

TO PROCLAIM FREEDOM FOR THE PRISONERS

Luke 4:14-30

Key Verse: 4:18b

"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed...."

Luke chapter 4:14-9:50 is the record of Jesus' earthly messianic ministry, mainly in the Galilean district. The event in today's passage (4:14-30) took place in Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus. Although this was not likely the first event in Jesus' ministry, Luke chose to start here. Through this passage we can get a general picture of what Jesus does.

First, Jesus preaches good news to the poor (14-19).

Look at verse 14. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside." Luke emphasizes that Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Why is the power of the Spirit so important? There was a country boy who was a head taller than ordinary people. But he was so bashful that when the prophet Samuel came to anoint him as the first king of Israel, he hid himself behind the garbage bags. But when the Spirit of God came, he became a mighty king (1Sa 11:6). When Jesus finished his mission and died, the gospel writers did not say, "he died." They said, "He gave up his spirit" (Jn 19:30; Mt 27:50). Man's flesh is nothing but the dust of the ground, but spirit is man's life itself (Jn 6:63).

When Jesus was anointed as the Messiah of the world, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove (3:22). In short, God gave him the Holy Spirit when Jesus had to work as the Messiah of the world. When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert, he fasted for forty days in order to prepare himself to confront the devil. By using only the word of God from Deuteronomy, Jesus defeated the devil's temptations. After defeating the devil's temptations, Jesus was even more filled with the power of the Spirit. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. In other words, Jesus began his messianic ministry with the power of the Spirit. The power of the Spirit is the power of God.

Jesus went to Nazareth, his hometown, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, look at verse 18a, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor." It was the first time for Jesus to visit his hometown. But Jesus did not give them any material gift. Instead, he taught them the word of God from Isaiah. Jesus believed that the word of God is the best gift for them. Jesus believed that the word of God gives them the bread of life. Jesus believed that the word of God gives them eternal life. Jesus' word had power to change people because he was filled with the power of the Spirit. Most people cursorily assume that Nazareth was a poor village and that Jesus was brought up in the backwoods of the village. But actually, Nazareth was a big town with 20,000 inhabitants. It was situated on the lower slopes of Galilee, near the plain of Jezreel. From the hilltop of Nazareth, three great roads stretched out--the road from the south with pilgrims to Jerusalem on it; the great way of the sea leading from Egypt to Damascus; and Roman military roads. The region was prosperous. It was a proper place for Jesus to start the work of God.

Look at verses 18-19. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This is a free quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2. It tells us about the historical background of the people of Israel in Babylonian captivity. During the time of captivity, the people of Israel had no hope. On them was placed the heavy burden of hard labor--not one day, but every day. With no freedom at all, they were oppressed by slave masters. Their spirits were broken because of mistreatment. But through Isaiah, God gave them the hope of God that the Messiah would come and liberate them.

Finally Jesus came as the Messiah of the world. The Spirit of the Lord is on him because God anointed him to preach the good news to the poor. Here, "the poor" refers to the spiritually humble man. Most of the people of Nazareth were humble enough to listen to Jesus, except the religious leaders. When Jesus preached the good news to his hometown people, the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him (20). And Jesus began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (21). Jesus was very happy to see that Isaiah's prophecy

concerning the liberation of Israel had been fulfilled. Jesus was happy that his hometown people accepted his words humbly.

Second, Jesus proclaims freedom for the prisoners (18).

What is freedom? These days the concept of freedom is misunderstood. Many teenagers are waiting to turn 18 so that they can be legally free from their parents. These young people are deceived by the devil; they have a wrong concept of freedom. They think they are free when they indulge in sinful pleasure, even if it means ruining others' futures. This kind of social consensus is not true freedom. It is the cultural disease which corrupts any man instantly. There are many foolish people who do not discriminate between true freedom and cultural diseases. The majority of people have contracted cultural diseases. They think that those who enjoy sinful pleasure freely are normal. On the other hand, those who use their freedom for the glory of God are regarded as foolish people. There was a young man who played basketball very well. He disciplined himself and polished his talent through relentless practice, facing innumerable challengers in competition. Finally he became the premier player in professional basketball. But he had a wrong concept of freedom. He thought freedom was enjoying immoral behavior at his whim. As a result, he turned out to be HIV positive. In proportion to enjoying sinful pleasure, he damaged himself and others. And he ended his career in disgrace. We must know that God is the owner of freedom because he gave us the freedom of choice. Man can use freedom only in God. When we use freedom in God we can be a blessing to others.

In the Bible we find many who used their freedom of choice to serve God. Moses was in the Egyptian palace and had all the privileges and the position of a prince, the Prince of Egypt. He could have enjoyed a luxurious life. But he chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time (Hb 11:25). His choice was costly. He suffered for forty years in wilderness training and another forty years to lead his slave-minded people in the desert. But through his choice, God could establish a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Now we pray for America to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Therefore, we must decide to use our freedom in God to do the things that please God. Then God can use us for his own purpose and to be a blessing to others.

