

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/31/2024

Proclaiming Good News to the Poor

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

I love studying the Bible because of the nuances and hidden details I discover upon deeper reading. There is just so much to enlighten and guide us and connect more deeply with our CREATOR. I find it exciting.

Recently I was looking at the beginning of Matthew 11. John the Baptizer had been imprisoned and sent some of his disciples to learn more about JESUS. Ask HIM, “Are you the ONE who is to come, or should we expect someone else?”

JESUS replied, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” This seems a good summary of the many miracles JESUS performed and would likely answer the question of John.

However, there are several details that I found intriguing. First, JESUS could have just said, “Yes, I’m the ONE.” Instead, HE highlights the things that HE has been doing. This is important because the prophet Isaiah foretold the actions of the MESSIAH (SAVIOR, CHRIST) that GOD would send. Guess what? It’s all these things that JESUS has listed. By enumerating these acts, JESUS is saying, “I’m doing what the MESSIAH is supposed to do. What do you think that means?” JESUS shows that HE is the fulfillment of the prophecies of scripture.

Second, this accounting JESUS gives is in ascending order of impressiveness. Diseases and infirmities are healed, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. We may not see it that way because things like giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf are fairly remarkable. None of us could restore someone’s sight. Through treatment some things can be corrected or improved, but full restoration? Only GOD could do that. But that’s the point, isn’t it? On top of these things, JESUS even raised the dead back to life. That one is very clearly the work only of GOD. Increasingly impressive. But then at the pinnacle is “the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” “The poor” has a much broader interpretation than just one’s financial situation. People are poor in relationships. (And the healings of JESUS, particularly things like leprosy, allow a person to return from isolation to community.) People are poor in their relationship with GOD. People are poor in their self-esteem, their sense of value. People are poor in their hopes for the future. The good news that JESUS brings can overcome these things and give a person life and wholeness. And this is why it is listed last. It is the zenith of what JESUS brings to the world.

Third, a small detail in two places gives specific instruction to us. When John’s disciples ask JESUS for proof, HE tells them to go back and report what they hear and see. They are to be witnesses to what GOD is doing in the world through JESUS. They are to go and tell. And then, the apex of JESUS’ works is that the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Note that JESUS doesn’t say, “I am announcing good news to the poor.” HE says that “the good news is proclaimed.” We may not be able to heal and cure. We certainly can’t raise the dead (though we can help people whose lives seem to be as empty as a tomb). But we can go and tell. We can proclaim the good news. We can tell what we see and hear GOD doing in our lives and the lives of others. When we do, we are participating in the mission of JESUS. And in doing so, we, too, may be bringing sight and hearing and healing and life to those who desperately need it. Through us, good news is proclaimed if only we look for it, listen for it, and then tell it.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey