



REACH THE WORLD: THE YEAR OF GOD'S FAVOR (Sermon)

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Scripture Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”

Introduction

Have you ever been under someone’s disapproval or disfavor? There is the story of a young girl, Christel, who was about six or seven years old, and her father remembers trying to comb her hair. Christel had very frizzy hair so trying to get a comb through it was for her a very painful experience and for her dad a time-consuming affair. Christel’s mom, who was a nurse, was on a late shift at work so Christel’s dad was in charge of the children’s bedtime routine. Christel had taken her shower before bed, and so it was her dad’s job to comb and plait her hair.

Sitting in front of that full head of hair and hearing Christel’s constant cries of pain and discomfort every time her dad tried to pull the comb through a portion of her locks, he did what every man does. He decided to tackle it from another perspective. Since the most painful part was getting the comb through the ends, Christel’s dad reasoned that if he trimmed the ends, then the combing would be a lot smoother. And guess what? It worked! So, Christel went to bed happy and contented and her dad was very proud of himself.

The next morning, however, when Christel’s mom undid the plaits in order to style Christel’s hair for the day, she discovered that her child’s hair was very uneven. Let’s just say that she made it very plain that he was never to approach their daughter’s hair with a pair of scissors ever again. Christel’s dad had fallen under his wife’s disfavor.

That's a humorous example, and of course Christel's mom quite quickly forgave her husband's misdemeanor. But imagine living under the constant disfavor of someone significant in your life. It may be a workmate, a boss, or even a parent. What about being under God's disfavor? The people in Jesus' day felt like they were living under God's disfavor. All aspects of their everyday lives seemed to remind them of this.

Politically, they were under the rule of the Romans. This was a constant reminder that their sin as a nation had caused them to fall under God's disfavor and, hence, their occupation by a foreign nation. Socially, they were divided into different classes of people. For those at the bottom of the social ladder, it was another reminder that they were under God's disfavor. Religiously, the setup of the temple reinforced the idea that only the male priests were far removed from God's disfavor. Those who happened to get sick were definitely viewed as being under God's disfavor.

Then one day a Rabbi named Jesus visited the local synagogue, read from the scroll of Isaiah, and concluded by saying that He was sent by God to bring good news. He was to be the embodiment of the year of Jubilee, the year of God's favor.

The year of God's favor

The Jews had a custom, ordained by God, that not only would every seventh day of the week be a Sabbath—a day of rest—but that every seventh *year* would be a Sabbath—a year when the land would not be farmed. And after every seventh Sabbath year (i.e., every 50th year), there would be what was called the 'year of Jubilee.' In that year:

- All slaves would be set free.
- All men whose poverty had forced them to sell their family land, would receive that land back again.
- Those who had lost family members into slavery or imprisonment would be reunited with their loved ones.

So, you can see why it was called "The Jubilee". That is what Jesus said His mission was. He came to bring good news to the poor, the kind of news that had them dancing in the streets every fifty years. He came to bring broken families together. To bind up the broken-hearted and heal the hurting. He came to free slaves. To swing open the doors of darkness, to untie men's hands, to unfold their wings.

Jesus came to proclaim the acceptable year, the year of God's grace, the year of Jubilee. Not just once but every fifty years, because that was already the case. Jesus came to bring a worldwide Jubilee; that every day would speak good news to the poor, bring liberty to the captives, and healing to the broken-hearted. It would speak forgiveness for the guilty, freedom for those who feel controlled, release for those who feel trapped. Jesus' Jubilee would bring deliverance, laughter, relief, and joy.

Good news to the poor

The word used for the poor in Luke 4:18 means to be thoroughly frightened, to cower down, or hide oneself for fear. Have you ever felt such fear that left you shaking? The other day there was a fascinating program on TV about the amazing work that surgeons do at a certain

hospital in the United Kingdom. One of the cases the TV crew was filming was that of a man who was about to undergo a double lung transplant. As he was being wheeled into the operating room he was visibly shaking. The nurse who was attending him asked if he was cold or if he was feeling afraid. In a typically British understatement he said, “Yes, I am feeling a little nervous.” He was shaking from fear. That is what it means to be ‘the poor’.

The poor were those who were reduced to begging, asking alms, destitute of wealth, influence, position, or honor. It describes those who are helpless and powerless to accomplish an end.

There are many things that can leave us frightened today. Losing our job. Diseases such as coronavirus, cancer, or Alzheimer’s. Being left on our own. When disaster strikes in the community, people are left poor. Then it is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that you are on the receiving end of God’s disfavor. We have the privilege of continuing Christ’s ministry by reaching out to the world and getting involved in relieving suffering. In this way we give the message of the Jubilee; we spread the good news that God is looking on the world with favor.

Healing for broken hearts

The word “broken hearted” means “to shatter one’s strength”. Jesus came to “bind up” which means “to set right, as in a broken bone”. Have you ever experienced a broken bone? I have known others who have, and they had to wear a cast for several weeks in order to allow the break to heal.

