

Good News to the Poor

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[0 : 00] To proclaim the gospel of his great and powerful rescue of us, we ask that you give us deep gratitude in our hearts. Help us to turn to you in repentance that we might know your grace and goodness overflowing in our lives.

We pray, Father, that you will use these gifts to bring others to know you as our Lord and our Savior. We pray for David as he preaches that your Holy Spirit would be at work in him as he opens your word to us.

Help us to have hearts that are humble before you and that desire to follow you with all that we have. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Well, it would be very helpful if you took your Bibles and turned to page 58, Luke 4. We don't do that because it's our custom, but we do it because we want to see what God is saying to us.

So, Luke 4 on page 58. As you're doing that, how good it is to welcome the Saladin clan for Jim's ordination tonight. It's terrific to have you with us. We're very grateful for Jim and for Amber and for their ministries.

[1 : 11] And it's a wonderful thing today, on this Thanksgiving Day, to see babies brought to the Lord Jesus Christ. And, you know, you're always conscious that babies and children carry the hopes and dreams of their family.

And through being baptized, they now carry something else. They carry the mark of the cross of Jesus Christ, which is going to mean something more than any of us know. And in the passage today, we have the very first thing that Jesus does in his public ministry.

And by now, Luke 1, 2, 3, he is carrying the hopes and dreams of all the world. He's been named and acclaimed by angels as the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

By John the Baptist as the one who's going to come and baptize with the Spirit and fire. He's been named by the Old Testament scriptures. And he's been named by the voice of God the Father from heaven speaking audibly, You are my beloved Son.

In you I am well pleased. And to say that he's carrying high expectations would be an understatement. And I think that's why it's quite a surprise that the first thing Luke has him do is preach a sermon.

[2 : 34] He doesn't feed 5,000 or raise a couple people from the dead. He preaches a sermon. And until now, Luke has been traveling at a furious pace and everything slows down.

I didn't know if you noticed that. And we go into the sermon. We see what Jesus does. We hear what he does. Because this sermon is the manifesto, the charter for his ministry. Again and again and again he goes into synagogues on the Sabbath day and preaches.

But this is the only time we get a record of his sermon. And he comes back to this sermon frequently. And I just point out to you that Luke puts it first because it is by preaching that we are saved.

That life and forgiveness of sins come to us. The miracles are magnificent demonstrations of the presence of the kingdom of God. But miracles by themselves can't save.

It's only through the preaching that we receive the good news and the freedom in the gospel. And it's an amazing sermon with a dramatic ending.

[3 : 36] Not a very Anglican ending. The congregation rises up as one person to try and kill him. I'm looking forward to preaching this at Jim's ordination tonight.

It's a collision of two realities. And we just have time to look at both of those briefly together this morning. And the first one I've called the divine face of freedom.

The divine face of freedom. And look back at verse 16 and 17. Jesus comes back to his own town. Place he's grown up. Everyone knew him when he was a little boy.

They view him as their homeboy. And he comes into the synagogue. And although they've got priests to big town. They've got many priests. They give him a bit of a privilege.

They let him take the scroll. And Jesus takes the scroll and unrolls it. And chooses one particular text. It's in the middle of Isaiah 61.

[4 : 39] And I'll just read verses 18, 19. So it's in our minds. These are the words. The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me 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.

And he rolls up the scroll. Gives it back to the leader. And then sits down to preach. Which is a much more comfortable way to preach. And that's how they used to do it in those days. And I just point out to you that Jesus is an expositor.

That he reads his text from the Old Testament scripture. Then he explains what it means. And applies it to the congregation. With a fairly inviolate response. And why does he choose this passage?

Why doesn't he choose something like. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. I mean that would get a calmer response. Wouldn't it? Or at least David and Goliath. Which would have some entertainment value.

[5 : 45] He chooses this passage because it is the announcement of the great day of salvation. The great day of freedom.

Of liberty. When God would send his servant. The servant of the Lord. Who would bring this day. And Jesus is absolutely clear. He sits down and he says. Today.

This scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. I am the servant of the Lord. And at the heart of the text. Verses 18 and 19. Is this phrase.

The spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. Now. Now. We have to avoid easy and superficial ways of reading these words.

The poor. In Luke's gospel. And the poor in Jesus day. Are not the poor in spirit. As they are in Matthew's gospel. They are not the economically poor.

[6 : 44] I know this is almost impossible for us to understand. Because we are so gripped by the almighty dollar. As the way of measuring everything.

