

#### Nehemiah 8:8-10

So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

#### Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## Sermon

We were millionaires growing up. Oh, we had a regular farm house and regular food and regular cars, nothing fancy. But I knew we were millionaires. We had to be, I just knew it. As a child, when I got off the bus from school, I would always stop at the mailbox on the way to the house. And every once in awhile I would see a piece of mail addressed my dad and on that larger, manilla envelope I would clearly read, "You may already a millionaire. Immanent winner, urgent, reply in next 30 days to receive your millions." Yeah, we were millionaires, but my parents were just too modest to let it show.

GOOD NEWS, a wealthy African Prince had a deathbed conversion to Christianity and expressed his wish to have millions of dollars shared with good Christians like me. I only need to reply to the email and all my financial concerns will be wiped away. God is Good!

Good News, powerball is \$1.5 billion dollars...

In Luke's gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry by going on a preaching tour of Galilee, a good ol' travelin preacher. And the next stop on the tour was Nazareth, his home town. Imagine the feeling of returning home, familiar streets and buildings, passing by your old haunts that you used to hang out at, and looking for the changes of a new restaurant or an old business that is no longer there. You even run into a few familiar faces of people who new you when you were a kid, "Hey Jez, what is happening, I didn't know you were back town. It's big J, how have you been. Jesus, good to see you, sorry to hear about your dad." - did you ever notice that. Mary pops up throughout the gospel story, but what happened to Joseph. But I digress.

So Jesus arrives back in his home town, a mixture of nostalgia and up-and-coming preacher surrounding him. And he arrives at the synagogue - probably the same synagogue that his parents took him to when he was a child - but this time he was allowed to stand in the front and to read from the scroll.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news..." I love me some good news, lay it on me Jesus!... "to the poor." Oh,... ok, they need some good news. "He sent me to proclaim release to the captives..." Wait, are you planning a jail break, what will happen if all the convicted felons, murderers and thieves are back on the street? "and recovery of sight to the blind,..." Not sure how you plan to fulfill that campaign promise, "to let the oppressed go free," but who will serve me my hamburger, they can be free, as long as they don't buy a house in my neighborhood or go to my children's school. "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." I'm all in favor of God's favor, but isn't that about the year of jubilation where we are supposed to forgive those who owe us debts, because Franky owes me \$20 dollars and he is going to pay up.

"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Was it good news like the publishers clearing house mailer, or was there something real about what Jesus was sharing?

Good news to the poor, to the captives, the blind and oppressed and those in debt. Great news if you are fitting into one of those categories, but most of us don't fit them - or at least we don't think of ourselves in that way.

Ezra, the priest and scribe, was teaching the people about God's law. The ten commandments I'm sure were at the top of the list, but I wonder how many of the other 600 plus laws were taught that day. It must have been a lot, because Ezra had to enlist at least 13 more temple priests to help teach the people. And as they finished their time of teaching, they looked over the crowd of people and saw long faces, sad eyes, and down trodden spirits. They were all mournful because they realized that they had not and could not fulfill all the law - they were sad because they felt like it was all too much and that they had already lost. "Don't be sad," they said, "Go home, eat the fat and drink the sweet wine - feast and be glad for this is the Lord's day - the joy of the Lord is your strength." they said.

The people discovered they are poor in spirit, that they were captured by sin and blind to a different way of life. And they wept because their sin was so great a debt that they had no hope of paying it off. And we are no different - poor in spirit, captured by sin, blind to God's love and calling, and in spiritual debt up to our eyeballs.

"I have been anointed to bring good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed." Christ's good news IS for me, even though I often don't recognize it, it is real good news for me. Christ lived so that we might know this good news, he died and was raised from the dead, so that this good news could be fulfilled for us all. Thanks be to God for real good news. May we learn to share that news with all we meet.