

7. Jesus Proclaimed Liberty to the Captives

In Luke 4:18-19, we read, “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’” In these verses, we see that Christ quoted Isaiah 61:1-2a. Then, in Luke 4:21, we read, “And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’” In these two passages, we see that one of the ministries of Christ, as our Shepherd, was to proclaim liberty to the captives. That will be the focus of our topic today.

The word that is translated “liberty” or “deliverance” is also translated “forgiveness” or “remission” in several passages of Scripture. Christ used this word in Matthew 26:28, when he said: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” It means *to pardon or let go of sin so it is as if the sin had never been committed*. The word that is translated “captives” comes from the word that means *a spear* and speaks of one who has been held in captivity.

Jesus was speaking to some of the Jews in John 8. John 8:31-33 says, “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, “You will be made free?”’” These Jews believed on Christ. However, they were still in bondage. Here, Christ tells them that if they are true disciples, they will continue in His Word. He promises that because the Word is the truth, the truth will set them free.

Although they believed Christ, these Jews did not even understand they were captives, and were in bondage. Christ told them that only by abiding in the Word would they become true disciples and be set free from the guilt and shame of their past. Christ made it very clear that He sets people free from their captivity. Christ went on to say, in John 8:36, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” A study of the entire chapter will show that these people believed the words Christ spoke, but they did not put their trust in Him. Instead, they were in spiritual bondage to Satan. Jesus was proclaiming liberty to the captives, and they were making the choice to remain in spiritual bondage.

Some people become Christians, yet remain in a different kind of captivity or bondage. One of the greatest hindrances, to the spiritual growth of Christians, is continuing guilt and shame about sins they have committed in the past. Sometimes, these are sins that were committed long before they placed their trust in Christ. Others are sins people have committed since becoming a Christian. However, this continuing guilt continues to hinder and prevent spiritual growth. One of the ministries, of Christ, was to help those who followed Him understand that He came to set them free from their past.

Paul understood how Christ had set him free from his past. He summarized it so well in 1 Timothy 1:12-14. There, we read, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He

counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” Paul knew his past, yet he understood the mercy and grace Christ had shown to him.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all tell us about Christ choosing the twelve. In Mark and Luke, the name of Matthew is given and nothing is mentioned about his past. However, Matthew 10:3 says, “Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus...” Although Matthew was writing many years after this event happened, he knew he had been set free from his past and was not ashamed to admit that past.

In fact, both Mark and Luke, when telling about the original call of Matthew, talk about Levi, the tax collector. However, in Matthew 9:9-10, Matthew uses his own name, because he is not afraid to admit his past. Those verses say, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.” When Christ sets people free from their past, He takes away the guilt and shame of that past. Matthew understood that he had been set free from the bondage of his past.

Christ also set free people who were in bondage to demons. Luke 8:2 says, “...and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities--Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons...” Mary Magdalene was set free from those demons and experienced the liberty of those who are set free. In fact, she was the first to see Christ after His resurrection. Mark 16:9 says, “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.”

We see an example of the liberty people experienced when Christ set them free from demon possession in Mark 5. Mark 5:2-5 says, “And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.”

In Mark 5:15, we see the change that Christ made in the life of this man when Christ set him free from the bondage in which he had lived for many years. That verse says, “Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.” This man had been given liberty and was freed from his captivity to Satan. As a result, instead of being untamable, he was sitting and talking with Jesus. Instead of being naked, he was clothed. Instead of being insane, he was in his right mind. Instead of being in spiritual bondage, he now had the eternal life that only Christ gives.

The liberty that he now had in his life had so changed him that he went and told everyone he met. Mark 5:19-20 says, “However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.’ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled.” Christ told him to go home and tell his friends. (He was alone in the caves and had not had friends for a long time). His life was so changed that he went throughout the region telling what Christ had done for him.

Galatians speaks of another kind of bondage. False teachers were trying to bring the Gentile Christians under the bondage of the law. Paul described what these teachers were doing, in Galatians 1:6-7. “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Paul made it very clear that these teachers were perverting the Gospel of the grace of God.

The purpose of the law is explained in Galatians 3:24-25. Those verses say, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” The law shows people their need for Christ. Once they become Christians, they are no longer under the law. The false teachers were trying to bring the Christians back under the bondage of the law

As a result, Paul said, in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Then, Galatians 5:13 adds, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Christ came to set us free, so that we can be free to serve one another in love. This is the freedom that can give every Christian a real purpose in life.

Christians can be held in captivity by Satan. They can be held in captivity by their own sin. They can be held in captivity by guilt and shame because of past sin in their lives. They can be held in bondage by trying to keep the law. Christ said that He came to proclaim liberty to all. As spiritual leaders, we are to follow the example of Christ and help people learn to live in the liberty that Christ has given. That is why it is very important to show developing leaders how to help other Christians learn to experience the freedom Christ has given. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to share the liberty that we have in Christ.