I mean we have elevated money. So that it is the. It is the complete measure of meaning. And of. You talk about your personal net worth. It has got nothing to do with who you are. It has got how much money you have got in the bank.

That is not true in Jesus day. To be poor. Was not so much an economic term. As it was a term of status. And your status came from a number of different places.

Primarily. What family you were born into. Your heritage. Your last name. Your religious standing. Sometimes your education. Where you were on the social network.

Whether you were on the inside. Whether you were viewed by people around you. In your society. And in your town. As being on the in. To be poor.

[7 : 42] Is to be on the outside. And later on in the gospel. Jesus uses two different words. To describe the poor. He says they are those who are lost. And they are those who are sick.

And need to be found. And need to be healed. You can have all the money in the world. And still be poor in Luke's gospel. Remember Zacchaeus in chapter 19. He is a tax collector. And rich.

But he's lost. And is found by Jesus. Now. One of the great delusions. We live under. Is that we have put status behind us.

But that is a delusion. During the summer. I asked the teens. What are the status markers. At school today. Within minutes.

They had a long list. Of status markers. In Canadian culture. They are terrific. And I think I'll share with you. Them with you. At a different time. But don't think that we are free of status. And what is the good news for the poor.

[8 : 39] Jesus gives three pictures. Of freedom. Release for captives. Setting free the oppressed. And the coming of the acceptable year of the Lord.

The first two are clear. The last one. Let me just make mention of this. What is the acceptable year of the Lord. Well you have to go way back. Into the Old Testament. Into Leviticus chapter 25.

If you've never read Leviticus 25. I encourage you this afternoon. A Thanksgiving exercise. Read Leviticus 25. When God took the people into the land of Israel.

He said to them. Every 50th year. I want you to get trumpeters. And send them all throughout the land. And they blow the trumpet in every city. And every town.

And the trumpets announce. All debts cancelled. All property reverts to the original owners.

[9 : 38] Who God had given it to in the beginning. And every slave is to be freed. Including those who sold them into slavery. Because they couldn't pay back their debts. Isn't that an astounding thing.

I mean imagine if we did that in North America. Yeah. Well we wouldn't need any banks. Would we? For a beginning. See in Jesus.

God says. When he gives this. In Leviticus 25. He says. Consecrate the 50th year. Proclaim. Liberty. Throughout the land. In God's land.

There were meant to be no lifelong. No such thing as lifelong poverty. No such thing as permanent slavery. Or crushing debt. And this idea of Jubilee.

Has been taken up by a number of international organizations. To speak about international debt relief. And cancelling debt relief. You know there's no evidence that Israel kept the year of Jubilee.

[10 : 36] And the reason Jesus chooses this passage. Is that he's saying. All that that pointed to. All the liberty that that pictures.

Has now come. And not just freedom from debt. And not just freedom from degrading political structures. But freedom from sin.

The word release that's used twice in those verses. Is exactly the same word as forgiveness.

Because our real bondage. Is never to Egypt.

Or to Rome. Or to our credit cards. Our real bondage is that we are enslaved by our own sin. And Jesus has come. Bringing forgiveness of sins.

And absolute liberty and freedom. Not just for Israel. But for the whole world. And if you don't believe me. Think about the context of this sermon for just a minute. What's the thing that happened immediately before.

[11 : 35] It's that Jesus goes out into the wilderness. And confronts Satan. Garden of Eden 2.0. And this time instead of disobedience and death. We get obedience and life. And immediately after.

From verse 31 onwards. Jesus rescues a man from possession. By an unclean demon. This is what Christ has come to free us from. From Satan. From sin.

And from death. In the baptism service. That's what we pray over every child. Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. But to fight bravely under his banner. Against.

Sin. The world. And the devil. Because of the release that Jesus brings. The forgiveness of sins. This is the divine face of freedom.

This is good news to the poor. But it gets a very bad reaction. And where does this hostility come from? And I want to call this second reality.

[12 : 30] That's going on in the synagogue. And goes on in every church. And goes on everywhere where the word of God is preached. The human face of slavery.

Now it is possible for preachers to use the word slavery carelessly and thoughtlessly. And I think we need to say to each other. That human trafficking in any form.

Is an obscenity. And a degradation. Of precious men and women. Who are made in the image of God. And that we ought to be very grateful for the freedoms we enjoy here.

But the Bible is very clear. That there is a deeper and a more subtle slavery. And it's a much more dangerous slavery. Because we are blind to it. And you can have all the political freedoms in the world.

