

## **WHAT DO YOU NEED?**

### **LUKE 4:14-22**

At some point in our lives, each of us reaches a point where we struggle. That has happened to me several times in my life. One point that stands out to me happened while I was in college. Most of you know I went to Auburn. I loved going to Auburn. Even today when I go to Auburn, it feels like home to me. But things weren't all rosy while I was there. At least for a portion of the time I was there, I went through a pretty serious depression. Truthfully, it took me years to get my life on track. I'm not going to go through what happened. It doesn't really matter. You just need to know that, eventually, with a lot of help and support, I got my life back on track.

I thought about that as I read this passage, because this passage occurs early in Jesus' ministry. When Jesus begins his ministry, he got baptized and then he went into the desert where he was tempted by the devil. This passage occurs immediately after he returns from the that encounter in the desert. He came into Nazareth and preached his very first sermon.

Most of the commentaries that I have read have focused on the figure of Jesus. They point out that this is the beginning of his ministry, and they focus on how amazed the people of Nazareth are. They talk about how this establishes his authority and build his reputation as the Messiah.

I chose to focus on something else this time. I focused on what Jesus said. Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah. The passage reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to Proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."

When I heard that, it led me to think back. Let me share with you just a few pastoral concerns I have dealt with in my career. In the interest of anonymity, none of these concerns belong to anyone who is a member of Copeland Presbyterian Church or even remotely associated with Copeland Presbyterian Church.

One person I pastored was an alcoholic. He attended AA. He had a very contentious relationship with his teenage daughter. He didn't approve of her lifestyle and it led them to argue. One person I dealt with was a woman who was mentally and psychologically abused by her stepmother for years. She lived in an utter hell for years and years, growing up in an environment where her stepmother belittle and humiliated her relentlessly. One person told me that her husband lost his job because he used a company computer to surf porn sites on the internet. She came to me because she was concerned about providing for her family with her job alone. I talked with one woman whose husband had told her he no longer loved her, and the list goes on and on.

Think for a moment about your own story. It may look remarkably similar to one of these stories. Chances are it's very different. But one truth is universal: life is difficult. It's difficult for all of us. We each have pain in our lives that we must handle. Anger, sadness, resentment, anxiety- these things are a part of all of our lives.

I recently had the opportunity to take stock of my ministry. I don't mean just my ministry here at Copeland, but my entire ministry going back over the span of my career. The very last command that Jesus gave to his disciples was to make more disciples. I've preached many a sermon in my years as a minister. I've counseled many a person. I've taught many a Sunday class and bible study. I have baptized people and celebrated the Lord's supper many times. But making Disciples? Not so much. I don't know that I can truly say I've made any disciples. I'm not sure I could truly recognize a disciple if I saw one. I'm not sure I'm a disciple, though I hope to become one someday.

I want touch on that a little bit today, though, because I think that will help us get our heads around this passage that Jesus read in the synagogue that day so long ago. Several years ago, we studied a book in Sunday school entitled The Disciple Making Church by Glenn McDonald. In this book Glenn states that the task of making disciples really comes down to a focus on asking and answering six questions. The very first of those questions is, "Who is your Lord?"

This is a critical question for all of us. It is the first question that McDonald asks, and it should be. It should be the first question. The answer to this question is the most important answer in our faith. Your immediate response to that question is, "That's easy! Jesus is our Lord." That's easy to say, but the answer itself begs another question. Who is Jesus? That question can be answered in a number of ways.

I can think of perhaps a dozen different ways to answer that question. I could sit here and go through all of them. Truthfully, I could probably make a sermon out of each one of them. However, I'm going to focus on just this answer that Jesus gave. Jesus said the Spirit of the Lord appointed him to bring good news. That's who he said he was. The person appointed to bring good news.

He mentions bringing release to the captives. That requires some explanation because we are dealing with a cultural difference. The word that is translated as captive here really refers to someone who owes a debt. You see, in our world when someone is in debt and they can't pay it, they generally do something like declare bankruptcy or they may have their wages garnished or they may have to fend off collector's calls. Until about seventy-five years ago, the British maintained a series of workhouses and debtor's prisons- that's how they dealt with this issue. Ancient Palestine had neither of those. Instead, it was common for people who owed significant debts that they couldn't pay to sell themselves into slavery. This is what Jesus refers to when he speaks of release for the captives. He's talking about the remittance of debts.

You may think that this idea of releasing the captives doesn't have much relevance today. It refers to something that doesn't happen in our culture. But if you think about that you realize that each of us has responsibilities in this life. At times those responsibilities seem overwhelming. We rack up debts, and I don't mean just financial debts. We take on family obligations, career obligations and social obligations. Sometimes we take them on voluntarily- sometimes they are thrust upon us. Regardless it's easy for those obligations to weigh us down. It seems overwhelming at times. When that happens, these obligations become a form of captivity all on their own.

We can also fall captive to the negative thoughts we hold in our heads. It's easy to become captive to a poor self- image. Sometimes our friends and family help that poor self- image along. I've seen that many times in my career. If that's happening to you, I have a message for you. You aren't alone. That happens to many of us- perhaps, most of us. So, captivity is a problem for us if only in a metaphorical sense.

We can also be blind. We can be blinded by our own sin. I have been in situations where I couldn't see how the things I was saying and doing were hurting others. I was blind to it. I've been on the receiving end of that kind of sin as well. People were engaging in actions that were painful for me and yet they couldn't see it. They were too defensive to see it. Often times if I pointed it out to them, they tried to justify, and it makes me wonder. How often have I sinned against others, and then sought to justify it when it was brought to my attention?

This next phrase is very interesting. The way that my bible translates it is - "...to free those who are downtrodden". The way the NRSV translates it is "...to let the oppressed go free." However, the word that is translated "downtrodden" really refers to something that has been broken into pieces. Jesus actually says he comes to free those who have been dashed to pieces.

That might be describing you. You might feel that you are dashed to pieces. The other night I was cleaning up the kitchen and I was standing over the sink and I dropped a glass bowl in the sink. It was one of those that is cut glass and when it landed it only dropped a short distance, but it shattered into a million pieces. Barbara and I had to go get the shop-vac out of the garage because it was in the part or the sink that holds the disposal. We had to stick the hose down in the disposal to get all the glass. It was quite a production! At times our lives are like that bowl: shattered into a thousand pieces. At times it feels as though the whole world is crashing down around us. It just seems as if it's too much to bear. I know you've been there. I have too!

The point I'm trying to raise here is that Jesus will be who we need him to be. What do you need? Do you need for someone to set you free from what's been holding you captive? Jesus can be that someone for you. Do you need someone to give you sight in the midst of your blindness? Jesus can be that someone for you. Do you need someone who will free you from your sin? Jesus can be that someone for you? Are you feeling dashed to pieces? Jesus can glue you back together.

But let's be clear. Jesus will be the Lord that you need him to be. That *does not mean* he will be the Lord that you want. He is the master. Sometimes, I think one of our greatest problems is that we have the notion that church exists to serve us. There's some truth to that, but that's a secondary consideration. The primary purpose of the church is to prepare us to serve God and to serve our neighbor. Jesus doesn't promise to give us what we want. He promises to give us what we need: namely love, grace, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. That's what he promises-what we need- not necessarily what we want.

The answer to, "Who is your Lord?" begins with the realization that God is who we need him to be. He doesn't always give us what we want, but he always gives us what we really need. So, to begin to answer that question, let me begin with another question. What do you need?