

Released

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[0 : 0 0] So, for the first time in 16 years, we had babies at my family Christmas. And Ella, one of my nieces, is 16, but this year, this last year, I should say, my niece Hallie and my nephew Connor, brother and sister, they both had kids for the first time. So we had a nine month old and we also had a two month old.

And it's exciting, you know, they're going to grow up together as cousins and of course that's a lot of fun. But when Lane was born, they decided that they wanted to take Carson to the hospital so he could see and he could meet Carson to the hospital so he could meet Lane.

And once they get there, it doesn't go exactly what they think. Bree, who is Lane's mom, Connor's wife, had given Carson a lot of attention.

And so she had been pouring into him and investing in him because she was pregnant with her first and he's, you know, months old and so she's living vicariously through him. And there is a picture of Bree sweetly holding baby Lane like this, but she has her arm around Carson.

And my niece sends the picture out and as soon as I saw it, I started laughing. I mean, I laughed out loud because, do you want to guess what his expression was?

[1 : 2 7] He was not looking at the camera. He was looking at this baby like, who the heck are you? Right? And it was so funny, but at the same time, it's really kind of a reality check.

He saw him maybe the way that Cain looked at Abel. He reminds us that something is broken in us even when we're babies. And it's evidence that childhood innocent isn't quite as innocent as we want to think it is.

Boy, I sound like a downer, don't I? It's also a reminder of David's words in Psalm 51-5, surely I was brought forth or born in iniquity. Because here's the truth.

Nobody had to teach Carson how to be jealous. It was already there. Right? And that may sound extreme because we're talking about babies. I mean, he's sweet and he's cute. He's precious.

And I'm like, I love you, you little sinner. And I think that's probably what God says to me. I love you, you little sinner. Right? It isn't extreme. It really is reality.

[2 : 3 6] And so each of us are born broken sinners, not just innocent babies. And now we may not want to think of it that way, but it's really important when we think about what it means to be released.

Let's start with what is true, that we're born broken. We're born as sinners. And Jesus has come to do something about that. He's come to release us.

So, if I were to ask you, what are we released from? Here's what I know with this group of women. We would probably get very correct theological answers.

He released us from sin. He released us from brokenness. He released us from, I don't know, death would be the other one that's the most obvious.

And in our head and in our intellectual understanding, so when I talk about head, I'm talking about our intellectual understanding. In our understanding, then what we would say is we know we need a savior because we need to be released from those things.

[3 : 39] And we need Jesus because we know that we cannot save ourselves. But tonight, I want to pull back the curtains a little bit. And I want to say, let's just get honest. And honest, we may have that theological answer, but a lot of times, functionally, we live...

Sorry, the timer is still going off there. Functionally, we live as if... Well, we're not the worst of the worst, but we were bad enough that we needed Jesus to save us.

Now, nobody ever says that out loud. But functionally, a lot of times, that is how we think. Because we do want to be considered good people.

We want to be considered good Christians, right? And so that's part of that, well, I'm not as bad as so-and-so. You know, I'm not the worst of the worst, but bad enough that I needed a savior.

And the question then becomes, well, is that God's perspective? Does he see us in that same way? Well, I think we obviously would say, no, that isn't. He would not say that you're not the worst of the worst.

[4 : 46] And he would not say that you were bad enough that you needed Jesus to save you. So we'll come back to that in just a minute. But for now, I want to talk about the concept of release.

Because it is absolutely important to understanding a facet of salvation. So when we think about release, one of the best examples in Scripture actually happens when Jesus is on trial.

And if you remember the story, there is a man named Barabbas. And Barabbas is a convicted murderer, an insurrectionist. And he is presented along with Jesus.

And the crowds, or the Jews, decide, release him and kill Jesus. So it's an account of a guilty prisoner being granted release.

And so right there in the story of Jesus' trial and his crucifixion, there's an example of what it looks like to be released. Because when Barabbas was granted release, he was given freedom to leave.

[5 : 51] But Jesus was condemned and slated for execution that very day. So when we think about release, scripturally, what that word means, it has two parts to it. One is to acquit and remit.

So in other words, to release the accused by not pressing the charge against them. And the other is to remit, or to remit means a person's debt through transfer. And we hear that verbiage.

We hear that language when we're talking about the gospel that our sin has been transferred to Jesus. And we're not guilty because he took our sin for us. But the other part of release that we don't always get, we may get it in our head, but growing in Christ and maturing in our faith, part of that process is understanding that we have, as captives, have been set free, that we have been released.

So let the captive depart in freedom with no holds at all. And yet we're going to see that we don't always live that way. So to better understand the term release and to move a theological truth from our head to our heart, which is a journey, it's never just something easily done.

But I do want to take you to a passage of scripture and to break it down for you, because it fills in some of the details, right? The details of what it means that in Christ we have been released. So if you have your Bibles, look at Luke chapter 4.

