

Christ Came Down | For the Captives

Rob Rogers December 4, 2022

Introduction

2,000 years ago, in a no name town, to a no name family, a little baby was born. That little baby boy, God in human flesh came down, set aside all His rights and privileges as God to enter into the human story.

This is what we celebrate at Christmas — the incarnation of Jesus.

When Jesus enters into the human story, He enters in at a pivotal moment in human history with a mission that is such much bigger than the first century world, so much larger than the Roman Empire, or any empire for that matter. Jesus tells us exactly what He came to do in Luke 4.

Over the next several weeks we will be talking about what Christ came down to do... what He came to accomplish... what He said His mission was... Luke 4.

Luke 4:16-21

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
because he has anointed Me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

This takes place after Jesus’ 40 days of testing in the wilderness. He returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and then makes His way to the synagogue in Nazareth. He stands up, is handed the scroll of Isaiah and reads Isaiah’s prophecy about the long-awaited Messiah. He says in front of everyone, “*This passage is talking about Me... this is My mission!*”

Today, we’re going to look at the reality that Christ came to proclaim liberty, freedom to the captives. We’re also going to talk about a unique opportunity to engage in Freedom work overseas.

But first what does it mean that Christ came to proclaim liberty to the captives?

We need to acknowledge what’s true in the room today

- Some of you are moving toward Jesus, but you’re not quite there yet...
 - Scripture tells you, if that’s you, you are enslaved. You might not have known that. But you are a slave. You’re a slave to sin.

- Sin being, not just the bad things you do... but even the selfish reasons for the good things that you do. It's your actions, *and it's your motives... why you do the things you do...* not just what you do, and sin permeates all of life.
- Others of you have made the decision to trust in Christ alone for salvation, you've heard the gospel, you've confessed with your mouth, and believed in your heart that Jesus is Lord — and you've been saved! **You are no longer a slave to sin.** In fact, you've been delivered from the ultimate **penalty of sin** *because of the finished work of Jesus Christ.*
 - ***How many of you know that you can be free from the penalty of sin, but still live under the power of sin, the oppression of sin, and bondage to sin.***

Difference Between Justification and Sanctification

JUSTIFICATION – A slave of sin is set free, declared righteous by God at the moment of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

- **Romans 4:25**
...[Jesus Christ] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our **justification**.
- **2 Corinthians 5:21**
For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the **righteousness of God**.
- **Romans 6:6-7**
We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be **enslaved** to sin. ⁷ For one who has died has been **set free** from sin.

What all of this is telling us is that at the very moment of your salvation... the moment you trust in Christ for salvation, by grace, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are no longer a slave to sin, you are set FREE and you are justified, declared righteous by God. You literally become the righteousness of Christ and you, as of that moment are FREE! That freedom is available to anyone and everyone that would trust in the finished work of Christ.

Another way to think about justification is “*it's just as if I've never sinned.*”

There is a difference between justification and sanctification.

SANCTIFICATION – The process of becoming like Jesus.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:3**
It is God's will that you should be **sanctified**...
- **2 Corinthians 3:18**
And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.
- **Romans 8:29**
For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...

Why the theology lesson?

We need to understand that you can be a follower of Jesus, set free from the penalty of sin — and still live in bondage to the sin that Christ has died to set you free from.

Galatians 5:1

For **freedom** Christ has set us **free**; stand firm therefore, and do not **submit again** to a **yoke of slavery**.

- Is it possible to be freed by Christ, and submit yourself again to a yoke of slavery to sin?
 - Paul wouldn't have told us not to do it if it wasn't possible.

PERSONAL: Some of you had some baggage that you brought with you when you came to Christ like me. From 12-19yrs old... I was an expert at sinning. When Jesus saved me... He saved me from the **PENALTY** of sin. I was justified. Declared righteous... and Jesus broke off of me the shackles of addiction, of slavery to sin. I went from being a heroin addict, to a child of God set free by the grace of God, the very instant I surrendered my life to Jesus... I was free.

I remember going for a walk in the woods...I was a new believer. I took a journal with me and I sat down and asked God a question... I wrote down, "God, am I right with you?" You know what He said to me? After all the rehabs, broken relationships, friends overdosing, and all the grief and sorrow that come with a life of addiction — He said, "Rob, you aren't just right with Me, you are My son. And I love you." I sat out there in the woods that day and wept...

I was justified. I was set free from the PENALTY of sin.

And there is a day coming, when Christ returns, or when He calls me home... where I'll be free from the **PRESENCE of sin**.

But between this day, and that day, I'm being saved, or freed from the **POWER of sin**.

When Jesus says, I've come to set the captives free... he's extending an invitation to every single person in human history to be saved, to be delivered, to be freed from the **PENALTY / POWER / PRESENCE** of sin.

Penalty

Some of us have been set free from the **penalty** of sin... we've surrendered our lives to Christ — but we still need some level of freedom from the **POWER** of sin in our lives.

This week I asked some of our staff... "What are some things that people might need to be set free from?"

