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Proclaiming the Year of the Lord's Favor

JERRY A. TAYLOR

My favorite biblical text for the practice of ministry is Luke 4.18-19, although it has not always been the guiding influence for my proclamation of the gospel. When I first entered the ministry I cleverly disguised my hunger for human love and social approval in the pretentious garments of religious piety. I was concerned more for the broad celebration of my name than I was with the high exaltation of the name of Jesus Christ.

I was baptized at the early age of 12. I started preaching when I was 14 years old and continued into my early 20s *without* a solid understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. I thought the only things I needed in order to preach were a good Bible and a loud voice. I am thankful for being introduced to a gospel evangelist and Christian author by the name of Luke. Reading Luke's gospel profoundly changed my concept of preaching, because it unlocked the door to my understanding of the significant role the Holy Spirit exercised in the ministry of Jesus.

THE TEMPTER'S POWER

Luke 4.1 opens with the statement that "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil." Jesus receives the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism and is immediately led by the Holy Spirit into a period of severe temptation. It is evident that Luke is convinced that the servant of the Lord must be filled with the Holy Spirit to firmly withstand Satan's devilish seduction. Often the environments of Christian ministry become the wilderness where God's servants face the temptations of pride, power, position, fame, prestige, and mammon. Human strength and determination alone cannot resist these demonic allurements, and Christian ministers are wise to realize their perpetual exposure to the unrelenting nature of the tempter.

The tempter causes the monstrous waves of temptation to subside only momentarily, to make them burst back upon the shores of life *with* greater force at a more strategic time. Luke says in 4.13, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left Jesus until an opportune time." The evil one never retires from his hostile efforts to sabotage God's ministers through distracting them from the sacred task of serving God's purpose. We must be prepared in the anointed power of the Holy Spirit to resist on every occasion the attractive seducer.

THE SPIRIT'S POWER

After the temptation, Luke describes Jesus as returning to Galilee in the "power of the Spirit." It is in the "power of the Spirit" that Jesus refuses to use his miraculous power to impress his townspeople. Luke says that Jesus taught in "their" synagogues and everyone praised him. The people praised Jesus as long as he performed ministry within conventional boundaries that conformed to their expectations. Jesus' townspeople could not co-opt him because he was independent of human praise and totally dependent on the praise from his heavenly father.

It is unwise to base ministry on human praise. The same people who praised Jesus for his teaching sought to kill him when he refused to perform according to their expectations. They became furious over Jesus' message that God's kingdom was racially inclusive of the Gentiles. They were so infuriated that they got up, drove Jesus from their midst, and took him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. Because Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, he was able to endure this violent assault.

MINISTRY TO THE POOR

In Luke 4.18 Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me." Jesus' ministerial actions were dictated by the will of God. His message was radically liberating because his anointing did not come from this fallen world. His radical mission to minister to the needs of the poor and the oppressed brought him into direct conflict with the spiritual powers and principalities represented in the domination system of the Roman Empire. His liberating ministry was a threat to the survival of the oppressive power arrangements of the first-century empire.

Jesus' anointing of the Spirit compelled him to preach the good news to the poor. Today the poor have received everything but good news in a world overwhelmed by imperial greed and deception. Today the poor live in a social context surrounded by financially neglected schools. These places serve as socialization centers of misinformation that mis-educate the poor, to the detriment of their social transformation. The poor need to hear the good news today, because bad news saturates their community, reminding them of how the blood and brains are being sucked out of their bright-eyed children through the straw of despair.

While there is a mad rush to take flight from poor communities, Jesus commissions his ministers to cast themselves within the abandoned places of the world preaching the good news of freedom and hope to the poor. The body of Christ must not run *away from* the poor while the Head of the body is running *to* the poor. We need Jesus' vision of the poor if we are to minister in his name. If we allow the media to shape our view the poor, our vision will be unreliable and distorted. The media often keep us blinded by fear and cause us to distance ourselves from the poor. As Christians we are to look upon the poor through the compassionate and caring eyes of Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "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."

In summary, this passage serves as my favorite text because it helps me understand that to imitate Jesus' ministry of freedom and healing, I, too, must be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. I realize that the Holy Spirit will equip me with the spiritual strength and wisdom to discern and resist all of Satan's evil schemes and conspiracies.

REMINDERS FROM LUKE 4

My favorite text for ministry reminds me that the Holy Spirit will enable me to do ministry without being dependent upon human praise and without being addicted to worldly acclaim. I believe the power of the Spirit will give me the strength to endure hostile rejection from those who persecute me because of my refusal to be co-opted by the self-serving agenda of Empire.

As I look at Jesus' life through the eyes of Luke, I conclude, with firm conviction, that the power of the Spirit will not permit me to stand silently by without speaking good news of freedom to the poor. This text challenges me to accept along with Jesus the baptism of suffering, in order to stand in solidarity with those who are being crushed to death by the injustices of the domination systems.

The fear of death is the ultimate weapon the domination system has to use against the followers of Christ. By the Spirit's power I sincerely believe that Jesus has set us free from captivity to the fear of death. Through Jesus' ultimate sacrifice he defeated death. It is only through this holy recognition that I will be able to speak the truth fearlessly to principalities and powers and to expose, in a loving manner, their deadly operations in the world.

PROCLAIMING GOOD NEWS

I thank God that we have been set free to proclaim the good news of the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. What a mighty message we have on our tongues. Great dignity is given to the mouths of humans that we may share in the proclamation of that Word that commands contrary winds and disciplines restless waves on the stormy seas of life. We proclaim this glad news with humble boldness and with unshakable confidence in him who first spoke and brought creation into existence.

The passionate shout of our celebration of the good news is so strong that it strikes fear in the stomach of hell and all the demons that support its satanic manifestations in earthly structures and power arrangements. Thank God we are free and empowered to proclaim freedom for the prisoners—those who are imprisoned by consumerism and commercialism. Thank God we are emboldened by the power of the Spirit to proclaim recovery of sight for the blind—those who blindly follow politicians who use religious rhetoric to mask their greed. Thank God we are led by the Spirit to work for the release of the oppressed—those who are being exploited in the new global slave trade falsely called cheap labor.

It is the power of the Spirit that fills the lungs of my ministry with the divine oxygen that keeps the legs of my ministry running to spread the good news of the kingdom. We run and gladly shout with unquenchable joy that this is the year of Jubilee; this is the year of the Lord's favor. Praise God!

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