

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Luke 4:14-30

Key Verse: 4:18a

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”**

Right after defeating the devil’s temptation, Jesus begins the work of the Messiah practically. He proclaimed his “mission statement” by quoting the prophet Isaiah. We need to understand his mission statement from the context of Luke’s gospel. When we read Luke’s gospel, we find Jesus’ deep concern for the marginalized: the poor, blind, prisoners, oppressed, women and children, and Gentiles. In Jesus’ time, some people enjoyed a privileged position, but most people were exploited and suffered. They were needy people. When they humbly came to Jesus, Jesus restored them physically, mentally, and emotionally, as well as spiritually, in his great compassion. These days, some conservative evangelicals tend to think of Jesus’ ministry narrowly in terms of the salvation of the soul. But Jesus’ mission statement and ministry reveal a more comprehensive view of the gospel. The gospel is more than forgiveness of sins and salvation of the soul. Its effects are not only spiritual, but physical, mental and emotional as well. Its effect is not only personal, but communal and universal. To sum up, the gospel brings the renewal and restoration of all things. It impacts every area of our lives. This gospel is offered to all people; it is for anyone and everyone. However, its blessings come only to those who respond with faith. Luke begins the story of Jesus’ ministry in his hometown of Nazareth. Though God’s blessing was generously offered to them, they rejected him. Why? We can learn what hinders people from receiving the gospel. Most importantly, let’s learn what Jesus’ mission statement means to us and how we can receive the good news.

**First, “the Spirit of the Lord is on me” (14-19).** When Jesus defeated the devil’s temptations with the words of God, he won a great victory on behalf of all humankind. We cannot compare this victory with any other. It was a unique and historical event. We might expect a special parade for Jesus in the capital city, Jerusalem, and then for him to begin his ministry there. But to our surprise, Jesus returned to Galilee, which was known as a despised area to the Jews (14a). Jesus began his ministry in a humble, ordinary place among people who were marginalized. Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit. News about him spread through the whole countryside (14b). He humbly

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

taught the words of God in the synagogues, and everyone praised him (15). He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up (16a). The account of Jesus visiting his hometown is recorded by all three synoptic gospel writers. In each case, Jesus was rejected. Luke uniquely starts with it at the beginning of his ministry. This foreshadowed Jesus' rejection by his people Israel, and becoming "the light for the Gentiles."

On the Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue as was his custom (16b). The words "as was his custom" reveal his faithfulness to keep the Sabbath holy, together with ordinary people. By this time, Jesus had become a popular teacher. It is likely that he was asked to read the Scripture and give a message. Jesus stood up and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it was written: **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor"** (16b-19). Jesus introduced his mission statement as the Messiah by freely quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2a and 58:6. Here we need to understand the good news that Jesus proclaimed, to whom it was given, and by what power and authority Jesus carried out his ministry.

What is the good news? There are many kinds of good news. These days the refugee problem is a serious matter. To refugees, finding a country which will accept them is good news. To those who want to marry, finding the right candidate is good news. To children who live in homes marked by strife, the reconciliation of their parents is good news. These are specific kinds of good news that apply to some people, and yet do not solve the basic problem of humankind. But the good news that Jesus proclaims is intrinsically different: it is fundamental, universal and eternal. When Jesus was born, the angel proclaimed, **"...I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord"** (Lk 2:10b-11). Simply speaking, the good news is that Jesus, the Savior, has come!

To really accept the good news, we need to know the reality of our present condition, and our need for the Savior. In verse 18 we find the words **"poor," "prisoners," "blind,"** and **"oppressed."** In verse 19, **"the year of the Lord's favor"** was the time when slaves were set free and debts forgiven.

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Of course, these words have a literal application, but basically they apply spiritually. When we observe Jesus' ministry, we do not find him primarily engaging in social, economic or political revolution. Rather Jesus helped the needy very practically by healing the sick, casting out demons, giving sight to the blind, and setting people free from the power of sin and Satan. Mostly, Jesus taught the word of God so that people could know who God is, who they are, the meaning of life, and their life goal, and have a living hope in the kingdom of God. When Jesus solved people's root problems, their lives were blessed in every way and this was manifest through their character, family life, and social life. As people are transformed one by one, society can be transformed. In some sense, we are all poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed, slaves, and debtors. The question is, do we realize this or not? For example, in John 9, Jesus healed a man born blind. Despite the incontrovertible evidence, the Pharisees did not admit that Jesus healed him. So Jesus said, **"For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind."** They became upset and said, **"What? Are we blind too?"** Jesus said, **"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains"** (Jn 9:39-41). If we don't acknowledge that we are blind, Jesus' coming is not good news for us. That is why Jesus said, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"** (5:31). Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, **"You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see"** (Rev 3:17-18).

