PART 5: GOOD NEWS FOR *EVERYONE*

By David Fields

Luke 4:14-30

"*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.*" – Luke 2:10

I. Good News to the Poor

"*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*" – Luke 4:18a

What is Jesus' mission?

- To "*proclaim good news to the poor.*"
- To "*proclaim freedom for the captives*". That word "*freedom*" could also be translated "*release,*" which includes the sense of "*forgiveness*", of being released from the dept of our sin. It can also relate to release from the binding power of the dark spiritual forces.
- "*…and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free…*" This is quoting Isaiah 58. When we read that text, is about God's people being called to act justly toward those who are mistreated or oppressed. The implications are clear: God's people need to live with justice when King Jesus is reigning. To "*proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,*" that is, the Year of Jubilee (see Lev 25). A time when depts are cancelled. Slaves are freed. Everything is reset as it's meant to be. It's like a new beginning for everyone, and everything.

Isn't this what we all long for? Our world healed and whole?

What does Jesus mean about "*proclaiming good news to the poor*"? Why mention the poor in particular?

We need to understand what "poor" means in the Hebrew Bible, since Jesus is carrying that forward. The prophet Zechariah writes:

"*This is what the Lord Almighty said: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner, or the poor. Do not plot evil against one another.*"

– Zechariah 7:9-10

The "*poor*" are those who face serious disadvantage or marginalization. Of this group, scholar Donald Gowan writes: "*The worst problem, that which these groups [widow, orphan, foreigner and poor] have in common, is powerlessness and its consequences: lack of status, lack of respect, making one an easy mark for the powerful and unscrupulous.*" - Donald Gowan

The Hebrew word *ani*, means 'oppressed' 'pushed down by the powerful,' those 'under.' The 'lowly.'

Justice, in the prophetic tradition, is about making sure that those who are disadvantaged aren't taken advantage of; that they are shown proper care by the community of God. And Jesus' ministry is to be particularly "good news" for those who find themselves in this precarious place of insecurity and disadvantage, vulnerable to be misused by others.

Christopher Watkins, in his book *Biblical Critical Theory*, provides a helpful list that summarizes that "great reversal" where the earthly hierarchies are confounded and subverted by Jesus' ministry.

Jesus consistently seeks out those who are marginalized in the society of his day:

- Those disadvantaged by family circumstances: *widows and orphans*
- Those disadvantaged by geography: *strangers/foreigners*
- Those looked down upon because of their occupation or social choices: "*sinners*," *prostitutes, and tax collectors*
- Those marginalized because of a physical disability: *the blind and the lame*
- Those marginalized by disease: *lepers*
- Those marginalized because of their age: *children*
- Those marginalized because of their gender: *women*
- Those marginalized because of their religion or ethnicity: *the Syrophoenician woman or the Samaritan woman at the well*

In a sense, each of these groups of people are "poor" because of the disadvantage they face, or marginalization that results from their life situation.

NOTES

Scholar Joel Green says it well: "*Jesus' mission is directed to the poor – defined not merely in subjective, spiritual or personal, economic terms, but in the holistic sense of those who are for any of a number of socio-economic reasons relegated to positions outside of the boundaries, asserting instead that even these "outsiders" are the objects of divine grace.*

Others may regard such people as beyond the pale of salvation, but God has opened a way for them to belong to God's family." – Joel Green, NICNT, *Luke*

Understanding how Jesus defines "good news to the poor" also becomes a way to evaluate "false gospels" as Paul calls them. Like, if someone is claiming to speak the "gospel" but it's not good news to the poor – to the lowly, the pushed down, those who find themselves disadvantaged or somehow considered "outside" the potential for God's gracious work – that's not the good news of Jesus.

Is what we're doing *good news to the poor*? That's our main question still.

II. Jesus Making the Call

How does this episode go from "all spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words" to, "They got up drove him out of the town and took him to the brow of a hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff"?

Notice, the townsfolk ask: "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

This could be taken in negative sense: "Wait a minute: Isn't this Joseph's son?" A bit like an arms-crossed, "Who does he think he is? This kid who grew up next door is claiming to be God's Messiah? Sure bud. Prove it."

Or it could be understood positively. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" could be taken as, "He's one of us! Now we have an inside track with God. Surely, with our proximity to Jesus, means we'll be well taken care of!" "We've got a claim on you and your power – now use it for our benefit."

NOTES

1. **Interpreting the Time Factor**

Jesus mentions: "in Elijah's time…" and "in the time of Elisha…" Why does the *time* matter? Because that was the time of Israel's incredible apostasy – of false worship. The poor were being oppressed. King Ahab, the worst king ever, was leading the nation into deep idolatry – the worship of false gods. The rage of Jesus' towns people comes at least in part from being associated with King Ahab's world. Like, the coming of John the Baptist – the Elijah figure we heard of in chapter 3 – his coming, and Jesus' making this connection, it's an indictment of their moment, and their violent rage only confirms Jesus' point.

Jesus is challenging his townsfolk. Where would he challenge us?

Where are those who are still marginalized in our world, the easily overlooked, the excluded?

2. **Don't Be a Snob**

Listen to what Paul writes in Romans 12:16: "*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low positions. Do not be conceited.*"

One of my New Testament profs, Rikki Watts at Regent College, he put is so well: "*Godliness is not being a snob.*" I've never forgotten it. Lord help me to put that into practice.

What would it mean for us to apprentice ourselves to Jesus? To join in his way of life and ministry? Are we open? Open to wideness of God's mercy to those we might overlook? Those often excluded or pushed down? Are we also proclaiming good news to the *poor*, or presenting something else?

NOTES

Open Up

Consider a time when someone welcomed you with genuine openness. What did it feel like? Why do you think it felt like that?

Dig In

1. Read **Luke 4:14-30**. What surprised you, or still confuses you from this story? Why?

2. As we saw in the message, in the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), the category of "poor" is much more broad than simply economic insecurity. It means those who are pushed down or oppressed. Those excluded or easily taken advantage of. Jesus is making clear that his ministry will be for all people – and the poor will be protected, welcomed, and given a new sense of security. How can the church continue to carry forward Jesus' ministry in this kind of way?

3. What challenges might come with that?

4. Paul writes in **Romans 12:16**: "*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low positions. Do not be conceited.*" Why might it be tempting to gravitate toward an "in group", and therefore, exclude those who don't seem to fit? How does Jesus' proclaiming good news "to the poor" address this temptation?

5. How might this text challenge you personally? How can you enact this generous welcome that Jesus' ministry speaks to?

Pray

Share your prayer requests to lift up together. Pray that we, as a community, would live in a way that is truly good news to the poor – for those who find themselves excluded.