

## **DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES**

– AUGUST 25. – LUKE 4:16-30. –

**Text: "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not." – John 1:11.**

THE CHILDHOOD HOME of Jesus was Nazareth, although He was born in Bethlehem. The people of Nazareth would of course feel a certain sense of pride in their fellow-citizen whose fame was spreading throughout all Galilee and Judea. Hearing [R5068 : page 232] of the mighty works and wonderful teachings given at Capernaum, they not unnaturally said to themselves, Well, of course He will soon return to His own town and give us a sight of His wonderful power. And yet, they reflected, Is not this Jesus, whose mother and brethren we know, and who has for a long time been identified with Joseph's carpenter shop?

They could scarcely believe what they had heard. How could it be that so soon after leaving home He had become so famous and so powerful? He never did such miracles in all the years that we knew Him, said they. They did not, of course, understand as we do that He received His power as a special benediction when He was thirty years of age, as a result of His full consecration of His life to the Divine service, that devotion being symbolized by His immersion in Jordan.

## **THE SYNAGOGUE AT NAZARETH**

At length He came to Nazareth. It was on a Sabbath day. For long years He had been recognized as one of the few able to read, and had done the congregational reading of the Holy Scriptures. This was therefore just what they wished and expected Him to do on the Sabbath day of His return. He went into the synagogue and received from the custodian the scroll bearing the lesson, and read the lesson for the day.

Thus far all went well; but when Jesus began to comment upon passages of Scripture there was a commotion; first whisperings of disapproval, and finally an outburst of wrath against Him. Ah! they thought, this young man has quite lost His head since He left us! We know indeed that His people of Nazareth have a mean name throughout the country, that ours is reputed to be a mean city of little learning; but who would expect that one of our own citizens would return to our midst and tell us to our faces that we are not worthy of having an exhibition of His power – such as He has given to other cities and to their people!

Their pride and patriotism made them wild. They drove Him out of the synagogue with angry demonstrations. They insulted and jostled Him and led the way toward the rear of their city, not daring to lay hands on Him, but merely as a mob gnashing upon Him and pushing onward in a direction in which they desired that they might lead Him to the brow of a hill, and then push Him over.

For a little way Jesus went, but then He turned and passed through their midst, overawing them by the dignity of His presence, and perhaps realizing that their course toward Him was merely a corroboration of what He had said respecting their unworthiness to have a share of the blessing of God which He was distributing.

### **THE TRUTH THAT ANGERED**

What were the words that thus angered them? At first we read, "All bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth." What, then, made the change? It was the plain declaration that because they did not appreciate Him enough, because they did not believe in Him fully, therefore it would not be God's will that He should perform any miracles for them. He backed up His statement with illustrations from the past which angered them still more. He said that in Elijah's day there was a famine in the land, and that Elijah was not sent to the widows of Israel, but to a widow across the border, in a Gentile city.

Again, Elisha was not sent to cleanse the lepers of Israel, but did cleanse a Gentile, Naaman. Alas, for the power of pride! "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Instead of the people of Nazareth getting angry and resenting these things, they should have said, Tell us, then, of our faults and help us to overcome them. If God has blessings, surely we, as Israelites, may have our share if we will but come into the right attitude of heart. Instruct and pray for us. But the proud cannot see their difficulties, hence the Scriptural declaration of the special favor and blessing to the humble.

### **THE LESSON FROM ISAIAH**

The lesson for that Sabbath was from Isaiah 61:1-3. It was an excellent text, and the sermon on it was from the very ablest of all teachers. The whole difficulty was with the heart condition of the hearers; and this is true of many a sermon and many a lesson. How His hearers should have rejoiced to know that they were living in the day of the fulfilment of these words! He had been anointed by the Father with the Holy Spirit, that He might declare good tidings to the poor. Surely many of them were poor and needy!

We read further that Jehovah sent Jesus to heal the broken-hearted. Oh, how those words ought to have appealed to all in that audience! How they *would* have appealed to any that were broken-hearted! The difficulty probably was that they were hard-hearted. Satan has hardened the hearts of mankind in general. God's promise is that under Messiah's glorious reign He will take away the "stony hearts" and give them "hearts of flesh."

The declaration further was that the blind would receive their sight, that liberty would be granted to the captives, that the bruised and injured would be healed, and that "the acceptable year of the Lord" would be proclaimed. These were indeed wonderful words of life! No wonder we read that "they wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth."

## **"DELIVERANCE TO THE CAPTIVES"**

This part of the message might have been applied in part to themselves. Were they not captives, bound by the fetters of sin, bound also by the fetters and chains of heredity, sickness, imperfection and death? Were not some of them actually blind also, as respected the eyes of their understanding? Evidently the time for them to see had not arrived – they were not in the condition to receive the blessing of the anointing of their eyes of understanding. Were they not all bruised by the fall, imperfect, blemished, wounded, sore – mentally, morally and physically – and was not the Great Deliverer there to set them at liberty, in part at least, from these difficulties? Surely that was a favorable moment, and they were a favored people!

But the work that Jesus was doing was merely the proclamation of these things, with a few illustrations or examples of healing, etc. The real time for Him to accomplish the deliverance of the captives, the liberating of the sin-bruised, and the giving of sight to the blind, that all might sing the praises of God and appreciate His [R5068 : page 233] favor – these actual blessings belonged to the Messianic Kingdom time. What Jesus was doing was merely a foreshadowing of the great things to be accomplished future – "In the Times of Restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His Holy Prophets." – Acts 3:19-21.

## **PROCLAIMING "THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR"**

This brief expression, so little understood, pointed out the special work of Jesus, far more important than the miracles. The term, "acceptable year," or acceptable time, refers to this entire Gospel Age of more than eighteen centuries. It is "the acceptable time" in the sense that during this period God is willing, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, to accept from amongst the sinners a Little Flock of joint-sacrificers to share with their Redeemer in His Kingdom.

No opportunity had been granted in the past to become dead with Jesus, to present their bodies living sacrifices, to walk in His footsteps, to fill up the afflictions of Christ, to suffer with Him. The proclamation of this opportunity waited until Jesus had made His own consecration, and all who accepted His Message and became His followers did so under this invitation or proclamation. It was the privilege of becoming the sons of God by a begetting of the Holy Spirit. (John 1:13.) The acceptance of these sacrifices began at Pentecost and still continues. Who can say how soon the door of privilege to offer acceptable sacrifices may close? Then the door to the High Calling, to the Bride class, will be shut – forever. Other blessings God has, but not other privileges than those of this Age for suffering with Christ and for participating with Him in His reign of glory.