Actually, we were born into the world with nothing; we were empty-handed. From that time on, we have tried to grab everything we can and hold on to it, never letting go. In the process, we became greedy, selfish and proud. We think we know what we need, and blindly pursue it, not realizing we are misguided. To such people, Jesus' words sound like nonsense: "poor?" They like the words, "success," "prosperity," "wealth," and "power." Even many Christians pursue the power and wealth of the world, avoiding the offense of the cross. Jim Bakker was a prominent televangelist in the 1970's and 80's. As a result of his popular preaching and networking, his ministry quickly prospered until it was generating a million dollars a week in donations.

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

Bakker lived luxuriously, abusing money and deceiving his supporters. Then he fell into a shameful sexual sin, and his scandalous use of money was publicly exposed. He was arrested and imprisoned, initially sentenced to a long prison term. His wife of 33 years divorced him and married his best friend. He was sued for millions of dollars. At this point, he lost the will to live and was on the verge of suicide. Then he began to read the Bible. He realized that he was totally wrong and confessed, “The more I studied the Bible, I had to admit that the prosperity message did not line up with the tenor of Scripture. My heart was crushed to think that I led so many people astray. I was appalled that I could have been so wrong, and I was deeply grateful that God had not struck me dead as a false prophet!”<sup>1</sup> He found that God did not abandon him when he was poor, but began to mold him in the prison cell. This illustrates that when we acknowledge how poor we are, we can receive the good news.

Chuck Colson<sup>2</sup> was once one of the most powerful men in Washington as one of President Nixon’s special counselors. He was blinded by power and abused his authority. As the Watergate conspiracy was uncovered, Colson became a prime target. While he was struggling, one of his friends, Tom Philips, the top leader of Raytheon Company, invited Colson to his home personally. Mr. Philips shared his Christian testimony. Though a rich and successful businessman, Mr. Philips had felt empty. But Jesus filled his empty soul with peace and love and gave him real meaning of life. After telling this, Mr. Philips kindly and clearly rebuked Colson for his inordinate pride and abuse of power. Colson could not forget Mr. Philips’ words, which included a quote from “Mere Christianity,” by C.S. Lewis. Little by little, Colson’s eyes began to open and he could recognize his pride as sin before God. At a cottage by the sea, Colson humbly surrendered to Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. When charged with crimes, he did not try to justify himself. He admitted his guilt and accepted the punishment of the courts. He was the first person to go to prison for the Watergate scandal and spent seven months in jail. Suffering together with other prisoners, he began to learn the heart of Christ and to have genuine compassion. Upon his release, he started Prison Fellowship and then other ministries, before his passing in 2012, at the age of 80. The point is to acknowledge that we are wretched sinners: poor, blind, oppressed, prisoners, slaves and debtors so that we can receive the good news.

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<sup>1</sup> Bakker, Jim, “I Was Wrong.” Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1996, p. 535.

<sup>2</sup> Colson, Charles W., “Born Again.” Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen, a division of Baker Publishing, 1976.

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

The question is, how can we come to know our wretched state? Shall we become homeless beggars? Shall we commit crimes and go to jail? Shall we become slaves and debtors? Well, many who are poor, prisoners, slaves or debtors do not come to God as sinners. Prisoners have their own standards of self-righteousness. There is no guarantee that experiencing this kind of hardship will help us know we are sinners. Then how can we? It is only possible when we encounter God in his holiness. As we read the Bible or spend time in prayer or Christian fellowship, we can experience the holy presence of God. When we are aware of God's holy presence, we come to see our true condition as wretched sinners. For example, Isaiah was full of self-righteousness and condemned his fellow Israelites. But when he saw the holy God in the temple, he realized how wretched a sinner he was and said, **“Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...”** (Isa 6:5). Peter also experienced the holy presence of God when he obeyed Jesus' words. Then he could recognize that he was a sinful man (5:8). Let's encounter the holy God, see ourselves as we are, and accept the good news.

