

## INTRODUCTION

In his book, *What a Way to Live*, Dr. Tony Evans gives reference to a conversation between Billy Graham and an interviewing network. Graham was asked, "If you could eradicate any problem in America, what would it be?" Graham answered very quickly and very directly as he replied, "The racial division and strife in our nation." If Billy Graham were alive today and asked the same question, I'm certain he would have the same answer. The voice of the oppressed still cries out.

To begin, I need to present my credentials to speak on this topic of racial oppression.

I am a white Protestant male. I am what many deem "privileged." And, it is true. I am privileged. I'm privileged to live in America. I'm privileged to grow up in a Christian home. I'm privileged to be middle class. I'm privileged to have attended college and seminary. I'm privileged to never have had to worry about my safety. There are many more things that I could add to the list. I've worked hard for a few things in my life, but to be honest, most of them are unearned. I'm privileged to have them.

Because I am privileged, I don't know what it is like to be born into poverty. I don't know what it is like have violence and harmful circumstances around me. I don't know what it is like for people to look at me differently or with suspicion. I don't know what it is like to have to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to attend higher education. I don't know what it is like to be a minority. I don't know what it is like to be oppressed.

It seems that I have absolutely no credentials to speak on the topic of the racial tension that is present in our nation at this very moment. BUT, although I have no clue what it is like to be marginalized, oppressed, falsely accused, in fear for my life, and having the system against me, I know someone who does. And that is who I want to talk about.

Jesus is God in the flesh, the long-promised Messiah. The whole of the Old Testament pointed to him, in eager expectation of his arrival. He finally came and lived in small-town Nazareth for thirty years under Roman rule and in poverty. That's how God decided to come. That's the setting God placed himself. And here Jesus is in the passage we are about to read, having started his ministry of teaching and miracles in Capernaum and has now come home to make public who he is and why he has come. This is how he does it.

Read **Luke 4:16-21**

## BODY

I want us to see three things from Jesus that flow out of this inaugural reading of the purpose of who he is and why he has come.

### 1) **JESUS CAME FOR THE OPPRESSED**

Jesus inaugurated his ministry in Luke by reading from Isaiah 61 in his hometown synagogue. After he purposefully read words such as, “He has anointed me...to set at liberty those who are oppressed,” he sat down and said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Think of all the passages Jesus could have turned to in order to make public who he is. He could have turned to prophecies of David showing he will be on the throne forever (2 Samuel 7:16). He could have turned to the Genesis 3:15 protoevangelium and said I am here to crush the head of that ancient serpent. Maybe they only had the Isaiah scroll out in the synagogue and he had to choose from Isaiah. He could have pulled from some more powerful passages like Isaiah 53. Didn't Jesus come to die? There's no passage that more clearly demonstrates the sufferings of the suffering Servant. No, he chose, it says, to read from Isaiah 61. He chose to read about his actions towards the downtrodden and marginalized in society. Because He came for them.

Think about how Jesus did ministry. Yes, he taught and healed large groups of people. But, who did he spend time with? It wasn't the elites he sought out. He sought out and spent time with and ate with and loved on the marginalized of society. He ate with sinners, prostitutes and tax collectors. It wasn't just those marginalized in society because of their sin, but also because of their place in the social order. He talked so much about the poor, and even lifted them up saying we should be like them! Think of the passage of Jesus with the woman at the well. There are so many reasons that he shouldn't have been talking with her. She was a Samaritan, a woman, and had a sketchy reputation. And Jesus drew from the same well as her, breaking many of the oppressive rules that were present in that moment. She was oppressed as a woman in that culture, and even was outcast from the other women because of her reputation. She was oppressed by the Jews because she was a Samaritan. And Jesus saw her. And heard her. And liberated her.

There is story after story we could look at like this. Jesus came for the oppressed. It's right there in the passage he chose to quote in that hometown synagogue. He came to free those with bruised souls. Jesus came to offer meaning and dignity to the marginalized of society. He came to free bruised, broken, and shattered hearts is what this passage can literally mean.

