

Good News to the Poor

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 October 2008

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Let's pray while we stand. Our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray now that you would shine the light of your word into our hearts by your spirit.

Show us the freedom that we have in you so that we might live for you. And we ask that this gathering and this word would be a particular blessing for Jim and for Amber.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Well now, if you'd put aside your bulletins and take out the Bible, that would be very helpful.

And turn to Luke 4. We're going to flick around a little bit tonight. So we're going to go wider than the passage of Luke 4, if that's alright. It's on page 58 in the Bible in the seat in front of you.

Now there are many of us who've been looking forward to this night, Jim and Amber. Not just because of your obvious godliness and leadership gifts.

[1 : 08] And Jim, we see the mark and the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life for congregational leadership. Nor just because we want to show our support for Jim, for Amber and their family.

But because we really want to see Bishop Don lay hands on you, Jim. And we want to set you aside and commission you for this ministry to which God has called you.

And I've been looking forward to looking at this passage from Luke's Gospel, which was just read to us. Which is the first sermon Jesus preached after he was ordained by the Holy Spirit.

And at the end of the sermon, the entire congregation rose as one person and tried to kill Jesus. And there are some lessons here. It's effective preaching.

Yes. I don't think that the mark of faithful preaching necessarily is a long line of people with rocks and knives at the door for you. But by being ordained, you need to know that you're entering into something which is viewed by most people as utterly irrelevant.

[2 : 21] Useless, annoying, ineffective. I've told this story before. Some time ago, I went to a neighborhood barbecue just up the road from where we live.

And one of the neighbors introduced me to a new neighbor saying this is the local Anglican minister. And not knowing what to say and trying to be polite conversation, this guy said to me, and I quote, It must be very difficult to spend so much time moralizing and being self-righteous. It's very good to see how other people see you. Well, as we look at this passage, there are two things that stand out to us.

And two things I want to leave with you tonight, Jim. The first is that Jesus was a preacher. Look down at verse 14. Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee.

The report concerning him went throughout the whole surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And then we go down to 18.

[3 : 29] And when he's reading from Isaiah, his ministry is that the Spirit has anointed him to preach good news, sent to proclaim release. And verse 19, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

We've looked at this passage this morning. And it's very interesting that the first thing in Jesus' ministry is not a great healing. It's not the calming of a storm. It's not the raising of a dead person. But it's a sermon. And the sermon is given to us in great and careful detail. Because this is the manifesto and the charter of Jesus' ministry.

And after the sermon finishes, we have a hurricane of miracles. He casts out a demon. He heals the sick. And we come to the end of the chapter, verse 42, and we read this.

Now, it's an appalling choice.

[4 : 48] And it's an excruciating choice that Jesus has to make. He's been healing people of every known disease. And people gather and press around him and press him to stay, bringing family and friends, hundreds, maybe thousands.

Jesus says, I must preach the gospel of the kingdom to other cities. I was sent for this purpose. And the reason, of course, is because it is through the fragility and the foolishness and the weakness of preaching that God is pleased to make spiritually alive men and women.

The miracles are a brilliant demonstration of the power of God and of the kingdom of God. But the miracles cannot save us.

Only the proclamation of the good news of forgiveness. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the preaching of Christ. And notice, please, that Jesus is an expositor.

He reads a passage from the Old Testament and he explains what it means and then even applies it at the end to his hearers and to himself. And this is what he does Sabbath by Sabbath.

[6 : 05] And what is the core of his preaching? Let's read verses 18 and 19 again. He says, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Now, again, we looked at this this morning. The poor in Luke's Gospel and the poor in Jesus' day, he's not so much speaking about the poor in spirit.

He's not speaking about the economic poor. And it's very difficult for us because we are raised in our current culture where we measure everything by money to imagine that poverty is not primarily an economic term.

But poor in Jesus' day and particularly in Luke's Gospel is not so much a measure of money as a measure of status. And status in those days was generally set by the family that you were born in and where you were on the social network.

[7 : 19] Status was being on the inside. It was how people looked at you. To be poor meant you're on the outside. And Jesus uses two other words to describe the poor.

Lost and sick. And you can have all the money in the world. You can be a Zacchaeus and still be lost and still be poor.