We can find another aspect of the good news through **“the year of the Lord's favor.”** This year, also called **“the year of Jubilee”** has a special meaning, which is explained in Leviticus 25. It was a year of special consecration to God that was to take place every 50 years. God knows the sinful tendency of human beings to be greedy and selfish. He wants people to remember that they belong to him and that everything belongs to him. Everyone was to return to their own property, debts were cancelled and slaves were set free. It was a time of renewal and refreshment which revitalized the entire society. It is really a great idea: imagine if all mortgages and student loans were cancelled. It is necessary for us to regularly go through a time of release and repentance and to come back to God purely. Spiritually speaking, our debts of sin have piled up like a huge debt that can never be repaid. But Jesus paid it all through his death and resurrection. The point is that as the good news of Jesus is proclaimed, people are renewed and refreshed. Then through their transformed lives the truth of the gospel extends into family life and to society. In this way, everything is renewed and restored through the gospel.

What makes this possible? Verse 18a says, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me....”** This verse tells us that the source of

# TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

power to transform lives and society is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' preaching the words of God, healing the sick and casting out of demons were done by the power of the Holy Spirit. No one can change another person; we cannot even change ourselves. Zechariah 4:6 says, **“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”** Only the gospel, proclaimed by the power of the Holy Spirit can change people. Titus 3:5-6 say, **“He saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.”** When we accept the truth that we are sinners and humbly accept Jesus and his gospel with faith, God pours the Holy Spirit into our hearts. The Holy Spirit is the power of God and wisdom of God that transforms our lives as children of God.

**Second, Jesus was rejected by his hometown people (20-30).** In this part we find further hindrances to accepting the good news: pride and prejudice. We also learn from Jesus how he dealt with it. After proclaiming his mission statement based on Isaiah, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him (20). Then Jesus said, **“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”** (21). This meant, “I am the Messiah foretold by Scripture.” This claim was too big for them to stomach. Though they acknowledged his words were gracious, they pointed out that he was a mere carpenter's son (22). They might have thought, “We have known you from infancy. You are one of us. How can you be the Messiah?” Though this was unspoken, Jesus knew their thoughts. They wanted to demand miracles. If they did not receive miracles they would not believe (23). They did not accept Jesus' message based on Isaiah, but rejected him. Rejection is painful, perhaps more so when it comes from people we are very familiar with. Many respond by examining themselves, finding a fault, and condemning themselves. This can paralyze those who are trying to share the gospel with rebellious people. But what did Jesus do? Jesus rested in his anointing by the Holy Spirit. He knew God had sent him to proclaim the good news and he had done as God wanted. He did not take the rejection personally, but kept God's perspective and kept on proclaiming the good news. He reviewed two events from God's history that revealed how some people believed in a general atmosphere of rejection. In the time of Elijah, idolatry was prevalent throughout Israel due to the wicked Queen Jezebel. Elijah prophesied that there would be neither dew nor rain in

## TO PROCLAIM GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

the next few years except at his word. So a severe famine came upon the land. When Elijah needed a place to go, the Lord sent him to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon, which was Gentile territory (26). This widow was about to eat her last meal with her son and die with him. But when she humbly obeyed Elijah's words, she experienced God's love and power and was saved (1Ki 17:1-16).

In the time of Elisha the prophet there were many lepers in Israel. Yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian (27). Naaman was a valiant soldier and the commander of the army of Syria. He was highly regarded by the king. He had fame, power, and wealth, but he also had leprosy. He was humble enough to hear the news from a servant girl that the prophet Elisha could heal him. So he went to Elisha. He expected Elisha to wave his hand and make a grandiose display of healing. But Elisha did not even come out to see him. Elisha sent a messenger to say, **“Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed”** (2Ki 5:10). At first, Naaman went away angry. But later, by the help of his servants, he curbed his pride and obeyed. Then he experienced God's healing power and became a worshiper of God (2Ki 5:14-15). Here we learn that anyone, regardless of nationality, social status or wealth, who accepts the good news can experience God's holy presence and power. Unfortunately, the people in the synagogue became furious. They drove Jesus out of the town and wanted to throw him down a cliff. But Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on his way (28-30). Today we see that Jesus proclaims good news to the poor. Let's admit our need and accept Jesus with humble hearts.