

Free at Last: An Open Invitation for the Addicted¹

Luke 4:16-21

Introduction: Today is a day of special emphasis in our church. We are calling today “Recovery Sunday.” Our intent is to proclaim the *good news* that Jesus Christ offers *freedom and recovery* from every form of addiction.

Most people are familiar with addiction in the form of drug and alcohol abuse. Red Ribbon Week has been a successful program used in our schools to educate our children to the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Because of the physical damage drugs and alcohol can do to our bodies, chemical addictions are perhaps the most dangerous form of addiction.

However, we must not allow ourselves to be misled into believing that these are the *only* forms of addiction. There are addicts who have never tasted alcohol or abused drugs. Some may be sitting in this auditorium today. They suffer from codependency, sexual addiction, eating disorders, relationship addiction, and many others. For them, the need for recovery is just as great as for the chemically addicted.

The prevalence of this need has made recovery groups very popular today. There are numerous approaches for helping the addicted. Unfortunately, many programs fail to achieve their goals because they emphasize the wrong thing. They emphasize the ceasing of addictive behavior rather than addressing the real need of recovery. In Alcoholic Anonymous terms, it is the difference between being “sober” and being “in recovery.” Simply being sober has not solved the issues that caused the problem in the first place. Recovery is a process that changes people, and not just their actions.

There are many options for recovery today, but the ultimate recovery can only be found in the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Christ is the only “higher power” capable of the miracles needed to change addicted lives, and Jesus himself addresses this issue in Luke 4:16-21 (NIV):

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.” 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.”

I believe these verses teach us that Jesus Christ offers freedom and recovery from every form of addiction. This is the good news of the gospel. Let’s look at how the fulfillment of this scripture brings the power of the gospel to the addicted.

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I. The gospel proclaims *good news* to those who have *none*.

A. People who are addicted are *engulfed* in an *inherent lack* of good news.

The bad news in their lives is generally what leads them to addictions in the first place. Once the addiction begins, the bad news begins to multiply at an exponential rate. Sometimes the bad news is imagined or over emphasized from a loss of perspective, but in many cases the bad news is very real. Addiction causes real health problems, endangers relationships, jeopardizes jobs and careers, leads to depression and a sense of helplessness, and often results in legal difficulties.

B. These *tangible difficulties* can grow to the point that they appear to be *all that is left* in an addict's life.

Addiction becomes a vicious circle. The greater the addiction, the more hopeless things appear. The more hopeless things appear, the greater the need to escape into the addiction. This cycle continues until addiction becomes the only thing in the addict's life that he or she can depend on. Even when the addict sees a need to change and desires to do so, the fear of losing the only stable thing in life keeps change from occurring. Trapped in this quagmire of guilt and desperation, hope seems lost.

C. The gospel, however, declares that *there is hope* even for the *most despondent*.

Jesus carefully chose the passage of Scripture he used to announce the inauguration of his ministry. He seized upon the reference to the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed. These groups represented the most hopeless people in first-century society. In each case, Jesus delivered to them the hope for the very thing in life that seemed most impossible to them. Good news, freedom, sight, and release were the things for which these groups most yearned and yet could not allow themselves to hope. Jesus boldly proclaimed that this recovery was not only *possible*, but that it was his mission to make recovery *a reality*.

D. Significantly, Jesus told them that *hope* was within their reach *immediately*.

Today the scripture was fulfilled. Jesus was not promising those who needed hope and release that they would find help someday. His promise was that if they wanted it, the hopeless could realize change in their lives right away. The Spirit of the Lord was upon him and had provided him the power to effect life-altering changes. The gospel does not make shallow promises regarding *might* happen or qualify its claims against failure. The promise of recovery is made without hesitation, doubt, or limitation.

Illustration: Most of us have had the frustration of dealing with broken items in our homes. Often, to our untrained eyes, the items appear to be damaged beyond repair, at least by our own hands. In desperation, we call upon a repairman, but all too often, these calls lead only to more frustration. We are asked to meet service personnel somewhere between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Our job is to just sit around and wait. Then they may or may not be able to repair the problem, or they may have to send for parts that may be in soon or not be in for a while, or perhaps not at all. Meanwhile, we live with the brokenness. Our hopelessness turns out to be real and irreparable.

In Christ, the opposite is true. He responds to us when we cry out to him, has the power and ability to address the most serious of problems, and never needs to send out for parts. His ability to heal our deepest wounds so is so thorough that instead of just finding ourselves repaired, we are made new. In Christ, our hopelessness is shown to be unfounded.

What hope is offered by Christ to the addicted?

II. The gospel proclaims *tangible, physical* recovery.

A. The promises of freedom for prisoners and sight for the blind were *specific miracles* that the hopeless could see *demonstrated*.

