart decision; that is a prison. 1 John 4:16, 18-19 says, **“We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love....¹⁸Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love.¹⁹We love each other because He loved us first.”** Jesus Christ died for you, so your sins would be forgiven, canceled and destroyed, so you can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and move from fear to faith in God’s love, purpose and plan for your life. This Easter, Jesus wants you to experience breaking

out of the prisons of pretending, unforgiveness and fear. If there are other prisons, you know you have been locked up in, He has come to free you from those prison experiences also. I have had the privilege of helping many people walk through the door of freedom. Jesus is that door. He wants to lead you through your Breakout of the prisons you're presently in. I want to pray a simple prayer for you. Will you pray along in your heart and mind with me? If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you can do so right now as you pray with me.

Let's pray. "Father, I'm tired of pretending. I'm tired of being a people pleaser. I'm tired of fear, stress and worry that comes from trying to be perfect when I know I'm not. Father, you know the secret fears in my life, the fear of being found out, the fear of being exposed, the fear that someone, if they really knew me, wouldn't like me. The fear of rejection. Father, you know my fears. Jesus, I bring the things that have imprisoned me to You. I've been ashamed of my regrets, resentments and worries. Father, I don't want to live that way anymore. I want to live a life of freedom. Today I choose to walk through the door of freedom, Your Son Jesus Christ. You said the door's open, and I'm going to walk through. Today, as much as I know how, I'm saying, 'Jesus Christ, I want to follow You. I ask You to come into my life and fill me with Your love. Drive all the fear out of my life. Heal the pain in my life. Fill me with a new sense of hope. I want to walk through the doors into the future that You have planned for me. I choose not to live in these prisons anymore. I'm asking You today, Jesus Christ, save me. I ask You to accept

me into Your family, and I humbly say this in Your name.
Amen.””