

Setting the Captives Free

Scripture: Luke 4:18 “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 broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

Jesus had just subjected himself to the assaults of Satan. It was the beginning of his public ministry. Days earlier he had been baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit had confirmed Jesus’ ministry by descending upon him in the form of a dove. The Father himself had affirmed Jesus’ ministry with the words “You are my beloved Son; in you I am well-pleased” (Luke 3:22).

He was then led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-2). He denied his appetite by fasting for forty days. Then he was tempted first by the devil in the area of appetite. Because Jesus was truly hungry from this extended fast, it would have been natural for him to give in to his appetite. But Jesus demonstrated that there is power to overcome in circumstances far more severe than most of us will ever face. Immediately after his victory in the wilderness, Jesus went to Nazareth in Galilee and went to the synagogue on Sabbath. Recognized as a Rabbi, Jesus was given the book of the prophet Isaiah. At the beginning of his ministry, He powerfully proclaimed its purpose.

This powerful proclamation has signaled good news for everyone since that day who has struggled to overcome unholy attachments, habits and addictions. Jesus, anointed by the Spirit, began his ministry of preaching the gospel to the poor. While it is true that many addicts spend all their money on riotous living (Luke 15:13), the main thrust of Jesus here addressed those who are poor in spirit (Compare Matthew 5:3 with Luke 6:21). For most who are in need of recovery, becoming poor in spirit is the greatest challenge. We think that we can control our addiction and our lives. We don’t think that we need God. Only when we honestly and humbly come to the place of admitting that we are powerless over our addictions, and that our lives have become unmanageable, so we become poor in spirit, and open to the truth of our need for God, a power greater than ourselves. Now the possibility of freedom from addiction has begun.

Quoting from Isaiah, Jesus further defined his ministry as his being sent “to heal the broken-hearted.” The vast majority of addicts are attempting to medicate some kind of pain using food, sex, relationships, shopping, work and a multitude of other possible attachments. They have hurts and wounds from living in this unfair world of sin. Trying to comfort themselves, they do not know that the heart of God is to be “the God of all comfort” in their lives (2

Corinthians 1:3). They may have heard with their ears, but not received into their hearts, the truth that “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Angry at God, they don’t understand that “in all their suffering, he also suffered, and he personally rescued them” (Isaiah 63:9). He was feeling the full force of the hurt without putting up a defense to protect himself. Therefore, he felt the pain more deeply than any other human being. He earned the right to claim the ministry of healing your broken heart.

Can anyone question the reality that addicts are in captivity, and need deliverance? Addiction is truly a form of slavery. It has been called a disability of the will, in which even our capacity to choose has been damaged. This slavery begins in many with genetic or character predispositions, but the addict also gives himself over to the addictive practice and loses the ability to choose freedom. He is indeed powerless, and needs a power greater than himself to restore him to sanity. When he makes a decision to turn his will and life over to a power greater than himself, God in the person of Jesus Christ, he finds freedom from captivity. The slavery that was previously not chosen now becomes the choice to become a love slave to Jesus Christ (Romans 6:15-18).

One of the cardinal characteristics of addiction is that addicts are in denial. They do not see that they are in bondage. Almost everyone else around them can clearly see that they have a problem, but they cannot. Jesus said that a part of his ministry was to give sight to the blind. In a very real sense all of us struggle with addictions or unholy attachments, but most of us don’t readily see this about ourselves. We all have hurts, habits and hang-ups, but some are wrapped in a Christian garb. Some Christians work so hard for the Lord that they neglect their own families. Their positive sense of self comes from working. They feel guilty if they are not meeting every request that comes. Others hold several church offices and neglect their own self care in the process. When hurts or disappointment comes, we would never think of using drugs, but we might go to the refrigerator or go shopping to make ourselves feel better. But we don’t see these addictions as a problem. We are truly blind. We don’t recognize the message that our addictions are giving God, that he is unable to meet these needs for us, so we functionally become our own gods.

If it is true that we are all addicted to something, to some type of sin, then we all need Jesus’ ministry today. Just as he was victorious over Satan when he was tempted in the area of appetite, he can give us the victory over our addictions today. The most powerful model of recovery is this: victory in Christ in community. Because we are blind to much of our own behavior, we need to be accountable to others in community. But we first need the power of God, truly a power great than ourselves to restore us to sanity. Just as we have turned our wills and our lives over to our addictive practices, we can choose to turn our wills and lives over to

the care of God. Will you trust him with yourself? Will you trust him to be your comforter? Will you trust him to manage your life, that he is powerful enough and wise enough to control the outcome of the circumstances of your life? Will you trust him to supply all of your needs (Philippians 4:19)? Will you judge God as good and faithful (Hebrews 11:11)? I invite you to join me today in letting God have all of you.