

THE CRUCIAL HOURS¹ **“They Bound Him”**

In the name of Jesus, bound to be our Savior, dear fellow prisoners of hope:

“Then the company of soldiers, their commander, and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus and bound him.” (John 18:12 EHV²)

It’s handcuffs or zip ties in our time, but back in Jesus’ day, binding hands and feet with chains or ropes made life easier for everyone – except the prisoner. No unpleasant surprises. The prisoner would have to see it’s useless to run. No flying feet or fists of revenge on nasty captors. Ropes said to the prisoner, “You’re not in charge. You’re totally under our control.” That’s what the crowd in Gethsemane wanted to convey to Jesus when **They Bound Him**.

Maybe so, but this was no standard arrest. Binding Jesus was as foolish and ineffective as spaghetti on Samson, and absolutely unnecessary. This prisoner’s hands were not dangerous at all. In the Old Testament when someone did something with evil hands, they were said to be **“covered in blood.”** But Jesus’ hands? Only covered in good, never harming anyone. Jesus’ hands had always been used to help, to heal, to bless. Jesus’ hands had gently taken little children into his arms and graciously blessed them. Jesus’ hands healed the blind, the deaf, the mute, and the lame. Just minutes before this, Jesus had used his hands to heal the severed ear of a man named Malchus, part of the crowd that came to arrest Jesus. Yet our Lord used his hand to heal the ear of his enemy! (Luke 22:50f; John 18:10f)

Think about the psalm writer praising God: **“You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.”** (Psalm 145:16 NIV84) Why would you want to bind such gracious, gentle, giving, helping, healing hands? Yet don’t we kind of “bind his hands” when we fail to pray? Not asking for healing and deliverance, trying to handle things our own way, betrays weak hands and heart, our utter lack of faith. Should we be surprised if Jesus’ hands remain still, allowing us to find out the hard way the foolishness of self-reliance? James wrote, **“You do not have, because you do not ask God.”** (James 4:2 EHV)

Other times we bind him more forcefully. When we choose to go our own sinful way and want him to remain silent, we’re binding not only his hands and feet but especially his mouth, so his Word and commands are muffled by our rebellious nature. We’ll let him know when—or if—we’re interested in hearing from him. If we get ourselves stuck in big problems, maybe then we’ll ask him to bail us out. Otherwise, he needs to stand in the corner, bound and mute. It’s like trying to tie up a tiger with thread!

Seeing Jesus bound in the garden ought to be a bit frightening for the mob. Remember a previous attempt when Jesus was preaching in his hometown of Nazareth? Some fellow citizens decided they’d not bother binding him or trying him in a court of law. Instead they’d just throw him off a cliff to kill him. But Jesus **“walked right through the crowd and went on his way.”** (Luke 4:30 EHV)

Just moments before this, Jesus asked who they were looking for. Remember that? They answered, **“Jesus of Nazareth.”** When Jesus said, **“I am he,”** the crowd intending to step up and arrest him instead **“backed away and fell to the ground.”** (John 18:6 EHV) Jesus did not need to lift a finger to keep them from laying a finger on him, much less bind him hand and foot.

¹ Adapted from NPH 2022 Lent: *The Crucial Hours*, based on the book by William Lauterbach. (NPH: 1-800-662-6022)

² EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS.

Even if they somehow managed to bind him, nothing could hold Jesus against his will. Ropes, shackles, or chains on the Son of God would fall like spaghetti from your arms even if you're not the incredible Hulk. Or like Delilah binding Samson with fresh ropes which he **"snapped...off his arms as if they were threads."** (Judges 16:12 NIV84) It's such foolish, useless impossibility binding Jesus.

Yet **They Bound Him** – in one sense a false statement – or at least, incomplete. Everyone watching might see Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders taking control and binding Jesus. Yet a far more accurate description would say, "Jesus allowed them to bind him." Previous displays of his power proved they couldn't do so without his consent, but Jesus consented, in a sense binding himself.

Why? Because he had already previously bound himself to us. We were already bound by our sins so tightly that we had absolutely no hope of escape. Remember that classic Lenten hymn? "Enslaved by sin and bound in chains, Beneath its dreadful tyrant sway, And doomed to everlasting pains We wretched, guilty captives lay." (CW 102:1) We had no way of escape, no tools for freeing ourselves.

Jesus chose to bind himself to us when he "came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became fully human." (Nicene Creed) That's why this binding by the chief priests and Roman soldiers was totally unnecessary. Jesus wasn't going anywhere. He had already chosen **"to carry our sins in his body on the tree."** (1 Peter 2:24 EHV) That meant being bound, not just by Roman soldiers and Jewish leaders but bound by sin and death. Jesus allowed the mob to bind him so he could also be bound by God on the cross, suffering every last bit of just and righteous punishment for our sins.

Death's power to bind was unmatched. Some people were quickly bound by dying young. Some held it off, maybe cheated death by surviving accidents or illnesses, ancient plagues and pandemics. But they could only escape death's binding for a time until it bound them like everyone else. And always completely – no matter their memories and fears for those back home. Remember how the rich man in hell still wanted poor Lazarus to serve as his lackey to warn his five brothers about that place of torment? Abraham's answer soothes and warns all souls today with the one way to escape that eternal binding in death: **"They have Moses and the Prophets. Let them listen to them."** (Luke 16:29 EHV)

Jesus willingly placed himself in "death's strong bands" (CWH 439:1) so that we could celebrate His Easter victory in time and eternity. We'll keep building up to our Easter festival as Jesus strips away our guilt of sin and death in this Lenten season. Jesus died to **"free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."** (Hebrews 2:15) Life is so much sweeter when you know the grave could not bind Jesus, cannot bind us who trust in Jesus, and will someday fall away from our bodies bursting the bonds of death like Jesus. This sure and certain hope keeps us moving forward.

But it's not just for tomorrow. I got a little lesson in this from a fellow pastor at a conference who had just gotten off his cell phone with a troubled look on his face. "Everything okay?" I asked. He tried to smile as he answered with just one word, "Feelings." How true to life, isn't it? Pastors have them. Their families have them. And the more involved members surely have feelings. How would you be so involved and care so much if you weren't blessed with sensitive feelings? But it's one of those frustrations for us Christians. You feel bad because you made someone else feel bad, but that was the opposite of what you hoped and planned. You can't just blow it off like others who don't care.

Welcome to the heart of God. Here's where our baptism comes in. One of the main reasons I'm so glad Jesus allowed them to bind him was for the sake of our emotions too. It was right in front of the insensitive disciples: Judas betraying Jesus with a kiss. Peter soon to deny even knowing Jesus. All but one of the rest running to hide while Jesus died. Yet baptism binds us to God's faithful love. **"We were baptized into his death...our old self crucified with him, to make this sinful body powerless, so that we would not continue to serve sin."** (Romans 6) With Christ in our baptism we daily rise to newness of life. So when I've hurt someone's feelings, I need not despair. Jesus wants to renew my hope. Then I can pray along with Jesus to send his dear Holy Spirit of peace on their hurting hearts. Jesus frees us from the prison of our emotions for new life with God. Glory be to Jesus – **Bound!** Amen.