

Where in the world is God? Freeing you.

Luke 4:17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Jesus. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 18 The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, 19 and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

I don't have all the answers. That's probably the best thing I can say to start off the topic that we are going to talk about today. But Jesus gives us the starting point from which we can face all that we encounter on this difficult road.

I'm going to throw the subject out there by bringing up a celebrity example that hit the news this week. *Anxiety* is the title of a newly released song. If you're thinking of going home and checking it out after the service, I'll warn: sadly there is a curse word dropped in the refrain. Aside from that drawback, I do think this high profile example is of benefit. It brings to the headlines in a personal way a big issue, which *so many* people are facing. Here, take a look:

"But all my friends they don't know, what it's like, what it's like / They don't understand why, I can't sleep through the night. And I thought that I could take something to fix it / ---- I wish it, I wish it was that simple, ah, ah."

It's actually sung by two popular artists, Julia Michaels teaming up with Selena Gomez. And it isn't just *anxiety* that is in the picture. There is the wider context of facing *depression* as well.

Celebrities aren't alone in this. There is a proverbial flood of anxiety and other related mental health struggles that are hitting across the spectrum of society. You may already be very familiar with this. That may come from a personal example - yourself or others within your circle of family and friends facing a mental health struggle. Your familiarity may come more from having a finger on the pulse of our times and culture (though I bet there's still some personal connection too).

Here's the observation that one person shared: "Everyone is searching for a place to be safe... Safe from judgement. Safe from hurt. Safe from oppression. Safe from abuse. Safe from anxiety. Safe from depression. Safe from the worst parts of ourselves." Yeah? Does that ring true?

I think that helps to pinpoint how broad of an application there is for the topic that we're talking about here. And then from there, I think it directs us to the question we should answer first: And where are you going to find that?

Even if there is some resolution or partial relief found in other sources, maybe from people who provide certain levels of safety and comfort ... there's only one source that provides the full answer - complete resolution to: "where can you and I or any human being find that place where we're safe - safe even from the worst parts of ourselves?"

Jesus provides that for us. If we get that in place and locked in here [our hearts], that will give us a starting point from which we can return to the topic of anxiety or similar struggles, and have a safe place from which to face what we still encounter in life.

What do you envision when you hear about a group of people described as... "*Captives. Confined. Poor. Empty. Oppressed*"?

The last description there - "oppressed" - is those who are *broken, shattered, crushed*.

That's the group that Jesus talks about here. Isaiah by the Holy Spirit's inspiration talked about that same group hundreds of years earlier. Oh, who could this be that Jesus and Isaiah talk about who are in such a sorry state?

It's us. When it comes to the spiritual reality for each of us, there's a starting point which we must understand is true: brokenness, utter emptiness, and captivity are the descriptions used to tell this truth.

Jesus lays out here the predicament we are in. Prisoners are not always confined by concrete walls and barred doors. There are unseen things that had us entangled, things like pride, selfishness and rebellion.

But Jesus stepped in to break us free from our prison. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame. Sin did nothing but shackle you. We were imprisoned by sin, Satan and death. It was the worst kind of imprisonment because, on our own, there was never a chance of escape.

We would have forever remained in a state of captivity. But our God has brought us to see our lost state, to confess our sin, and to trust in Him to break the unseen chains that bound us up.

Jesus brings freedom for us captives. The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to have the sentence served - to have its penalty served. Someone must die and suffer hell - either you or a heaven-sent substitute. So He - our Lord Jesus -

went into battle against Satan. The Lamb of God went toe-to-toe with our ancient adversary. The Lamb was slain, but Satan's power to hold us was crushed. Jesus shed His blood and suffered hell on Calvary's hill so that we might be set free from the sin that bound us. Jesus rose from the dead so we might be released from the grave that claims us. The word used by Jesus here in Luke ch.4 for "freedom" or "set free" is the same word for "forgiveness" – literally, a "sending away" of sin out of God's sight forever. And so the one who trusts in Jesus has been freed from sin and freed for eternal life with God.

Soul once crushed, know relief. Guilt removed. Conscience calmed. Joy returned. Peace abiding. All yours in Jesus. Whenever Satan tries pulling you back into your former prison of unbelief and sin, remember the freedom you have in Jesus. "So if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed" (John 8:36)!

Now, we are free. But it's good for us to be honest about the battle that goes on daily within us. Someone asks us "how are you doing?" And we could always give the pat answer, "I'm fine." But there's tremendous benefit when fellow Christians get deeper than that. Think of giving some thought and really discussing something of substance from your life - maybe where you struggle. While it may appear on the outside to the casual observer all is going "fine" for us, how's it really going?

Struggles in life are real. We do get weighed down by them. There are the spiritual type. And when we lean on one another and share, we can encourage, correct, support and comfort each other. There are also physical and emotional things in life that can weigh on us. So we don't deny those. As we each deal with them, if we talk to one another – and if we're listening – we give each other openings to point one another to the assurances we carry from our God. Assurances that we carry even as we face hardships. The assurances: Jesus has freed you from your spiritual captivity - He has made you whole - Your sins removed, wrapped in His holy life given for you.

Again, this isn't saying to one another, "Anxiety or depression won't ever effect us." Instead, it is pointing each other to the safe place from which we can face all that we encounter.

Let's walk through that one more way, and try to pull together all that we're talking about today by looking to a personal example. This time I'm not going grab an individual from the headlines, like Julia Michaels or Selena Gomez. I read this week what a fellow pastor wrote about facing depression. What he had to share went like this: (edited & adapted somewhat)

"Shouldn't I be happy? I'm a Christian, aren't I? Jesus died for me. He took my sins away. I have eternal life. Depression shouldn't affect me at all!"

Let me laugh for a moment. | Look, the Gospel gives joy. It really does. Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again: Rejoice!" Paul wrote that at a time he thought he might soon be executed for the faith. He knew how to rejoice even in hardship.

We are freed from our sins. We are made children of God. We have a home in heaven. And yes, the response to all this is joy. But joy is not the same thing as happiness.

What is joy? Joy is a reaction to reality. We are saved. Jesus has died for us. Nothing can change these facts. Nothing can shake what is real. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit and grows through the Gospel.

How is that different from happiness? Happiness is a reaction to circum-stances. That smile you feel when things are going well? That's happiness. It's not a sin. Praise God for the gift of happiness! But nowhere does God tell us "thou shalt go around grinning all the time." If he had, Jesus himself would have sinned. Remember, Jesus wept and was familiar with sorrows.

It is possible to have joy and not feel happy. And feeling happy isn't a cure for all ailments. Proverbs expresses that thought well: "Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief." ([14:13](#))

But I'm Christian. So doesn't that mean I need to be happy, or at least fake happiness? Not at all.

If you feel pressure to always look happy on a Sunday morning because you think good Christians always smile, let me release that pressure for you: if it's ok for Jesus, it's ok for you. Jesus wept. He didn't always smile. You have permission to be broken. Don't find comfort in faking happiness. Instead, find real comfort for real hurt in Jesus.

Take your very real hurt to a very real Savior who knows what it's like to experience sorrow. Hear him as he says to you, "I know your pain, and I grieve with you. Know that your sorrow will end. I have borne all the guilt of this world, all the shame — all your shame, too. I love you, even when you're not smiling."

Maybe right now you're not feeling happy. That's ok. Your joy, though, cannot be taken away -- because Jesus stands with you, even now.

Or to see that truth in the terms of our series: Where is God in the world? He is day-by-day freeing you from your need to search for a safe place from which to face life. You have that safe place in Him. Amen.