And Jesus says, I have come to proclaim good news to the poor. And he gives three quick pictures of the good news and all of them have to do with freedom and release.

Release to the captives, setting free the oppressed, announcing the coming of the acceptable year of the Lord. Did you know that the word release that's used twice in these verses is the same Greek word that is used for forgiveness?

Our real bondage, of course, is not to Rome. It's not to Egypt. It's not to financial institutions. Our bondage is not primarily political or physical.

[8 : 24] We are enslaved by sin. And Jesus has come bringing salvation by the release and the forgiveness of sins. And we noted this morning that, look where this story is placed.

The very story before it, Jesus goes out into the wilderness and confronts Satan. And the very story after it, he delivers a man from demon possession because Christ has come to set us free from Satan and from death and from sin.

Now, what was the message that John the Baptist preached? Do you remember? He came preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And it's exactly Jesus' message.

And you know what? It's the message that you're supposed to preach and that we're supposed to preach. Just turn right with me to the end of Luke, chapter 24, for a moment. This is the risen Jesus, Luke 24, verse 45, his last words in the gospel.

Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

[9 : 59] And then he says to the apostles, You're witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you. Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

Between the time when Jesus ascended into heaven and the time that he comes again, it is God's purpose that repentance and forgiveness of sins is preached in Jesus' name in all the world.

And let's have a look at how it works. Just turn over to Acts. Keep going right. Acts chapter 2 for a moment. It is page... Well, it's the end of the sermon on the day of Pentecost, page 114.

The apostle Peter is preaching. Verse 37, When they heard this, they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what should we do? And Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins

and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Or in the next chapter, chapter 3, verse 19, speaking in the temple portico, the apostle Peter, after the healing of the man who is lame, he says, Repent, therefore, and turn again that your sins may be blotted out.

[11 : 18] The times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Or in chapter 5, verse 31, when Peter is standing before the council, a Jewish council, let's start at verse 30.

The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God had exalted him at his right hand as leader and saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. We'll turn over to Acts chapter 17. The apostle Paul now, speaking on the Areopagus to the philosophers, comes to the end of his sermon.

In verse 30, he says, The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent because he's fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he's appointed.

And to this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead. Or turn right again to Acts chapter 20, verse 21, the apostle Paul describing his ministry to the Ephesian elders, says, I went from house to house testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[12 : 42] And one other illustration, just turn right again to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, on page 190, speaking about the true conversion of those in Thessalonica.

In verse 9 of chapter 1, the apostle Paul says, They themselves report concerning us what a welcome we had among you, how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.

I can't think of a higher privilege than of preaching the forgiveness of sins and the release that comes through repentance. It is through the preaching of this gospel that men and women and boys and girls receive repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

And in a moment, Jim, the bishop will lay his hands on you and he will say this, Receive the Holy Spirit for the office and work of a priest in the church of God now committed to you by the laying on of our hands.

Whoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven. Whoever's sins you retain, they are retained. Be faithful in the teaching of the word of God and in the administration of his holy sacraments in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[14 : 11] Of course there's more to ministry than preaching. The ministry, there's the ministry of the sacraments, there's pastoral care ministry, there's planning and organizing and visiting, there's the ministry of prayer.

But at the heart of the New Testament picture of the role of the shepherd in the congregation is this. It is the preaching of the brilliant good news of God in Jesus Christ.

And it is through the preaching of that good news that God seeks out and finds those who are lost. He brings healing and wholeness to those who are sick. And he brings the unsearchable riches of Christ to those who are poor, salvation, forgiveness and his spirit.

Jesus is our chief shepherd but the way he has so ordered the church is he puts under shepherds in place to serve with him. These lead the flock of God.

And Jim, your responsibility is to lead the sheep of God, the flock of God into the pasture of God and feed them and protect them. That's the first point. Jesus is a preacher.

[15 : 22] Let's go back to Luke chapter 4, shall we? The second point is, not everybody wants to hear it.

It's tragic. The thing we need to hear the most is the thing that we resist the hardest. Jesus comes bringing the best possible good news to us.

True liberty. True freedom. Salvation. And there is in this passage a violent reaction. And you know that through the first few chapters of Luke's gospel, as salvation comes into our world through Jesus Christ, there is a collision between the salvation of God and the way in which we've set this world up.

