

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes
March 10, 2024
Rev. Dr. Andrew Keuer

Sermon Text for Lent 2: John 19:6-16

Title: “Shackles & Chains” / Series: “Things He Carried”

Core Observations of the Texts

1. Who did this? The shackling or binding of Jesus begins in John 18.12, and is commented upon in 18.24, 19.6, and 19.16. The opposite of binding is to free or release or unbind, and such a notion is mentioned in 18.39, 19.10 and 19.12. Thus, the shackles of Jesus flag a key theme of this section, namely entrapment and freedom. What shocks us is that all four Gospels clearly state that the religious leaders do this to Jesus. For example, Mark 15.1 says the chief priests, elders, scribes and whole council are responsible for this chaining of Jesus. As noted in the sermon, Johannes Tauler (see book reference below), a middle ages German mystic, wrote, “There are doctors [of the early church] who say, that they threw an exceeding heavy iron chain around His neck.” We’re not sure what physical items were used, but the Jewish leaders were responsible for this. However, we cannot follow Tauler in saying that the Jewish religion is to blame. For 19.11 and 19.40 (which uses “binding” language) signals to us that the disciples also were tempted in various ways to chain Jesus up and make Him predictable. John’s Gospel is declaring to us that all religion is tempted to entrap Jesus!

2. Does God need our help? Pilate’s response to the chaining of Jesus is to offer release: see John 19.10-12. But chapters 18-19 as a whole suggest quite clearly that Jesus is doing just fine, accomplishing all He intends even while shackled.

3. What does Jesus do? While he is shackled, Jesus is setting people free. First, his chains set free Barabbas, who was a notorious rebel and social menace. In all of us, there is a Barabbas, a part of our story or our lives that feels beyond forgiveness and cleansing. But Jesus can free you and start you over again, if you ask Him. Second, Jesus frees Pilate from the burden and weight of responsibility (John 19.10-12). Pilate is like the oldest sibling who always wants to carry on all the duties of a good son of the household. But in this instance, he could not follow Roman procedure and keep peace with the Jewish leaders. Jesus says the chains are not Pilate’s fault, and he lightens the moral load off his shoulders. Jesus wants to do the same for you. Third, Jesus frees the disciples, who wrapped Jesus in spiced grave clothes which symbolize their loving despair. Jesus will rise from the dead after three days, and restore their sense of meaning and hope. Jesus can do the same for you, if you ask Him.

Questions to Ponder

1. When were you most free? When in your life have you felt most free?

2. Our religion? How are we tempted to ‘put God in a box’ (hint: Don’t talk about how others do it, but about how you and your friends do it!).

3. What to ask God? Of the three characters in this story who needed freedom in different ways (Barabbas, Pilate, the disciples), which do you identify with most at this point in your life?

Notes: The book mentioned in the sermon is Johannes Tauler’s “Meditations on the Life of Christ” and can be easily found online.