1. Short-temper, a spirit of offense, compulsive spending, the sin of gossip, alcohol, drugs, pornography, sexual immorality, and promiscuity
2. Fear, anxiety, depression, unforgiveness, bitterness, a critical spirit, entitlement, comparison with others
3. Fear of man, insecurity, need for approval, recognition, status, power, the love of money, reputation, jealousy, resentment, bad medical diagnosis

How many today still need some level of freedom from the power of sin in your life?

There is freedom available for you today because Christ Came Down to set the captives free... and not partially free. Completely free.

The reality is, you CAN be free from these things... but you're not just **freed from sin, Jesus sets you free FOR a life of purpose**. A life of kingdom impact. You're freed not only for your sake, but also you're freed for the sake of those closest to you — the people around you who need you to walk in freedom.

On a recent visit with some pastors in the area, one phrased it in such a powerful way. He said, “What is the sin that’s keeping you from running? From really going all out in life? What is keeping you at an average life? Average impact? Average capacity for world change? What sin is keeping you from running? What’s got you all tangled up...?”

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also **lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.**

OBJECTION: Some of you say... I’ve been following Jesus for a while now and I don’t feel like I’m changing. It’s not happening the way it’s happened for other people... I don’t think God is changing me.

Some of you aren’t changing because even though you’ve been justified by Christ... you’re not really trusting Him. Not enough to change your life anyway. You say, “*You know, I want the benefits of Jesus, but I don’t want to have to change my lifestyle. I want to the benefits of being a part of God’s family, but I don’t really want to have to change my attitude, or my behavior.*”

Jesus loves you, and that’s why every time He shows up and confronts someone about their sin and **sets them free** — do you know what He says afterward? **Go and sin no more.**

You want Christ to change you, but are you willing to change for Christ? Throwing off the sin that so easily ensnares, entangles us... that requires something of you!

The challenge for you today is this: Don’t waste what He came for! Don’t waste the freedom that Christ has won for you! Don’t settle for a mediocre Christian life. Don’t run the race half-heartedly. Throw off whatever is enslaving you and live in the full freedom Christ has won for you! He’s proclaimed liberty for you! And if Christ can create the whole universe with a word, when He proclaims freedom — it is done! So walk in the freedom Christ has won for you!

Year of Jubilee

Luke 4:19

...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

One day every week is a day of rest. The Sabbath. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year. And every seventh Sabbath year, was the 50th year — or the Year of Jubilee.

In the days of the Old Testament, whenever someone — through bad crops or bad fortune or poor judgment — would come to the place where they were so in debt that they couldn’t possibly pay them off — they would become an **indentured servant** to those they were indebted to. They would become their slaves... and often, they wouldn’t be able to earn enough to get out of that debt. Over time, some people would become more and more prosperous, while others were in horrendous poverty they couldn’t climb out of.

But God set up the nation of Israel so that every seventh year, God says, “*It’s a Sabbath year.*” What would happen on the Sabbath year is **every debt would be forgiven**. All servants and slaves went free!

The land would rest on that year, and people would eat from what they’ve stored, and they would not till the fields. So, everybody rested. The land rested. Every debt was forgiven, every slave went free. That’s the Sabbath year.

You can read about it in Deuteronomy and Leviticus. In Leviticus 25, we have a description of what’s called the Year of Jubilee.

Every seven days is a Sabbath day, and every seven years is a Sabbath year. **But every seventh Sabbath year, was the Year of Jubilee,**

The Year of Jubilee was far more extensive than even the Sabbath year. Not only were all the debts forgiven, not only were all the servants and the slaves freed — but if you lost your family's original land, which was the family's means of provision and the financial security for your children and grandchildren — if you lost your land any time in those 49 years — that land was given back to you.

The whole purpose behind the Sabbath year, and the Jubilee, was to help all those, who through misfortune or poor judgment, found themselves in a pit of poverty, slavery, unpayable debt — to have a second chance. To be given another shot to get a running start economically for the future of their family.

When Jesus says, I've come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, I've proclaiming the year of Jubilee — Jesus is saying, I've come to forgive every debt against God. I've come to set every captive free from slavery to sin. I've come to give those who've blown it (*everyone by the way*) an open invitation into my family — not as servants... but as friends, as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

But in order to forgive a debt, someone still has to pay the price — it's the person who is forgiving the debt. In Luke 4 Jesus is telling us, your debt is so large... it's unpayable... but I came down, not to collect the debt — **I came down to pay the price to remove your debt for eternity.** You don't need to pay it... I'll pay it for you.

An Opportunity to Pay the Price

As we're following Jesus... we have an opportunity to pay the price — for people — who through severe misfortune, manipulation, and deception — have found themselves so in debt that they'll never be able to pay it off. They are enslaved and generationally doomed to a life of indentured servitude in brick kilns in South Asia.

We're partnering with our friends at Conduit Church who have pioneered this effort. We have the opportunity to link arms and do some real kingdom work together.

Some details...