It's a collision between our usual notions of status and power and money. Do you remember the two signs of Jesus' birth? The sign in the manger and the sign of the child.

Both of them overturn our view of money and status. Both of them upset the way the world is put together. He has cast the mighty from their thrones and exalted the humble and meek.

[16:53] And do you remember we saw in John the Baptist's ministry that repentance is the reversal of the religious status quo. It's a reversal of our ethical status quo.

It's a reversal of our spiritual status quo. And try as hard as we like and saying it as kindly and as graciously and as compassionately as we possibly can.

We cannot remove the central problem of the gospel. And the problem is Jesus himself. The fact that Jesus has come bringing forgiveness and freedom means that we need to turn away from the way we are now to him.

And even if you say it with infinite niceness and compassion the fact is to receive this gift means that we have a bad heart and a bad conscience and a bad record and we need the cleansing of the gospel.

And the gospel tells us God does not affirm our lifestyle choices but that we're lost and we're enslaved and unless we turn to him we will remain in darkness in this life and be cast into hell.

[18:09] And we don't like being told that. And it's amazing to see how it works out in this Nazareth in Jesus' hometown. The people of Jesus' hometown I think they expect Jesus because he's their homeboy they expect him to include them in all his goodness and his kingdom just because he is their homeboy.

That's the way things are supposed to work. They assume that they are on the inside track. They use their status though as a way of hiding from the reality of God.

It's very interesting if you read this passage and take it home and study it because Jesus will not let them hide. Did you notice in the second half of the passage instead of backing away and trying to calm things down Jesus steps into the issue and he crosses the pain line.

You know the pain line? It's that line in relationships where you know that if you say the next thing you're going to cause that person pain. Jesus seems to have no difficulty in doing it and he uses two illustrations from the Old Testament that show the way of grace is not the way we naturally think.

Neither the widow nor Naaman the Syrian commander deserve anything from God. Neither of them have any hope.

[19:42] They both face death. Neither have any claim on God and they are the poor and God's grace is good news to the poor.

So the congregation rises up to kill him. And don't you find it instructive that right here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry it's not those who are outsiders and far off who want to do away with him.

It's those who know him and who are close to him. Later on the Apostle Paul says to the younger minister Timothy you are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me and among them Phygelus and Homogenes.

After praying and loving after preaching and visiting the Apostle was hated and vilified and abused. And he says to Timothy in that same letter do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord nor of me his prisoner but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God.

Have we not just left John the Baptist in prison? Do we not follow the Jesus who goes to suffering and to death? Not everyone wants to hear the gospel.

[21:07] So Jim here are two things for you and two things for us as a congregation. It's not it's not the brightest lightest passage but it's a very important passage and it says two things.

Jesus was a preacher and not everyone wants to hear it. So I say to you Jim you have the unspeakable privilege of preaching and proclaiming Jesus Christ and this gospel preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Tell us what we need to hear not what we want to hear. Cross the pain line with us in grace and love and by doing that you will save yourself and your hearers.

And I say to you as a congregation this evening congregation on this Thanksgiving day that we have a great deal to be thankful for that God has brought Jim and Amber to us as God's gift and I want you to pray for them and support them that they might know the strength of Christ and the power of the spirit and that Jim would preach the word with courage and place a much greater weight on Christ's expectation than on yours.

In just a moment the bishop will charge you with these words Jim you are called to be a messenger a watchman and a steward of the Lord to teach and to warn to feed and nurture the Lord's family to seek for Christ's sheep scattered abroad in the evil world so that they may be saved through Christ forever.

[22 : 51] I wonder if you would stand and let's pray for Jim. Our Heavenly Father we thank you for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the freedom of forgiveness that he brought and that he has won for us through his death on the cross and we thank you for Jim and for his ministry amongst us that he is now called to be a messenger and a watchman and a steward.

We pray that you would supply him and Amber with everything they need that they might nurture and feed us as a family that they would seek for Christ's sheep scattered abroad in the evil world so that we might be saved through Christ forever and we ask this in his name Amen.

Please be seated. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. If you would please. My brother in Christ you have heard earlier in your private examination and now in the sermon and scripture readings of what dignity and great importance this ministry is to which you are called In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I urge you to keep in mind the nature of this office.

