

1. We are going to continue with our word from the Lord for 2023. This is your year of Jubilee.
2. We have been declaring this is the year where God restores to you, and for you, and in you what he originally intended for your life.
3. Specifically, the word jubilee means liberty or freedom.
4. This is the year where the Lord restores in us the freedom that he has intended all along.
5. We are going to take a slight detour this morning. Rather than talking about another area of life where the Lord wants to bring restoration, we are going to talk today about what usually happens in our life when we begin to believe for, and walk toward, this restoration and freedom that the Lord gives.
6. I have been longing to share this message of encouragement for quite a while, and thankfully I get to today, because the reality is that the pathway to restoration and the pathway to freedom is rarely a smooth path.
7. It is rarely a straight path. It is rarely an easy path.
8. But there is a destination at the end of that path that is worth it.
9. In spite of the bumps and the curves and the strenuous hills we have to climb, the freedom and the restoration that awaits us is most definitely worth it.
10. Specifically, I want us to consider why this path toward restoration and freedom can be difficult.
11. Part of the reason it is not an easy path is because we have an enemy that will do everything in his power to block that path.
12. He will do everything in his power to hinder our progress and our forward movement toward God's desired destination. And he often does that by lying to us.
13. Another reason why the path is not an easy path is because as human beings, we have a dislike of pain. In fact, I will go so far as to say most of us hate pain.
14. And because we hate pain, when pain comes, we will do almost anything we can to get off the painful path and find an easier one.
15. But it is taking the easy path that got us into trouble in the first place.

16. Often times it was taking the easy path that robbed us of our freedom to begin with.
17. There is a saying most of us have probably heard that originated in the 2nd century. No pain, no gain.
18. But even before then Jesus identified that the pathway that leads to life is a road less traveled.
19. **Matthew 7:13-14** "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (NIV)
20. We will spend a few minutes this morning talking about the path. But what will give us the courage to stay on the narrow path, the not so easy path, is to keep our focus on the destination.
21. And the destination is life. The destination is freedom. The destination is restoration.
22. Turn with me if you will to the Old Testament book of Jeremiah.
23. I'm going to read a few verses that won't make full sense until I give you the context. But I will give you the context after I read them.

TEXT: **Jeremiah 44:16-18** "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! 17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. 18 But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine."

TITLE: **Stay the course.**

INTRO:

1. We encounter the prophet Jeremiah and the nation of Israel at one of the lowest times in their history to this point in the bible.
2. Remember at the beginning of this year we talked about the children of Israel going into the promised land, and how God mapped out and assigned a territory for every family.
3. God was specific and he was generous. God's whole motivation was to bless his people in a way they had never experienced.

4. So, they enter the promised land, and with God's help they do in fact take control of the land.
5. They build cities and they build a life for themselves. But all the while God was blessing them, their devotion to the Lord was halfhearted.
6. They served God, but at the same time many worshipped and served the idols of the people who were in the promised land when they arrived.
7. God in his love and his patience warns them for a period of hundreds of years.
8. He sends prophet after prophet to try and win back their devotion. And when that doesn't work, he begins to warn the people that destruction is coming. That His wrath will be poured out.
9. Jeremiah the prophet was given an assignment that most would not enjoy. He spent almost his entire ministry foretelling doom and gloom, and the people refuse to listen.
10. Finally, when God had had enough, he sends the king of Babylon to capture the people of Israel, and they are carried off into slavery.
11. Jeremiah, however, was spared and was left in the land along with some of the poorest people.
12. The people come to Jeremiah in chapter 42, and they make a request.
13. Jeremiah 42:3 Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do."
14. And then they follow up their request with a promise. Jeremiah 42:5-6 Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us. 6 Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God."
15. Essentially, they were saying, we are tired of this life of bondage. We are tired of being on the run. Ask God what he wants us to do, and we will obey him.
16. It doesn't matter if we like what God says or we don't like what God says, you have our word that we will obey.
17. So, Jeremiah goes to the Lord, and this is what God says.
18. Don't run off to Egypt. Don't think to yourself, if we run, we can get

away from all this trouble and difficulty. Stay here.

