

¹⁴ *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* ¹⁵ *He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.* ¹⁶ *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read.* ¹⁷ *The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:* ¹⁸ *"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,* ¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* ²⁰ *Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,* ²¹ *and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

Dear fellow redeemed,

I read a newspaper article which was concerned with whether this year should be pronounced "two thousand ten," or "twenty-ten." I don't know which is more correct and I think I will use both. What I do know is that this year will probably be remembered as the year of Haitian earthquake. If you have seen pictures of the devastation, you have used some kind of superlative to describe it.

In ancient times events such as these were so important that time was measured by them. Very often, accounts of ancient times will record such an event as 'so many years after the death of King such and such,' or so many years before the great earthquake or something similar.

Although we recognize such events, we do not measure time by them. We measure our time A.D. which stands for *anno domini*. In Latin that means, "in the year of our Lord." We measure time in years approximately from the time Jesus was born. The people in the synagogue in Nazareth learned another way to mark time. Jesus told them: THIS IS THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR.

1

(14-15, 20-21) *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ...Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

"Jesus has come!" that's what the people were saying. You can imagine what that must have been like for Jesus to come back to Galilee. It would be like someone from Wickenburg, becoming known on a national level and then coming back to town. When he came back, everyone would want to see him and speak to him. That's exactly what happened with Jesus. The people of Galilee knew about Jesus and his miracles and the way he taught with authority, not like the Pharisees.

But their knowledge of him was incomplete. He wasn't just Joseph and Mary's Son. He came into the synagogue and with all the honor normally given to a visiting dignitary, was asked to do one of the readings. It would be similar to having a son of the congregation decide to go into the ministry and then return for a visit during his first year of Seminary. We would probably ask him to do the three readings in our worship service. Jesus read verses from the scroll of Isaiah which talk about being anointed.

Anointing was a special rite. Samuel anointed both Saul and David with oil to mark each of them as the King of Israel. After John baptized Jesus, (Acts 10:38) *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power...* When Jesus told them these words were fulfilled in their hearing, he was claiming to be the anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ.

The U.S. today has a great deal in common with Galilee then. Christmas and Easter are still celebrated as important holidays in the Western world even though most people either deny or have

forgotten the significance of these holidays. People today also have an incomplete knowledge of Jesus. Unfortunately most people still have to learn that Jesus coming makes this the year of the Lord's favor. They still have to learn that Jesus is the Messiah and that he is the only hope for this world and the next.

Even for us as Christians, there are difficulties with that. I often hear people mistake their knowledge of the Bible for their faith. Although faith is often based on knowledge, knowledge in and of itself doesn't save us. Satan knows Jesus is the Christ, but he is not saved. There are many people who know the Bible has stories about Jesus and can even relate some of those facts, but they do not believe they are sinful and do not put their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

This is why we read the Scriptures a little every day. It's why we attend Bible Study. It's why we take our children to Sunday School even after they are baptized. It's why we come to church and receive the Lord's Supper regularly. The Holy Spirit creates or strengthens faith through all of these means. That may or may not increase our knowledge, but it certainly increases our faith in what Jesus has done and makes it clear to us that this is the year of the Lord's favor.

2

(16-19) *He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "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."* We say this is the year of the Lord's favor because Jesus brings freedom.

The year of the Lord's favor meant something special to these people. They knew it by another name. They called it the year of Jubilee. The year of jubilee was a very special day in Israel. On the year of jubilee, all slaves were freed, all land was returned to its owners, all debts were canceled and there was to be joy throughout the land. Jesus was telling them that they were living in the year of jubilee.

They were, and so are we. He has *preached good news to the poor*. He is talking about those who are poor in God's sight, poor spiritually. So these poor are not going to receive some government entitlement program, it's that Jesus has freed us from the poverty of sin.

Jesus has also *proclaimed freedom for the prisoners*. The picture in these words is very similar to a POW who has been tortured and made to work at slave labor. We are those prisoners in God's sight. We are prisoners of Satan who have been freed from Jesus.

Jesus has *proclaimed recovery of sight for the blind*. Sin blinds us so that we cannot see the truth of Jesus. Sin is so blinding that it often makes us think we aren't even sinning and that we cannot see things the way God would have us see them. Jesus changes all that so that we can see what sin is and avoid it.

Jesus has also *released the oppressed*. This picture is very similar to the one of a POW, but it differs in that it talks about the way sins destroys a body almost like a cancer wasting it way and Jesus has given us the cure. Truly, then, this is the year of jubilee. This is the year of God's favor because Jesus has brought us freedom.

I don't know whether you are going to call this year "two thousand ten" or "twenty ten." The difference is lost on me personally. There will no doubt be many reasons by which we will remember this year. But I do believe this. This is a special year. Even if there is no special birth, wedding, death, or some other disaster, this is a special year. Jesus our Lord, has come and brought freedom for you and me. That makes this, the year of the Lord's favor. Amen.