### 2) **JESUS CAME TO BE OPPRESSED**

Jesus came to free the marginalized by being marginalized himself. He came to liberate the oppressed by being oppressed himself. His own hometown would run him out of town for what he was now saying in this synagogue. He would be falsely accused. The system would fail him. The authorities would wrongfully kill him. As they are killing him, he would yell out, “I thirst!” And he didn't even have breathe enough to whisper “I can't breathe,” having likely died from asphyxiation from his crucifixion.

Jesus knows what it is to be marginalized. Jesus knows what it is to be wrongfully accused. Jesus knows what it is to have the system against you. Jesus knows what it is to brutally die though having done nothing wrong.

Jesus came to bring freedom to the oppressed by being oppressed himself. He came to breathe life into those who can't breathe. He came to die to give life to everyone who places their faith in the marginalized God-man from Roman-oppressed Nazareth.

Oppressed, marginalized, broken-hearted brother and sister, Jesus sees you. Even if no one else understands, Jesus knows. It's for you that he came.

With the context of who Jesus is and what He went through, we can see a little more clearly some of the purpose for which he came. He came for the oppressed by means of being oppressed himself.

### **3) JESUS CAME TO BRING ULTIMATE LIBERATION FOR THE OPPRESSED**

I want you to consider Jesus as he rode in to fulfil his mission.

Read **Luke 19:28-42**

Jesus' followers didn't see him as we see him. They saw him as the liberator of the oppressed from Isaiah 61 that he quoted in that synagogue. They even held a peaceful protest as he rode into Roman occupied Jerusalem, crying "Hosanna!" (Matt. 21:9), which is an expression of praise or adoration literally meaning "Please save us!" They were oppressed, and their liberator was here, and as they were crying "Hosanna," they were protesting the oppression of the Roman system. And the leaders tried to silence their voice. Jesus responded to them, "If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." They were crying out that the liberator of the oppressed, the rightful king to rule and reign without prejudice, to bring forth peace, had come! And the Pharisees said, stop protesting! And Jesus' response is staggering. He says, "nothing can silence the voice of oppressed." I have come to bring liberation for the oppressed.

There are many people saying, "Stop protesting! It's causing more harm than good!" I question whether much of the looting and vandalism is from these peaceful protesters, but regardless, there are many Christians who are quicker to say, "Don't destroy that property!" than they are "Don't destroy that person!" If you look at the social media feeds of those who cry out for the protests to stop, you will be hard pressed to find any posts about the racial oppression of which the protesters are crying.

Stop! Stop and listen! Right now isn't the time to say "Stop shouting!" It's the time to say, "I'm listening!"

Hear some of these words of Martin Luther King, Jr. *“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends...There comes a time when silence is betrayal.”* He wasn't silent. He peacefully protested. And he was shot and killed. Silenced. But the voice of the oppressed is crying out right now. Are you listening? Jesus is.

He came to make the way for the truest freedom of oppression. There is an oppression that is far worse than racial oppression. It's the oppression of sin from which we need liberated. That's what he came to bring. Freedom of sin. The change out there starts with a change in here. In our hearts. In our lives. Letting Jesus first rule and reign in us. But in order to do that, he himself was oppressed. He was arrested just like we see some people arrested for today, for the potential of causing an insurrection, for uprooting the systemic injustices of the time.

*(Just this week, two pastors in Louisville were arrested. I saw the video. And I went to college with one of them, and seminary. He has won preaching awards and is pursuing a doctorate. He was arrested on Monday and when he got out with a citation continued his online Bible study that he does every week that next day, yesterday. They weren't cussing or looting or vandalizing or resisting arrest. And even the other pastor was held on the ground with a tazer to his head. I saw it all. And I know the guy! An educated, upright, godly pastor, put in the back of a cop car and given a citation for peacefully protesting.)*

Think about this...They arrested Jesus at the time of the Passover. The day that was to forever commemorate the liberation of the oppressed in Egypt. The irony was that Jesus came as the ultimate liberator and in an other-worldly sense came to bring insurrection to the kingdom of this world. And that's what they arrested Him for. He was speaking against those in power. The scribes and Pharisees didn't like the religious tables he was turning over. The Romans didn't like the talk of him as king, so as they crucified him they mockingly put a sign above his head saying “King of the Jews.”

