

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."

Study Questions:

1. What characterized Jesus' ministry in Galilee? Why is the power of the Spirit so important? (14-15; Jn 6:63) Where and what did he teach in Nazareth? How did the hometown people respond? What was Jesus' attitude toward God's word? Why was Nazareth a proper place to start his ministry?
2. Read verses 17-19. What hope did Isaiah (Isa 61:1-2) give the Israelite captives in Babylon? How did Jesus fulfill this prophecy? (21) Who are "the poor"? What is the good news? (18b,21)
3. What is most people's concept of freedom? Who are the prisoners? What is the Biblical concept of freedom? (Ge 2:16-17; Gal 5:1,13; 1Pe 2:16) How can we learn to use our freedom rightly? (Jn 8:31,32; Ro 6:22)
4. Who are the "blind"? How is King Ahab (1Ki 21) the classic example of a spiritually blind man? (What was his mission?) How can we see what God is doing in our time? What is people's oppressor today and how does the yoke of Jesus release the oppressed? (Mt 11:29-30)
5. What did Jesus mean by saying that the scripture was fulfilled (21)? What was Jesus seeking to teach through the two Old Testament examples? How did each exemplify faith and obedience? What did the hometown religious leaders do instead of repenting?

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? For example, there was a country boy who was a head taller than ordinary people. But he was so bashful that when 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 ever 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 plane 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, which tell 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).

There are many teenagers who are waiting to turn 18 so that they can be legally free from their parents. These days the concept of freedom is greatly misunderstood. Many young people are deceived by the devil and they have a wrong concept of freedom. They think they are free. They think they can enjoy physical pleasure even if it means ruining others' future. But this kind of social consensus is not true freedom. It is the cultural disease which corrupts any man instantly. There are many fools 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. Recently, one young man has been recognized by the world as the greatest diver. In order to become the greatest diver in the world, he must have pummelled himself and practiced diving day and night. But he had a wrong concept of freedom. He enjoyed unnatural behavior out of his perversion. As a result, he became an AIDS patient. In proportion to his enjoying sinful pleasure, he damaged himself and others. And he himself has become a living dead. 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.

We thank God that there are many who are using their freedom in God or for the sake of their children. There was a couple whose children are around the age of high school graduates. The article did not say how many children they have or how old they are. Whatever the reason, the parents filed for divorce. However, before final notice came from the court they reunited for the sake of their children, overcoming their giant egos. It is a good example to be praised in this country. But the neighbor people all together criticized them, "Why are you going to yoke together and have a hard time again? Is it not good to be independent and have much fun?" The minister said, "When something is dead, you need to bury it." Despite the minister's counseling, they reunited. Later, the mother of the children commented: "The minister hasn't heard about resurrection." They are reunited in the true concept of freedom in God. They are united for the sake of their children's happiness.

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 the 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 much 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 spectacles 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 is King Ahab of Israel. During his rule, the people of Israel were in national crisis, surrounded by the 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. After hard work in America, everybody is exhausted until they lost their appetite, said Newsweek. But these people who love God come to the church 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. "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" in verse 19 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 wows. 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, and it is going on. 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 studied about the true concept of freedom in God. May God help us to use it for the glory of God and for the sake of our precious children and our descendants forever, amen.