19. Serve the king of Babylon. And if you do it will go well with you.
20. God says, I will save you and deliver you. I will show you compassion, and I will restore you to your land.
21. In other words, I am going to give you a jubilee. Restoration and freedom.
22. These are my words. But God was saying, stay on this path. What I have got for you ahead is something wonderful. Trust me. Don't run. Stay the course.
23. And what do the people do? They disobey the Lord. They run away to what they believe will be an easier life. And like all disobedience, what they find is not what they wanted.
24. When they arrive in Egypt, God speaks to them again through Jeremiah.
25. This time he let's them know that they didn't escape the king of Babylon, but that eventually Babylon is going to attack and capture Egypt, and the king is going to treat those in Egypt worse than he did the nation of Israel.
26. That is the context. The verses that I read to you from our text this morning captures the reason the people gave to Jeremiah, for not staying on the path God was taking them on. Listen to it again.
27. Jeremiah 44:16-18 "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! 17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. 18 But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine."
28. Don't miss the reason they give. Back in that old life, we had everything we needed. We had plenty to eat and we didn't suffer any harm.
29. But ever since we stopped doing those things, everything has gotten worse.
30. Ever since we started listening to God and following him toward this new life, we have had nothing but difficulty.
31. This is what I believe was going on in the spiritual realm. It is the

same thing that can happen to us as we commit to follow the Lord in this year of jubilee.

32. Satan manipulated this tendency that all of us have in us. I have it in me and you have it in you.
33. In fact, all human beings since the beginning of time have been susceptible to this tendency, and susceptible to the enemy's manipulation of it.
34. The tendency is to think that pain is bad, and ease is good.
35. Struggle is bad and smooth sailing is good.
36. But the truth is what feels good to us can actually be destroying us, and what feels bad to us can actually be birthing new life inside us.
37. That's why Jesus clarified the truth in the book of Matthew.
38. He says, all of you who want to follow me. You need to understand. The path that leads to destruction is wide and broad. It seems pleasing and easy to navigate. But it's a trap.
39. The path that is narrow and small, the path that seems to be squeezing us is actually the path that leads to eternal life.
40. When we start believing this is our year of jubilee. When we start following after the lord toward the restoration and freedom we so desperately long for, we think and hope that the path will be an easy, wide path. But when we get on it, we eventually realize that the path is narrow and at times difficult.
41. And it is about the time that things get hard that the lying devil will rear his ugly head and say, what are you doing? Things sure were a whole lot better back there than they are right now.
42. And on the surface, what he says might seem true. But keep in mind the enemy never tells the whole truth. Because what seemed better back there was actually bondage. And what seems difficult right now is actually moving you toward new life.

Conclusion:

1. How do we know that is how the devil acts. Because he has acted that way multiple times throughout history with God's people.
2. In the book of Exodus, the nation of Israel has been in slavery for 400 years.

3. For 400 years someone else controlled every aspect of their lives. They were in complete and total bondage.
4. So, they cry out to the Lord. Set us free. Help us, Lord. And so, God hears their cry and delivers them by the hand of Moses.
5. But along the way toward freedom and a new life as a nation what do they encounter? Difficulty and hardship.
6. And what are they tempted to do? Go back to their bondage.
7. Listen to what the people told Moses and Aaron and see if it doesn't sound familiar. **Exodus 16:3** The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."
8. Satan tempted them to go back by reminding them of what was "good" about that old life, but he left out the fact that while they may have been sitting around pots of meat, they were slaves sitting around pots of meat.
9. They did what the people of Jeremiah's day did. They did what I have done more times than I can count. And they did what you may be being tempted to do right now and that is to get so caught up in the difficulty of the moment, that we lose sight of the beauty of the destination.
10. Will you allow me to remind you of your destination?
11. Can I remind you where this jubilee path is taking you?
12. **God is taking you toward freedom and restoration.**
13. You may be climbing up some steep hills or wandering in some low valleys.
14. You may feel like you are experiencing more twists and turns than you can handle.
15. You may feel like you have been beat up and pushed down. But God is still with you, and God is still guiding you.
16. He knows exactly where he is going and he knows if we will trust him and put our faith in him and not jump ship, that what lies ahead is new, restored, liberating life.
17. So today I want to be your cheerleader.
18. Consider me your own personal cheering section.

19. You can make it.
20. Don't give up.
21. You may not be able to see around the next corner, but I want to remind you that what is ahead if you keep following the lord is restoration and freedom.
22. Pray.
23. Lord I am struggling. The path is hard.
24. But I trust you. I believe you are leading me to what's best.
25. Holy Spirit, give me the strength to stay on God's path.