

Where in the World is God? Here's There – Releasing You

Grace, mercy and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The country we live in is heralded as being the epitome of freedom. We even sing it in the National Anthem. “O’er the land of the free.” Sure, there were some major issues with freedom in our country’s past, and admittedly there are still struggles with this today. However, no matter who you are, or what your background is, you are free to make a name for yourself. Free to buy whatever you want. Free to believe in what you want, something that is protected by the First Amendment! The world tells us that apart from breaking the law, we can do anything that we want to. We have been given an incredible amount of freedom!

As you can tell from the theme for this week, we’re focusing on release from captivity. After all this talk of freedom, you may be asking, “What do I need release from?” Our text for this morning shows us that while we may enjoy a tremendous amount of freedom in our lives, our sinful nature is truly a captive to Satan. It has no freedom whatsoever, but instead is completely blind to the fact that it’s a prisoner. When faced with this bleak prospect, we may be tempted to think, “Where in the world is God?” Thankfully Jesus is there, showing us that, yes, our sinful nature truly is captive, and that only he brings us true release!

I. WE TRULY ARE CAPTIVES

Our sermon text for this morning is taken from Luke chapter 4. This account comes after the account of Jesus in the wilderness, where he spent 40 days and nights constantly being tempted by the devil. Since then, Jesus had done quite a lot. By the time Jesus returned to Nazareth, his hometown, it’s clear that he had much more fame and renown than when we heard about him last week. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus was just an ordinary guest. However, in verse fourteen of our text, we hear that **news about [Jesus] spread through the whole countryside.**

Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth and he stands up to read a portion of Isaiah, taken from chapter 61, which was also the first lesson for our own worship this morning. He reads, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”** And then, Jesus says something important. **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

By saying this, Jesus was telling the Jews that he was the fulfillment of this prophecy. He was the anointed one, and the Jews he was speaking to were the captives that Isaiah was talking about. They were prisoners, blind and oppressed, and they needed release. Behind each of those words (prisoner, blind and oppressed) there is a point that Jesus was making about the Jews’ sinful nature.

By calling them prisoners, Jesus told the Jews that they were held captive by the devil and his lies. There was nothing they could do to escape those bonds. You would think captivity would be something they would know about, which is why Jesus also calls them blind. The Jews were unable to see, and even refused to see that they were prisoners. After all, how can you tell that you’re a prisoner if you can’t see the bonds that tie you down, or the bars of a prison cell surrounding you? The Jews looked to their own laws and actions to save them. They didn’t see that the very things that they put their trust in were keeping them captive!

Finally, Jesus said that the Jews are oppressed by the world. The Greek word used here in verse eighteen means “to break to pieces.” The Israelites had literally been broken apart. By Jesus’ day, almost nothing remained of the original nation. Why had this happened? The Israelites wanted to worship God, but also worship other false gods too. By doing this they rejected the truth of God’s Word and his prophets. They willfully engaged in the sinful things that the world said were good. All that was good and true was worthless in the eyes of the Jews. They were truly broken. If nothing was done to escape the bonds of sin in life, it would lead to eternal captivity and separation from God.

What about us? Jesus unrolls the scroll before us and shows us that we have a serious problem too. Our sinful nature is truly captive to Satan and his lies. There’s a struggle every day against that sinful nature, which only wants to do the will of its captor, Satan. St. Paul is speaking of this struggle in Romans 7:19, **For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing.** As if this wasn’t bad enough, Jesus tells us our sinful nature is blinded by the lies of the devil and its own sinful desires. It tempts us to think, “The sins I commit really aren’t that bad, I’m not suffering any real consequence. God really isn’t watching everything I do...” By continuing in such sins is how our lives become ever more broken in pieces! Sin shatters and destroys our

relationship with God and each other. By continuing to engage in these sins we are closing our eyes to the deadliness and severity of our sins.

This captivity to sin and to Satan is serious. No one can claim to be completely free from Satan's grasp or the world's temptation on their own. To do this is to deny Jesus' own words. The result of this captivity should be terrifying. Without someone to rescue or release us, this captivity will continue forever in the clutches of the devil.

Thankfully we have a Savior who comes to us, and unrolls Scripture before our eyes, just as he did for the Jews. In verse twenty, Jesus points them to a wonderful gift; the gift of release. He brings this gift to us as well!