What is the concept of freedom? The concept of freedom is based on the freedom of choice. When we study the book of Genesis, we learn that God made the world and everything in it. Finally, God made man and woman and gave them a command. Genesis 2:16-17 says, "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'" In light of this holy command, we learn that we have freedom in God. Freedom is God's great gift for all mankind. God gave man freedom for the glory of God. God gave man freedom for the utmost happiness of mankind. Paul understood the concept of freedom very well. He said in Galatians 5:13, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." 1 Peter 2:16 says, "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." It is the time that we must learn how to use freedom in God. Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:31,32). In order to use our freedom in bearing the fruit that God wants, we must become the disciples of Jesus and learn from him. We cannot learn everything from Jesus. That's impossible. But we must learn from Jesus first, to have faith in God (Mk 11:22), and second, how to use our freedom in God.

Because of our sins we have used our freedom at random. As a result, we are bound by the bondage of sin. We became like the Israelites in bondage in Babylonia. Because of the misuse of our precious freedom we became the prisoners of fear. But our Lord Jesus Christ set us free from the bondage of sins. Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." It is common sense that we are not the Creator. We are creatures of God. Therefore we must know that freedom is God's precious gift for all mankind. Romans 6:22 says, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." Here, "slave" stands for identity. We are either slaves of God or slaves of Satan.

Third, Jesus recovers sight for the blind (18).

Here the "blind" are spiritually blind men. Since eye glasses have been invented, most people can enjoy 20/20 vision. With 20/20 vision they enjoy reading many classics and the Bible. But there are those who are spiritually

blind. In history there was a most petty man and the most spiritually blind man. He was King Ahab of Israel. During his rule, the people of Israel were in national crisis, surrounded by powerful enemies. God's purpose was to conquer all the countries in Canaan and make a united theocratic kingdom. But King Ahab did not realize this. He saw one thing—that was Naboth's vineyard. He really wanted to get it to make his palace look beautiful. When Naboth refused to sell the vineyard, Ahab went home and cried before his wife.

God gave each of us God's mission in this generation. But there are many spiritually blind men. Candidly speaking, 98% of unmarried men and women only think about their marriage candidates. Otherwise they have nothing to think about. Most of the young men and women are happy with their temporary jobs as long as they can pay bills and maintain their hand-to-mouth existence. In light of the social consensus, they are normal people. But in the sight of God they are spiritually blind men. They do not see the glorious mission from God. Still, there are many people who are working hard as medical doctors and college professors and so on in our community. In America, after hard work, everybody is exhausted until they lose their appetite. But these people who love God come to the church after hard work and take care of God's sheep through one-to-one Bible study. They are indeed heroic people. History seems to be going nowhere. This country is governed by situation ethics. Yet, there are many who pray for the raising of 10,000 Bible teachers in this country.

Fourth, Jesus releases the oppressed (18b-19).

This part is, in fact, the summary of today's passage. In time past and present, oppression comes from our cruel master and makes us suffer endlessly. The people of Israel had been oppressed by Egyptian masters. Modern people live in the time of high technology. So they have to be happy. But they are not. They are angry. Biblically speaking, they are oppressed by the torment of the devil. Jesus came to save men from their sins. In order to save men from their sins, Jesus became a ransom sacrifice, shedding his holy blood. When we take Jesus' yoke we can be free from all the oppression. Matthew 11:29-30 says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." In this verse, the yoke of Jesus stands for the bond of love. And the yoke of the devil is the burden of sin. Look at verse 19. "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This gives us the hope of mankind. It indicates the season of Christ. People think that the world is a vicious cycle. But it was made for the season of Christ.

Fifth, Jesus was rejected by his hometown people (20-30).

After hearing the good news of salvation, the hometown people's eyes were fastened on Jesus because they were moved by his message (20-22). They said many vows. Jesus said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (21b). When Jesus said this he meant that the promise of God that the Savior of the world would come was now fulfilled. But where there was a work of God, there was a work of Satan. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" some religious leaders asked (22). The religious leaders saw that the village people were overwhelmed by the gracious words of Jesus. The religious leaders were furious out of their jealousy. Their blood pressure went up. They were determined to kill Jesus by throwing him from the cliff on the brow of the hill. Look at verse 24b. "No prophet is accepted in his hometown." Jesus was sorry that they did not repent of their sins. Jesus was even more sorry that they only wanted to see the miracles of Jesus. Jesus said, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!'" (23b) Even if the religious leaders were unrepentant, Jesus hoped that somehow they would repent. Jesus told them two stories. In the time of Elijah, there was a great famine. No one was willing to serve the prophet Elijah. But a Gentile widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon accepted him and served him with her last rations. Then God continued to give necessary food to them. "And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian" (27). Naaman was a Gentile army general. He had nothing to do with the Jews. But he humbled himself and listened to Elisha the prophet. His leprosy was cured. When Jesus told these two stories, he hoped that the hometown religious leaders would repent. But they did not repent. Rather, they wanted to kill Jesus, throwing him down the cliff (29).

Today we heard God's word, "To proclaim freedom for the prisoners." We learned the true concept of freedom in God. May God help us to use our freedom for the glory of God and to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Then God will bless us and our descendants forever. Amen.