Similarly, the broken hearted are people whose hearts have been broken to pieces by pain. They have been deceived, abused, and let down by people in their lives. These are people who are suffering under crushing grief and are bound by bad memories. They are hopeless and see no point in living. Perhaps I just described someone you know. Perhaps I just described you. Those who have experienced the death of a loved one know the pain of a broken heart. Those who have been betrayed or let down by someone who swore their undying love to them know the pain of a broken heart. Those who have been mistreated by someone who should have been protecting them know the pain of a broken heart.

Jesus came to “bind up the broken hearted”. He is the great physician who can make you whole again. Listen to God’s voice: “The LORD is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Ps 34:18, NIV). When Jesus says he will bind up the broken hearted, he is committing to stay with us for as long as it takes for healing to come. He will not just give us some painkillers and send us on our way. He promises to walk with us through the whole healing process.

As followers of Christ, we have the opportunity to reach the world with the good news of the Jubilee. We can embody the healing power of Jesus by offering a listening ear, a sympathetic heart, and practical support. Like broken bones, the broken hearted need a long-term commitment in order for healing to take place. Thus, ours will be a ministry of long-term presence.

Freedom for prisoners

Many people today live in “bondage”, under the control of something from which they are unable to break away. Whether it is alcohol, drugs, sex, gambling, eating disorders, fear of the future, fear of failure, bitterness, or anger, there are people who are so bound by habits and lifestyle choices that there is no freedom in their lives. These people often live lives of quiet desperation, especially if they are within the church. But Jesus has good news for them too.

Jesus came to bring people out of captivity. Deliverance begins with a decision to let Jesus lead us out of whatever prison we may be in. “Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’” (John 8:34-36).

A pastor in the United Kingdom remembers helping to mentor a woman who had grown up in a world of witchcraft and communicating with the dead. She described how the temperature in the room would drop when the “spirit” of a dead person would enter a room. After she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour, there were several occasions when she called the pastor to pray with her so she could be free from the prison of the “spirit world”. After several months she had been released from her prison and was no longer visited by unwelcome “spirits”. The Son had set her free.

Followers of Jesus have the opportunity to reach out to those who are imprisoned. There are a number of different courses aimed at addressing various addictions that we can encourage people to attend. We may even want to be a mentor to them to encourage them along their journey to freedom. The good news of the Jubilee is that freedom is possible for anyone in bondage.

Sight for the blind

Sight problems were common in Jesus’ day, and physical blindness is still a problem in the world today. In 2010 the World Health Organization estimated that globally the number of people of all ages visually impaired was 285 million, of whom 39 million were blind. Over two million people in the UK live with sight loss. That’s around one person in 30. Living with visual impairment and blindness can be challenging and isolating.

A really valuable Adventist resource is Christian Record Services for the blind. They offer free resources and programs to people who are legally blind that offer empowerment, connection, and engagement.

But physical blindness is not the only sight problem. We refer to sight when we think of not being able to “see” the future clearly or being unable to “see” the way out of a particular situation. The pastor from the United Kingdom mentioned earlier remembers receiving a phone call from a young woman who had started to visit his church and was having Bible studies. She had become pregnant, and her boyfriend wanted to abort the baby, but she wasn’t so sure. He threatened to break off their relationship if she went through with the pregnancy. She didn’t feel as if she could bring up a child on her own. She couldn’t see a way out of the situation.

The pastor tried his best to give her the Bible's perspective on how God views unborn life. Then he prayed with her that God would give her clarity on how to move forward. She decided to keep the baby, and ever after she was very grateful that this pastor had "opened her eyes" to see God's perspective.

Reaching the world with the good news of the Jubilee can range from assisting those with physical sight challenges, to helping people come to a place of greater spiritual insight and clarity.

Release for the oppressed

The oppressed are those who feel discouraged, crushed, or bruised. Areas of their lives are sore from being weighed down with a heavy burden of guilt. To these Jesus brings pardon and forgiveness.

Release from oppression was what the woman at the well felt after her encounter with Jesus (John 4:1-26). She had come to the well at midday because she was weighed down with the guilt of several failed marriages. She could not face the condemning stares and whispers of others, so she came to the well at a time when no one else was expected to be there. Yet, after talking with Jesus, she was so thrilled that she left her water jar behind and excitedly went and told all the people in her town, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (John 4:29). She didn't feel condemned by Jesus but rather went away released from her burden of guilt.

Today we understand the close connection between the mind and the body. Some physical illnesses are caused or worsened by our mental state. In other words, carrying a burden of guilt and shame can manifest itself as a physical ailment. As we go out to reach the world with the good news of the Jubilee, we can help bring release from oppression by pointing people to Jesus as their Saviour from sin and guilt. Introducing people to our loving and gracious Redeemer can bring true release from the mental and spiritual burdens that many carry around each day. Jesus' invitation is clear, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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" (Matt 11:28-30).

Conclusion

Jesus came to let us know that we are in God's favor, not his disfavor. We are under God's smile not his frown. We are under God's grace not his anger. You and I have the privilege of continuing to be the embodiment of God's favor to the world. This is the good news with which we are to reach the world.