II. JESUS BRINGS TRUE RELEASE

This gift that Jesus offers comes at the end of the prophecy he reads, and with the promise that he attaches to it. **He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor... Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.** The year of the Lord's favor, also known as the year of Jubilee, is something that would have made the Jews ears perk up. In Leviticus 25:10 God says, **Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you.** Every fifty years, the Israelites were to celebrate this year of Jubilee. All debts would be cancelled, forgiven; slaves released from their masters and property given back to its original owners. Even the farmers were told that they didn't need to work extra. The Israelites would be free from most responsibilities for an entire year so that they could dedicate their time to worshiping the Lord.

Unfortunately, there is no record in the Bible of this ever happening, but Jesus was telling the Jews that the year of Jubilee was NOW. Restoration and rescue from their spiritual captors came from him! Through his death on the cross, Jesus would cancel and forgive the debt of sin that the Jews owed to God. Through the cross, he would release them from their captivity to sin and the devil.

Jesus points us to the cross as well, and the release he has given us through his death. Because of this release from sin and Satan, we are in our own "year of Jubilee." But I don't just mean 365 days or the year 2019. This freedom lasts for a lifetime! It would be great if our mortgages were paid off, our student loans were forgiven, car loan was gone, credit cards paid off, and we could take a year off simply to worship God. But how much greater the release is that Jesus offers! Through faith in him we are set free from the grip of our captor Satan. Our debt to God has been released as well. Now is the year of Jubilee!

How do we remain sure of this release? There are four special words that answer this question in vs. 16. **As was his custom.** Jesus made a point of going to church regularly. We might be tempted to think that since he's God he didn't need to go to church, but he knew he needed to. There is where he eagerly, regularly, learned God's will for him and how he was the one anointed to bring true freedom to all. How much more do we need this regular nourishment from the good news of the Word of God. Even though we are free from their captivity, the world and Satan never cease trying to break us to pieces and once again make us prisoners of sin and guilt. Because of these constant attacks, we need these weekly and even daily reminders from Scripture that our sins are forgiven, that we are free from sin's control. You'll hear about that release every single time you come to church.

Then the question arises, "Now what? We are free from sin, but what do we do with that freedom?" We're released from all our debts to God. We don't need to work for salvation. What is that freedom for? Is it so that we can goof off for the rest of our lives and just let loose? No of course not! God has released us for a purpose.

As St. Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2 verse 10, **we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.** Jesus has freed us for a purpose; to do good works. Did you wake up this morning? There's a good work. Did you eat breakfast, take a shower – taking care of the body God has given you. Maybe you need to get ready for work or school tomorrow morning, so you faithfully prepare your homework, using the skills God has given you. All of these are good works, because they are done through faith and in love for the one who has given you true freedom!

When we see the release that Jesus has given us, the release from the bonds of sin and doubt, this leads to an incredible joy in our hearts. Joy that we are free from the "jail cell" of hell and eternal separation from God. Joy that our sins are completely forgiven. Joy that we are always offered release from guilt and remorse over our daily sins through our faith in Jesus. Live and serve in that joy, knowing that Jesus is right here, offering each and every one of you release! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Outline

Country of freedom...free to do many things...apart from breaking law...

As you can tell from theme... enjoy freedom, but actually captive

PT.1

Context... **vs. 14** news about Jesus spread through the whole countryside.

Goes to synagogue, reads... **vs. 18-19** **"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."** And then, Jesus says something important. **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**

He's the fulfillment of anointing. They're the prisoners...blind...oppressed..... They were truly broken. If nothing was done...

What about us? captive, blind, broken to pieces if we continue.

Romans 7:19, For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. Captivity is serious...nothing done to escape...should be terrifying... Thankfully... gift...

PT. 2

Promise in reading and explanation...

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**

Lev. 25:10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you

Year of jubilee never happened...but it's now...death on the cross = restoration with God, free from devil

Us to the cross too...Because of release we're in year of jubilee...would be great if... Set free from...restored with God...

How do we remain sure? 4 simple words...temptation is to think...greater is our need...world won't stop trying...reminders...every time you're in church.

What now? Free from debt, works righteousness...free to goof off? for a purpose

Good works...done in faith and love for the one who has given true freedom

Eph. 2:10 we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

See release...joy... free from jail cell...sins are forgiven...release from guilt...live and serve knowing Jesus is here offering release.