[7 : 08] We're going to look at 16 through 21. So the context of this passage, this is early on in Jesus' ministry.

He has been baptized, the Spirit of God descended on him in the form of the dove. He's gone to the wilderness. He's been tempted by Satan.

Then he leaves the wilderness, goes into Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and he begins a preaching tour. He preaches and he teaches and he does miracles all throughout Galilee. And then here, where we come to, is Jesus goes home.

And I just went home for Christmas, so this is really right here in my face. I'm like, oh yeah, everything is different than my normal life. But Jesus gets to Nazareth, and this is what it says in verse 16.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

[8 : 18] He unrolled the scroll, and he found the place where it was written. And he said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And he rolled up the scroll, and he gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

I can picture that scene, can't you? It's very descriptive. And I picture him unrolling that scroll, looking for that specific passage, and then rolling it back, handing it to him.

And when he sat down, probably every eye in the room was like, Okay, what's coming next? Because that meant he was going to teach. But what we know from the Gospel accounts is that the Jews were waiting, and they were hoping for a Messiah.

However, their idea of who he would be, and what the Messiah would do, was very different than who Jesus actually was. To them, the Messiah's purpose was to throw off the Roman oppressors, and to return Israel to a place of prominence and glory.

[9 : 32] They thought that their greatest need was to be free from Rome. But Jesus was sent to address this deeper need, the real need. Now, we all know what that's like, because we all have this idea of this is what my need is.

But when we get underneath it, and when God continues to make us deal with it, he gets to this deeper thing. And that's what's happening here. So the real need is to be released from spiritual captivity, where sin, death, blindness, and oppression dominated their lives.

So Jesus, when he read that prophecy of Isaiah, he said that it was fulfilled. And he was teaching them, first of all, you have a greater need than Rome, Roman oppression, and someone is here who can do something about it.

I would love to have been in that synagogue that day. I would love to have seen it. I think I would have been like, Hallelujah! You know, but this is not, we don't see that in this passage at all.

So Jesus begins quoting the prophet Isaiah from Isaiah 61. And he starts by saying that he's anointed that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. In other words, he is telling them without telling them, I am the Messiah.

[10 : 41] I have been set apart. I have been consecrated for this messianic office. And he is also telling them that he has been empowered with the necessary power to do what he came to do.

He didn't come going, I hope I can do it. He came saying, I am going to do this. If we were to study the word anointed, that word, we would find that there's an associated Greek word called chasma, C-H-A-S-M-A, which probably makes us think of the word chasm, which is how it would be defined.

So a chasm, a gulf, or a gaping hole. When Adam and Eve sinned, we know that our relationship with God was broken. But it wasn't just like a simple break. You know, like if you break your arm and you break it in one place and you can put it back together and it's pretty easy.

It wasn't that. It was a complete shattering. And this chasm was created between God and humanity. As the Messiah, Jesus came proclaiming, I am the one who's anointed, chosen, and empowered to restore the relationship with God by closing the chasm.

Now, if you've ever been taught the bridge illustration, you understand that you have us over here on one side. There's a gulf in between or a chasm in between. And then God is over on the other side. Well, that's where that comes from.

[12 : 03] Have any of you seen the Grand Canyon? If you've seen it, raise your hand. The Grand Canyon is absolutely amazing. If you need a place to go for vacation, I highly recommend it. And I don't know, for those of you who have seen it, if you have the same reaction.

But my reaction was, as I stood and I looked across that canyon, it absolutely took my breath away. And in that moment, I was aware of something that I never really thought about before.

If I had gone back 100 yards, ran as hard and as fast as I could possibly run, there would be no way for me to make it to the other side of that chasm.

It was too wide. And if I wanted to get to the other side, to the other end, then it had to happen apart from my ability and apart from my strength. In the same way, this chasm that developed between God and us requires someone with the power to close the gap.

So, sitting at the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus said, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He's anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. In other words, someone is here who can close the gap.

[13 : 17] But, notice who He's come to proclaim it to. He's not come to proclaim it to just anybody. He's come to proclaim it to the poor.

And this is where we see them stumble. Because, how many of us want to be considered poor? They could not perceive themselves in that way. But the poor, by definition here in this verse, means to be spiritually destitute beggars, who are helpless and powerless.

There is something in our brokenness that makes us want to fight against that. Because we want to prove that we can overcome. And that we have the power to get ourselves out of the mess.

And yet, Jesus says, No, you don't. And I think that's where we might say, Well, we're not the worst of the worst. But bad enough that we needed Jesus to save us. And yet, Jesus paints a picture of how God sees us.

And here's who you are. You are a spiritually destitute beggar who is powerless and helpless. And believe it or not, that's actually part of the good news.