You can have freedom of access. You can have freedom of movement. You can have all the money and resources that you want. And still be an absolute spiritual slave. And the test of whether you and I are free or slave.

[13 : 34] Is what we make of Jesus Christ. And the forgiveness of sins. Because what's going on here in the synagogue that day. Is that the hostility of Satan. Which is both sides of this passage.

Takes on a human face. Through the people in the synagogue. As they rise up to kill Jesus. Where does it come from. And it seems all natural and normal and reasonable.

And halfway through the sermon. We come to this turning point. Verse 22. If you just look down on the right hand side of the column. Verse 22. And all spoke well of him.

And wondered at his gracious words. Which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said. Is this not Joseph's son? It's the only thing they say.

And at one level it seems innocuous enough. But in actual fact. It betrays a deep sense of entitlement. And an awareness of their own status.

[14 : 31] Listen to how status works. As we look through these chapters. And we go up to chapter 9. In Galilee. There are two things that control a person's status. In Galilee.

And the first was. Your kinship. Kinship was absolutely central to life in Galilee. Who you were born to. Who your family was. If someone was family.

You opened your arms to them. You opened your home to them. And you opened your pocket to them. But if someone was not family. You had no responsibility to them. Now.

Family is one of God's great and wonderful and precious gifts. But like every good gift that he gives. Our tendency is to take the gift. And forget the giver.

And elevate the gift. Into being an idol. And we're going to come across this again and again. Jesus' teaching cuts straight across the kinship system of his day.

[15 : 27] And he refuses to recognize the tyranny of kinship structures. And he shows how grace redefines family. And redefines our understanding of ourselves.

Kinship. But there was a second thing. A second reality of status. And that was the system of patronage. In a society where your status was where you were born.

The only way to get ahead in life. Was to go to the people who were above you. On the totem pole.

And the way the people who were above you on the totem pole. Ensured they kept their status.

Was through patronage. They would use their power. Or their money. Or their position. To do you favours. And then they would hold you. In their debt. For the rest of your life.

Can't imagine that ever happening today. And Jesus comes along and says. God is completely different from that. He says God does not treat us according to our kinship.

[16 : 31] Or according to patronage. He could not care less. How people think of you. God is gracious to the just and the unjust. His kindness and his generosity. Are not a means of manipulation and control.

And those who follow Jesus. Are meant to demonstrate in social relationships. Grace. Not status. That's why we're generous to those outside our kinship group. The good news to the poor completely overturns.

Kinship. And patronage. And status. So when they say. Is this not Joseph's son. They're not saying. He's our boy. We're proud of him.

They're saying. He belongs to us. He has no status apart from us. He grew up in our village. We are doing him a great honour. By allowing him to stand and preach in the synagogue.

And he's chosen a very good passage to read. About good news to the poor. Because he's the poor. They've turned it completely around. They don't see themselves as the one who are poor.

[17 : 34] They don't see themselves who are in need of liberty. It's Jesus who is poor. Because when it comes to kinship and when it comes to patronage. Jesus owes them.

Did we not cover up those nasty rumours about Jesus' mother's pregnancy? Did we not support Joseph in his struggling carpentry business? And it's a very good thing we're giving him a chance to stand up today.

See when it says they wondered in his gracious words. The word wondered is always used for people who are amazed but don't believe what's going on. They've got the wrong end of the stick.

They say to him, if you can bring release to the captives. Go and release your cousin John the Baptist who is in prison. If you can bring good news to the poor.

Heal yourself doctor. Give yourself some status. If you can do miracles. Which we've heard rumours you can. Why don't you make yourself into someone important? It's exactly the same temptation he faced last week in the wilderness.

[18 : 38] Because it's the same thing that happens when he's on the cross and they hurl insults at him and they say, You say you can save others? Save yourself. You're Joseph's boy. We've done a lot for you. We're good people.

We've played by the rules. We've treated you fairly. Now it's your turn to do something for us. See? For God's grace it doesn't work like that. That's not the way the freedom of forgiveness works.

And as proof of that Jesus uses two illustrations from the Old Testament down there in verses 24 to 27. Let me just mention them.

First is the story of a widow who did not even live in Israel. She lives up there in Lebanon. How could she deserve God's goodness? But Elijah is sent to her.

And there's a famine on. And she's about to take the last of her flour to make one last piece of bread to cook up for herself and her only son to eat and then die.

[19 : 35] And Elijah goes to the woman and says, Give the bread to me and God will supply your needs. And she does. And he does. And that is not the way things are supposed to work.