Jesus did not offer vague promises of relief that would help the hopeless simply feel better. He promised drastic, dramatic results that would physically change their situation. One implication of Jesus' teaching is that the promise of recovery of sight for the blind and release for the prisoner go hand in hand; those imprisoned by their various defects would have them removed. Along with restoring the sight to the blind, we see this release in the healing of the lame, the deaf, the lepers, and even the raising of the dead. No physical problem was a limitation to the freedom that Christ could provide.

B. This is *tremendous news* for the addict who is faced with *physical problems*.

Addiction almost always plays itself out in physical consequences for the addicted. Drugs and alcohol provide the best example of this reality, but all addictions affect our bodies in one way or another. The physical problems incurred by our addictions can be overwhelming and devastating, which can lead addicts to believe that they have passed the point of no return. Their physical condition is just as serious as blindness or deafness. There appears to be no hope for recovery, but again and again throughout the New Testament, the power of Christ is displayed in the form of physical renewal.

C. *Physical recovery*, however, requires *faith and action* on our part.

Jesus required faith from the person who needed healing. He often required some sort of action on the part of the one who was healed to publicly demonstrate the miracle. The lame were told to pick up their mats and walk. The leper was to go and show himself to the priest. Lazarus was called to come forth from the tomb. In an addict's life, Jesus requires that we believe that he has not offered an empty promise, but a reality that is ours for the taking. To validate our faith, he demands that we go forth to show the changes that have occurred in our lives. An addict can be made well if he or she wants to be and believes in the healing power of Christ. Addicts then have the opportunity and the obligation to show those around them the miracle that has transformed their lives.

Illustration: One of the most popular forms of reality television has been the "makeover" shows. Whether the subject is a person, their home, or even their car, the impact of the show is the way these subjects are physically transformed. Addicts demonstrate the power of Christ in their lives when they submit themselves to the path of recovery. Alcoholics, for example, display the healing which is at work in their lives as they submit to detoxification and embrace the Twelve Steps of recovery. The physical

dependencies which characterize addictions to alcohol and other substances can be healed by the power of Christ, but addicts must take definitive steps to avail themselves of Christ's healing power.

The glory of Christ's transformation in the life of an addict is that it is not only a physical restoration.

III. In addition to *physical recovery*, the gospel offers *spiritual release*.

A. Jesus' words proclaim a recovery that is not only an *external transformation*, but an *internal change* as well.

The promise of good news for the poor and release for the oppressed represents more than the hope of money and physical freedom. There is also the hope of internal release from the burdens that poverty and oppression create. Jesus was not only promising a freedom from physical hardships. He also offered deliverance from the despair, fear, and worry that go hand in hand with poverty and oppression. Jesus' healing was spiritually efficacious as it was physically obvious.

B. This is glorious news to addicts whose *spirit and emotions* are *crushed*.

Addiction is usually the failed attempt to find something outside of us to fill the empty void that is within us. Addiction is a spiritual issue. Our spirits are poor and oppressed, and Jesus' words invite us to restoration. There is an opportunity in Christ for more than the absence of addiction. There is the promise of a new life, a new spirit, and a new hope. Any addict can tell you that such a transformation is even more miraculous than the physical removal of addictive cravings. The power to accomplish this kind of interior healing is truly miraculous.

C. Jesus proclaims his ability to perform these miracles with the saying, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

The power of God, and only the power of God, would be sufficient to accomplish the miracles that Jesus described in his sermon at Nazareth. Addicts are always looking for something that can deliver them from their misery. What the addicted must realize is that there is only one thing that can bring about such drastic change, and that is the power of God in Christ, who alone has defeated the powers which enslave us. A number of strategies can provide an absence of addictive behavior, but only God can transform the addiction itself. This transformation is available to the addict and demonstrates the power of God's love. Only God's love could provide such a miraculous opportunity for complete and total change.

Illustration: One of the great blessings of the Bible is its record of change in people's lives. For Abraham, Jacob, Peter, Paul, and others, even their names were changed to indicate the depth of the transformation that God had wrought. Their entire lives were transformed by the power of God. This is the promise that Jesus said was fulfilled in him that day in Nazareth two thousand years ago and is available for us *right now*.

Conclusion: Jesus Christ offers freedom and recovery to every person here today. Whatever your addiction may be, whether it is public or private, general or specific just to you, hope is offered to *you today*. The Spirit of the Lord is waiting to transform your

addiction. You need no longer to identify your life by your addiction. You have the opportunity to be more than an alcoholic, a sexual addict, an overeater, or any other sort of addict. You have the chance to be a child of God, freed from addiction, both physically and spiritually. Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Hope, freedom, and release are yours for the taking. All you have to do is decide if you *want* the hope Jesus offers us and are *willing to reach out* to receive it. Are you ready to give up the life of addiction for the life of freedom found only in Jesus Christ?