[14 : 25] Because when you have eyes to see it, then you have eyes to see the one who can do something about it. It hit me as I was working on this. I thought, You know, a lot of times as a Christ follower, I think we think that God is moved by our goodness.

If I'm obedient, if I have my quiet time, if I do all the things that I'm supposed to do, that that is going to move God's heart towards us. But based on what this passage is teaching us, it's not our goodness that moves God.

It's our helplessness. Right? It's that powerlessness in our spiritually destitute lives. God cannot resist it. I mean, nobody at the synagogue in Nazareth invited Jesus there.

He came to them. Now, for just a moment, I want you to picture yourself losing everything. That's a terrible thought. But picture yourself losing everything.

Your job, your home, your family, your clothes, your car, your sense of identity, your sense of purpose. Anything that you think makes you, you. Gone.

[15 : 33] And then add to that your relationship with the Lord, because it's non-existent. Your prayer life is gone. You no longer think about God. You don't see Him at work in your life. You no longer worship Him.

You no longer live in community. And when we can see ourselves like that, then we begin to kind of understand that we are poor.

That we are those spiritually destitute beggars who are powerless and helpless. In the garden, when Adam and Eve sinned, this chasm between them and God was there for the first time.

And one of the ways that we see that being evidence is the fact that they are no longer walking with Him in the garden in the cool of the day. In fact, they are no longer living in the garden because they are cast out.

God places a gate there. He puts an angel there with a flaming sword so they cannot get back into the garden. And they have to move out into this desert area where they have to grind out a life through hard work and pain.

[16 : 35] And there is no way back except the hope of a promise. And when God speaks to the serpent, He plants the seed of hope.

He tells the serpent, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring. He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. This is Jesus.

Jesus who says, I'm here. I'm anointed. I'm set apart for this specific need. I'm empowered to do what the poor, what you cannot do for yourself. I'm here to close the gap.

I'm here to close the gap between you and God. But that is not all. I mean, if that was all, that would be enough, it would seem. But Jesus said, no, there's more that you need. And you need to be released from some things.

So Jesus describes His messianic mission as one being where people will be released specifically from three things. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.

[17 : 35] So we're captive. He has sent me to recover the sight of the blind. And to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Liberty means released. I mean, that's literally what it means in the Greek.

It means release. It's not just a simple declaration like you're released. It is a dismissal of something. It means to send or depart. But this is the word picture that you get with that word.

It's where some part of a hole is taken away or separated from what remains. So let's say that my ring is doing damage to my finger. Jesus will come, take that ring, and separate it.

And there's something that remains. But you know what? When you look at my finger, there's not a gaping hole. And so what remains when Jesus releases us isn't gaping holes in our life. It's who we were always created to be that becomes evident.

Because we were created in Christ. So he came to take the part that holds us captive. That life with God could remain.

[18 : 34] And I think it's such a beautiful picture when the things that we want to hold on to and we think are so important in our life, and God is saying, no, I've come to release you from those things. We need to learn how to let go because there's not going to be a gaping hole.

We're going to be more like Christ, right? It's beautiful. So Jesus says, my mission is to release you. So I will take away what has held you captive by being taken away for you.

And when he is taken away for us, what remains, of course, when we put our faith and trust in Christ is this new creation. And we are in this relationship with God, the God, the God who's making all things new.

And that should give us hope and that should give us joy. And that should make us want to shout, hallelujah. So Jesus takes away the things that hold us captive. And yet, again, moving from head to heart, we have to acknowledge that functionally we know that theologically, but we don't always live that practically.

So it's common for Christians to functionally live as if we're still in captivity. Right? And that's a process. I mean, we will be learning to live free the rest of our life. And even when Christ comes back for us and we know a different type of freedom, we'll be like, oh, I wasn't free at all.

[19 : 56] I didn't know freedom. Now I know freedom. So one of the ways that we functionally live as if we're still in captivity, we think that God holds our debt over us.

That, you know, when we do it wrong, when we don't do what we think pleases him, that God is the one who has an issue with it. And it's actually us that have that issue because we are living functionally as if he is holding our debt over our heads, when in fact, he's actually saying there is no debt.

It has been fully and completely paid. It would be three days after Barabbas was released from prison.

Imagine if Pilate said, you know, I've changed my mind. I want you to go, tells the soldiers, I want you to go and I want you to get Barabbas and take him, execute him because he's a criminal.

Well, you know why that would never have happened? Because in the eyes of the Roman government, he was a free man. And in the eyes of the Lord, the Father looks at us and he doesn't see those things that we think are the worst things about us.

[21 : 01] He does see them, but he doesn't. He sees them through the righteousness of Christ. So that's one of the ways that we still act like that we are prisoners.

Another way is we know that God has unlocked the door, the prison door. And yet we walk out of it for the day and then we go right back into it for the evening. And the way that we go back into it is we go back into it with our thinking.