You are called to be a messenger, a watchman, and a steward of the Lord, to teach and to warn, to feed and nurture the Lord's family, to seek for Christ's sheep scattered abroad in the evil world, so that they may be saved through Christ forever.

[24 : 52] Remember, always have printed in your memory what a great treasure is committed to your charge. For the people whom you serve are the flock of Christ, which he purchased with his death, and for whom he shed his precious blood.

The church and congregation whom you must serve is both Christ's bride and his body. Thus, if the congregation itself or any member of it is hurt or hindered as a result of your negligence, God will surely discipline you for this sin.

Bearing this in mind, remember what God has called you to be and to do. Never cease your work, care, and diligence until you have done all that you can possibly do, as is your duty, to bring all those under your pastoral care to a true knowledge of God, as well as to the unity of faith and maturity in Christ, so that there is no place available amongst you for erroneous belief and immoral behavior.

Since this office is both so excellent in nature and so difficult in its exercise, you see how most carefully and studiously you ought to apply yourself to this ministry, so as to prove yourself dutiful and thankful to the Lord, who has placed you in such a dignified position, and also to take care not to offend nor to cause others to do so.

Remember that it is only God himself who can give you the intention and the ability to do these things. Therefore, Jim, you ought, and you truly need, to pray sincerely for his Holy Spirit, and bearing in mind that you cannot accomplish so important a work relating to the salvation of man except by using teaching and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and by living a life agreeable to the same, consider how seriously you ought to study and learn the Scriptures, and order your own life and that of your family according to the rule of the same Scriptures.

[27 : 22] For the same reason, you ought to forsake and set aside, as much as you can, all worldly cares and studies which hinder you from doing your duty.

We are persuaded that you have carefully weighed and pondered these things for some time, and that you have clearly determined by God's grace to give yourself wholly to this office into which it has pleased God to call you, so that, to the extent of your ability, you will apply yourself wholly to this one thing and draw all other concerns and studies towards the fulfillment of this ministry.

We are also persuaded that you will continually pray to God the Father by the mediation of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Spirit, that by daily reading and considering of the Scriptures, you will grow stronger in your ministry and endeavor to sanctify and shape your life and that of your family according to the rule and teaching of Christ, that you may be a wholesome and godly example and pattern for the people to follow.

And now, in order that this congregation of Christ's flock may also understand your mind and will in these things, and in order to strengthen your resolve to do your duty before God, you shall plainly answer the questions which we, in the name of God and of his Church, now ask you.

Jim, do you sincerely think that you are truly called, according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ and the canon of law of this Church, to the order and ministry of priesthood?

[29 : 16] I do believe I am so called. Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine that is necessary for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?

And are you determined to teach the people committed to your pastoral care from those Scriptures and to teach nothing as required or necessary for eternal salvation except that which you are persuaded can be proved from the Scriptures?

I am persuaded and will do so by God's grace. Will you make every effort, always, faithfully to provide the doctrine, the sacraments, and the discipline of Christ as the Lord has commanded and his Church has received them, according to the commandments of God, so that you may teach the people under your pastoral care diligently to keep and observe the same?

I will do so with the Lord's help. Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to the Word of God?

And will you use private warning and public exhortation, both to the sick as well as to the healthy, within your congregation to accomplish this?

[30 : 43] I will do so with the Lord's help. Will you be diligent in prayers, in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such duties as assist in gaining a fuller knowledge of them?

And will you, at the same time, lay aside worldly study and private pursuits? I will do so with the Lord's help. Will you strive to frame and fashion your own self and your family according to the teaching of Christ?

And will you make both yourself and them, to the best of your ability, to be wholesome examples of the patterns to the flock of Christ? I will do so with the Lord's help.

Will you maintain and promote, as far as you are able, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian people, and especially among those that are or will be under your pastoral care?

I will do so with the Lord's help. Will you reverently obey those who are set above you in the Church, your bishop, and other senior ministers, and gladly and willingly accept their godly advice and submit to their considered judgments?

[31 : 58] I will do so with the Lord's help. Almighty God, who has given you the will to do all these things, grant you strength and power to perform them, that he may complete the work that he has begun in you through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.