



Christ Is Our Encouragement

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

From the first words spoken at the beginning of his earthly ministry, Jesus gave those listening to him direct and unmistakable **encouragement**. Jesus boldly announced that he had been sent to give good news, freedom, recovery of sight, the end of oppression and divine favor to those who needed **encouragement** the most. The poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed would be the recipients of such loving grace. We, as listeners to his words today, and also as people who share the same needs, rejoice in these gifts of his loving favor. We give thanks for his gifts of direct and unmistakable **encouragement**.

Jesus knew well the difficulties of living life in the Roman world. Poverty and hardship in a state of subjugation to a foreign power burdened the lives of the people. Imprisonment, conscription into the army and harsh taxation left many as mere captives. Life in the Roman world was hard living. The people of Jesus' day needed deliverance. They needed direct and unmistakable **encouragement**.

The people listening to Jesus that day were looking for a physical deliverance. They were looking for the type of encouragement that would come as a result of freedom from all forms of physical oppression. Although Jesus did

indeed heal the blind, raise the sick and the dead, as well as set many free from all kinds of captivity, his favor would look quite different than what most were expecting. His direct, unmistakable encouragement would be limitless by comparison. Jesus brought spiritual encouragement to those who would receive it.

In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world (John 16:33, The Message).

As Christ-followers, we have made our home in Christ Jesus, and he in us. We live in his spiritual freedom... We are no longer imprisoned, captive or oppressed, but alive in him.

The life Jesus lived was a paradox to the people. His death on the cross looked to most like nothing but discouragement. *Where was the physical deliverance so many were hoping for? Where was the direct and unmistakable **encouragement** that would come from freedom and the end of oppression?* There seemed to be no good news from Jesus' death.

In this physical life, we can often ask similar questions. Life in our modern world can be nothing but hard living, as well. Runaway inflation, high taxation and interest rates on credit card debt can leave us feeling like financial captives.

As we age, physical limitations, ailments and prolonged illnesses can come with a burdensome weight of oppression and a desperation for God's physical healing. We can live imprisoned by strained relationships with family

or friends, or by the utter realities of loneliness. We cry out for good news and favor from life all around us and feel like we receive none.

Yet, we are reminded that Jesus conquered the world. We are given the **encouragement** to **take heart!** We are not alone, though we may feel so. We are not without good news, favor and spiritual freedom though we can't see it. Jesus has given us the victory! Jesus reminds us of his ever-faithful indwelling presence. He is always right here.

I'll be with you...day after day after day, right up to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20, The Message).

As Christ-followers, we have made our home in Christ Jesus, and he in us. We live in his spiritual freedom, by his spiritual sight. His good news of salvation for all who will believe, take up their cross and follow him, is our **encouragement**. We remember that he lives in us, day after day. He will never leave nor forsake us.

From the beginning of his earthly ministry to the end of our physical lives—for all eternity we belong to him. We give thanks and rejoice in his **spiritual encouragement**. Though the age in which we live may look godless to us, we remain in his favor and grace. We rest in his victory.

Though we may feel imprisoned, oppressed or outside of his divine favor, he gives us the spiritual sight to remember the truth. We are his, no longer poor, but spiritually rich. We are his, no longer imprisoned, captive or oppressed, but alive in him. **Christ Jesus is our direct, unmistakable encouragement, each day of our lives.** □

—Ed Dunn