We think that we still live in there. We go to that cot that's on that dirty, dirty floor. When God has said, the door is open, you are free, you can be released. So we have to remember our old and familiar ways of living.

Jesus has come to release us from them. And we do that with him. Our living in the way that we think. But this is probably the one that I think for sure would be one of the harder things for me.

But for a lot of Christians as I've had time to talk with people and do ministry with them. One of the ways that we stay captive is we worship a happy God.

[22 : 06] Yeah, a happy God rather than the God of the Bible. Better be good and keep God happy or else. The happy God. But because of Christ, we no longer have to worship a happy God.

Because he is not the God of the or else. Instead, he is the God of more than. Right? And so he will say to us, I will do for you more than you can imagine.

I will love you more than you can conceive. I will forgive you for more than you even realize. I am the God of more than.

And as we begin to recognize and understand how we are seeing God. Not what we're telling ourselves just theologically. But how we are functionally living on a daily basis.

We might actually say, wait a second. I'm living in that prison that I was actually released from. So Jesus, he helps us by helping us recover our sight. And to recover our sight, that means that he restores our ability to understand and to perceive and to know God.

[23 : 17] And isn't it interesting? It doesn't say that he came to heal the bone. He came to restore our sight. And there's a difference. So there's this restoration that is in the context of being released.

We're released from not knowing God and restored to being able to know him. He also says that he sets at liberty those who are oppressed.

And the word oppressed there, it means to break. To break in pieces. To shatter. To crush. Or to bruise. Which should make us think about that chasm. When that was created between Ab and Eve, there was a complete shattering.

When we were separated from God and we experienced brokenness, it was a complete brokenness. That destroyed our unity. And it destroyed our completeness in him.

I say, Jerry Maguire did not make complete Dorothy at all. You know, that's a movie. But God is the one who completes us in Christ. Yeah.

[24 : 19] So our relationship with God was shattered and fragmented. And we were crushed. And we were bruised. And we look at ourselves and go, well, maybe not. You know, I look okay. You know, there are other people who look more crushed and more bruised than I do.

But from God's perspective, he's like, no. Every single one of you were crushed and bruised beyond your ability to recover. We were no longer free. We were captives to sin and death and oppressed by our sinful nature.

We were poor and destitute. We are the spiritual beggars, right? And that's the mess that Jesus walks into. I'm here. I'm here to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

A time when, once again, you can be acceptable to God. And I've come to preach good news to the poor. And what that good news looks like, I'm here to close the gap. I'm here to release you from captivity.

I'm here to restore your sight so that you can know God and understand. I'm here to release you from the things that have shattered our relationship and the things that have shattered your life.

[25 : 23] Now, at this point, when Jesus is telling them these things, you would think they would fall down on their faces and worship.

And that is not the rest of the story. They were offended by him because it's hard to see ourselves as the poor. It's hard to see ourselves as needy.

And it's hard to see that we need, truly need a savior. Not just for, to get us saved, but we need a savior every single day.

And what's so sweet about this passage, and sweet may not be a word that you would ever associate it with, but the sweetness of the Lord is that he begins to teach them in such a way to provoke them so they can see their spiritual blindness.

They don't, at least yet. We don't know the rest of the story. But the spiritual blindness that prevented them from seeing and understanding the truth or the good news was this.

[26 : 27] God has come to make good on his promise. A way to become acceptable once more. And the way he did that, Jesus himself became poor. He became the captive.

He was the one who was oppressed. And he was the one who was crushed and bruised. So when we look at what Jesus did, I would say that he was very successful at his mission.

Right? We don't think of it in that context very often. We look and we think, well, you know, it didn't go quite the way that you think it would. But Jesus was successful.

And tonight you may be thinking, you know, Pamela, you haven't told me anything that I didn't already know. Okay. Well, that may be true. These are truths. And we were just digging deeper into those truths.

But this is the question I want you to consider. What difference does Jesus' mission make to you now? Not when you were saved, but today.

[27 : 28] What difference is it making in your daily life? Is it something that you only needed to become a Christian? Or is it something that you need every day?

Well, stay tuned and we'll answer that next week. So let me pray for us and then we're going to break up into our discussion. One of the things I need somebody to do at each of the tables, if you don't have somebody who's assigned as a leader, if somebody would just read the questions.

And we are going to, we'll have about 25 minutes. So, Father, we're just grateful again to be here tonight. We're grateful that we have time around the table.

And I pray, Lord, that something has been said tonight that just provokes thoughts and understanding, just creates a hunger in our hearts to know you more intimately, to see this amazing thing that you did for us when you truly fulfilled those scriptures.

And so I pray for your blessing upon the discussion. I pray and ask that you would let it be rich and let it be deep and we invite you into it at each table. And so we're grateful, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

[28 : 36] All right. I'll bring this back together.