I mean, think about it for a minute. This widow has zero status. She has nothing. And God is calling on her to give the only thing that she has. And yet through it God wonderfully supplies.

And the second story is about Naaman the Syrian. He's a great warrior. He's the head of the Syrian army. And he gets leprosy. And he hears from one of his servant girls, one of the children who he has abducted from Israel, that there is a prophet in Israel who can heal him.

But he doesn't go to the prophet. He goes to the king of Israel. And he makes the king of Israel an offer he can't refuse. He takes two and a half million dollars worth in gold and silver and the best of Syrian fashion.

It was two and a half million dollars worth on Wednesday, according to Wednesday's values. I don't know what it's worth today. It's worth a lot more. When the prophet hears this, he says to Naaman, forget your money, go and wash seven times in the Jordan, you'll be cured of your leprosy.

[20 : 53] Again, that is not the way things are supposed to work. That's not the way you treat the commander of the Syrian army. This is deeply offensive to Naaman. It cuts straight across his status and his money and his power.

And all his status and all his wealth and all his power means absolutely nothing before the word of God and nothing before his leprosy. None of them can help him. He is not entitled to anything from God.

He is the poor. And at first he says, you can't be serious. There are much better rivers back in Syria that I can go and wash in. But then in a moment of humility before the word of God, he listens to his servant and he's healed.

And this is good news to the poor. This is the way of grace. And it's deeply offensive. Neither the widow nor the commander deserve anything from God, let alone food and health, and neither do we.

And the good news of liberty and the good news of grace is very disorienting to us. That's why it's so helpful every year to have a reminder of this at Thanksgiving. These are people who face certain death.

[22 : 01] They have no hope. They have no claim on God. They are poor. And the good news comes as freedom to the poor. And when the good news comes to us, it usually comes to us as the opposite of what we think we need.

To the woman who has one little piece of food left, she's asked to release that one piece of food. To the man of might, he's told to go and wash in a disgusting little dirty river in Israel.

But it is the way of healing and it is the way of wholeness. And I think at this point in the sermon in the synagogue, there's a gurgling sound. As the men rise up as one and they take hold of Jesus and they drag him out of town to a cliff where they want to throw him off to kill him.

How dare he insinuate that we are the needy ones. How dare he say that we are the poor and need forgiveness of sins. We would rather kill him than listen to this.

And just when they think they have him in their hands, Jesus slips through their fingers and moves on. So here is Jesus' first sermon.

[23 : 11] And the extremity of the response demonstrates the extremity of our slavery. And how deeply we need this forgiveness and this freedom that Jesus comes to bring.

Jesus says, I have come and I am announcing that God himself is willing to give you absolute freedom. Freedom from guilt, from sin, from Satan. He says, I have come to bring this crazy jubilee. And whenever we hear the good news, there are only two reactions. We either reject or we rejoice. And we reject what he offers.

And we rejoice and we receive what he offers. And I think this is put here as a textbook case on how to reject the freedom God offers. This is how we do it.

We are offended that we are poor or enslaved. We are affronted by the idea that we have no claim on God. And that to receive the forgiveness of sins, we have to recognize Jesus as the way it comes.

[24 : 15] This is how we hold Christ away. It's hard to swallow that we are poor. That I need forgiveness. That I am blind. That I am enslaved. That I am poor. That I am lost. That I can't do

anything.

I am not entitled to anything. And I think the reaction of the Nazareth is the exact opposite to repentance. In our hearts, we either rejoice that God is willing to free us. Or we push Christ away. And repentance, you see, is not building a ladder of sorrow and regret and remorse until we have built it high enough that God is willing to forgive us.

It's the opposite of that. It's the joyful recognition that I am lost and that I am poor. But that God is willing to forgive me now. And that although I have no claim on him, that Jesus Christ offers freedom and release.

And he comes to me and he takes all the sins from the past and all the sins from the future and all the sins from the present. And he releases us from them so that we can have jubilation. Which is very good news to the poor.

[25 : 23] Brothers and sisters, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake their way and the evil their thoughts.

And let them turn to the Lord. Repent. He will have mercy on you. And to our God. For he will abundantly pardon. Let's kneel and pray.

Our Father, giver of all good gifts.

We bow before you, full of thanksgiving this morning for all the good things we enjoy in this life. But most especially for the gift of salvation through your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

For we know that though he was rich, for our sake he became poor. So that through his poverty we might become rich.