There are two ways people find themselves in this situation:

1. Typically, people find themselves in this situation because they've been injured — they wind up in the hospital with no insurance and no way to pay the medical bills. They have to take out a loan that is at such a high interest rate that there is no way they'll ever be able to pay it off. So, they're forced into slavery at a brick kiln where they **make \$4 for every 1,000 bricks**. And they have to pay rent for the space they're forced to live in with their family at the brick kiln.
2. The second way people find themselves in this situation is a family member who owes the debt passes away — and the debt is passed on to them and their family — and they are forced into slave labor as well.

There are entire families, with a debt that is unpayable, that their children, and their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren will all inherit.

What we are now able to do is to pay off the debt, through attorneys that we have relationship with overseas. When the debt is paid, we have it filmed, documented, and notarized. It's legally binding and irrevocable.

We then move the family out of the brick kiln and into a safe house that is setup and fully supported by a network of churches. Immediately after they get established there, we help the family start a small business — sewing, farming, etc. They go from being a slave to a business owner in a single weekend.

This year alone, our friends at Conduit have already freed 154 families. There are currently over 100 families that have already been vetted and are approved for freedom.

What is the vetting process? We're currently freeing *persecuted Christians* — so there are multiple extensive interviews done with the family in order to verify that they are in danger. It's a very thorough and extensive process... headed up by our a handful of longstanding, trusted relationships with those that are ministering to those that are enslaved.

Doesn't freeing all these people crush their workforce? No, because the vetted families are across dozens of kilns across Southern Asia, and so we're slowly and methodically freeing families in a way that keeps this work under the radar.

Is there retribution for the family, and can they be "re-enslaved"? No. Because it's handled by the appointed attorneys, there would be severe legal ramifications for any form of retribution. Also, the family is relocated to an area where they wouldn't be able to be tracked, even if someone was searching for them. In all the families that have already been set free, not one family has been brought back into slavery.

Do the kilns enslave new families? They do. Ending slavery is a big issue in the world. But that's not the problem we're solving here. *We are freeing persecuted Christians from that problem.*

Proverbs 3:27

Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help.

1 Timothy 6:18

They are to **do good**, to **be rich in good works**...

Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good**.

We're going to overcome evil, with good; we're going to be rich in good works; we're not going to withhold good from those who need our help, when it is within our ability to help.

Just as Christ paid the price for our freedom... we're going to pay the price for someone else's.

EXAMPLE: **Watch the sermon online to see the video...**

This is Buta and Rafa and their children, Muskan, Niro, Sagar. Until this last November 13th, they had been enslaved for 11 years. They've since been relocated, connected to a church family, and are running their own business. Those children are free. You know how much it cost? \$2,260. The loan they took out was for Rafa's medical bill of \$115 for kidney stones — 11 years of slavery for a \$115 loan... they're now free!

On average, the cost to set one **family free is \$2,500.**

The goal for every single one of us is to simply obey Jesus and see what God wants to do.

We've created what we're calling our "**Freedom Fund.**"

- In most philanthropic efforts, someone is taking a handling fee, or administrative fee off the top.
- But you need to know that there are no handling fees, 100% of what is given, 100% goes toward setting these families free and setting them up for the future.

Here's the question for us today. **What would it look like for us to pay the price?** As those who *have been freed* from the **penalty**, *are being freed* from the **power**, and ultimately *will be freed* from the **presence** of sin — what would God have us give, so that our persecuted brothers and sisters on the other side of the world, might experience freedom? Jubilee... the year of the Lord's favor?

A more direct way to ask is, "What would God have you go without, so that a family without freedom could gain it?"

The reality is these are our kids — these are our families, our brothers and sisters. These are followers of Jesus caught in slavery and under constant threat, beaten, and persecuted for their faith.

If this were your family, what would you want someone do for them?

PRACTICAL:

Next Sunday, December 11, we're going to bring our offerings to the Lord... and see what God wants to do. All around the campus there are offering boxes by each entrance. When you come in next Sunday, you'll notice some extra signage indicating where those boxes are. You can leave your offering (*above and beyond your tithe*) in those boxes — and every penny given will go toward setting captives free.

If you write a check — put “Freedom Fund” in the memo. Online — Scan QR — or Text to “Give Freedom”

Here are the two questions for you to ponder...

1. What do you need the Lord to set you free from today?
2. What offering would the Lord have you bring next Sunday, so that a Jesus-loving family without freedom could gain it?

Discussion Questions

1. When Jesus was reading from Isaiah, “He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives — set at liberty those who are oppressed...” — what does that mean for us today who are following Him?
2. What is the difference between *Justification* and *Sanctification*? How can we be followers of Christ, and still live in bondage to the sin that Christ died to set us free from?
3. Do you still need some level of freedom from the power of sin in your life? What do you need the Lord to free you from today? Be specific.
4. Discuss: Jesus not only died to free you from the penalty of sin, but also to *set you free for a life of purpose*. Are you willing to change anything in your life that is hindering that — something that is required of you?
5. What offering would the Lord have you bring next Sunday, so that a Jesus-loving family without freedom would gain it?

NOTES