[26 : 42] Grant that unlike the people of Nazareth, we would have eyes to see Jesus. His ears to hear his good news. And that in daily gracious repentance, our lives might reflect the freedom that Jesus has won for us.

Freedom from the penalty and the power of sin. And we ask that you would anoint us with your spirit to proclaim that good news freely and generously.

Not only with our lips, but with our lives joyfully laid down in love and service for others. Lord, in your mercy.

The earth is the Lord's. And everything in it. The world. The world. And all who live in it. Father, as we lift up our world to you today.

A world in turmoil. We remember your steadfast love and faithfulness undergirding all creation. We pray that you would have mercy on those who have lost their life savings in the global financial crisis.

[27 : 59] We pray for wisdom for those who are charged with leadership. And who are in a position to act to restore order and confidence.

And we pray that many hearts would be turned to you. To the riches of your grace poured out in Christ Jesus. We thank you that in a secular age you are not tongue-tied as we so often are. You are not silent. The nations rage. The kingdoms totter. You lift your voice. The earth melts. Empower your people everywhere to boldly share the good news of Jesus. To act justly. To love mercy. And to walk humbly with you.

Especially we pray for missionaries all over the world. For missionaries that we support here from St. John's. For Sharon Johnson in Burkina Faso.

[29 : 02] And Heather Bellamy in Afghanistan. Fill them with your spirit as they serve you, Lord. Protect them. Provide for them. And make their ministries fruitful.

Lord, in your mercy. Hear her. We pray for the people of the United States as they head to the polls in these uncertain times.

And for ourselves as Canadians facing a general election this week. A federal election. Thank you for the great blessing of living in a free nation under the rule of law.

Let us not be held captive by any worldly ideologies. As we exercise the privilege of participating in our democracy. Oh, Lord. Our hope is in you alone.

We pray for discernment in casting our vote. And that you would continually raise up leaders for our nation. Who will govern wisely. And rule in justice and righteousness.

[30 : 06] Father, we pray for your mercy to be poured out on all those who are experiencing most acutely the devastating effects of sin and evil in our fallen world.

We pray that you would have mercy on our Canadian troops in Afghanistan. Cover them with your protection. We thank you for the safe return of Christopher, of Bradley, and of Brett.

And Father, we pray for special grace and help today for Christian brothers and sisters who are facing terrible persecution in Orissa, India, and in Iraq. Lord, in your mercy.

Father, we lift up our Anglican communion. Looking to you for the true unity. The unity that comes from bowing the knee to the one whose name is above all other names.

We pray for all those charged with making decisions and leading. That you would give true repentance and your Holy Spirit as they are called to discern the way forward for the communion as a whole and in local situations.

[31 : 20] We pray for the Anglican Network in Canada. For Bishops Greg Venables and Don Harvey. We pray that together we would continue in humility and love as we contend for the faith of the gospel.

Not trusting in our own righteousness. But in the way of giving himself up for us. We pray for all the trustees of the Anglican Network parishes that are facing legal action.

And especially for our own trustees. For Christine Kukas. Krista Frippel. David Lay. Michael Bentley.

And David Short. Help them to stand firm in one spirit. Full of wisdom and love and the endurance of faith. We pray that you would continue to sustain all our clergy and lay leaders and their families here at St. John's.

Nourish them with your word. Defend them with your mighty power. And we pray for them as we pray for us all. That as we are called upon to explain our actions as a conversation.

[32 : 30] Our words would be full of grace. And seasoned with salt. Lord. In your mercy. And on this Thanksgiving Sunday.

We give great thanks for the babies who are baptized. For Lucas. Teresa. Benjamin. And Mark. We pray your blessing on them and on us.

As we seek to be faithful in nurturing them under the sound of the gospel. We thank you for the ordination of Jim's salad in this evening. And pray that you would pour out your blessing on Jim and Amber.

Tonight. That Jesus would be exalted and glorified. Tonight and throughout Jim's ministry. Glorify yourself in all the ministries of the church.

And especially we pray for the upcoming women's conference. And the youth retreats. This month. Lord. In your mercy. We pray for those among us who are suffering.

[33 : 32] Crippled by fear. Or mental illness. Lonely or bereaved. Trapped in addiction. Bowed down in pain or illness.

Raise them up. Oh Lord. So that they might live in your presence. Especially we pray. For Rowena. Fiona. And in a moment of silence we pray. That for all those we know. Who are in need of your healing touch.

Lord Jesus. We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. Amen.