Jesus came for the oppressed. Jesus knows what it is to be oppressed. Jesus came to bring ultimate liberation for the oppressed, of which you and I are a part of.

As long as there are those who are oppressed, God forbid if we don't cry out, even the rocks will.

## **CONCLUSION**

In order for the system to change, we must change. The problem is “out there” when there are problems “in here.”

I want you to consider some of these questions to see if there is a root of racist oppression in your heart:

- Would you see nothing wrong with your daughter dating a black person?
  - I've recently heard one black person say, “You cheer for me on the football field but you wouldn't want me to take your daughter on a date.”

- If a black man starts to walk up to you while you're pumping gas, do you act differently than if a white man was walking towards you?
- Do you assume a black person is less qualified or less educated in your field or in general?
- When you hear someone lamenting the death of a black person, do you say, "I hear you, but..."
- Do you have any black friends?
- Have you reached out to any black people during this time?

<sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

<sup>18</sup> *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

<sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

To conclude, would you make these portions of Scripture your prayer.

*"Lord, open my eyes to see the world, to see people as you see. Let me be slow to speak and quick to listen. Let all that I do be done in love, which covers over a multitude of sins. Lord, help me to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility value others above myself. Let me look not only to my own interests, but also to the interests of others, having this mind among myself, which is mine in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Let me be a shining city on a hill, pointing others to the light that only he brings amidst the darkness. Let me not only be a voice for the oppressed, but let me go to where they are and draw from the same well. Let me point them to the Living Water that will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. Allow me to see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Let me do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with you God. And may, as the passage of Isaiah 61 that Jesus read from in the synagogue states, may all this happen so that you may be glorified and that you may display your beauty. It's in the King of the Jews, the King of Kings and the Lords of Lords, the bringer of freedom and life, Hosanna in the highest, the One who saves, in Jesus' name, amen."*

*During worship, read this liturgy:*

**A Liturgy for a Time of Widespread Suffering | By Doug McKelvey**

Christ Our King,

Our world is overtaken by unexpected calamity, and by a host of attending fears, worries, and insecurities.

We witness suffering, confusion, and hardship multiplied around us, and we find ourselves swept up in these same anxieties and troubles, dismayed by so many uncertainties.

**Now we turn to you, O God,  
in this season of our common distress.**

Be merciful, O Christ, to those who suffer, to those who worry, to those who grieve, to those who are threatened or harmed in any way by this upheaval. Let your holy compassions be active throughout the world even now—tending the afflicted, comforting the brokenhearted, and bringing hope to many who are hopeless.

**Use even these hardships to woo our hearts  
nearer to you, O God.**

Indeed, O Father, may these days of disquiet become a catalyst for conviction and repentance, for the tendering of our affections, for the stirring of our sympathies, for the refining of our love.

**We are your people, who are called by you,  
We need not be troubled or alarmed.**

Indeed, O Lord, let us love now more fearlessly, remembering that you created us, and appointed us

to live in these very places,  
in the midst of these unsettled times.

It is no surprise to you that we are here now,  
sharing in this turmoil along with the rest of  
our society, for you have called your children  
to live as salt and light among the nations,  
praying and laboring for the flourishing of the  
communities where we dwell, acting as agents of  
your forgiveness, salvation, healing, reconciliation,  
and hope, in the very midst of an often-troubled world.

And in these holy vocations  
you have not left us helpless, O Lord,  
because you have not left us at all.  
Your Spirit remains among us.

**Inhabit now your church, O Spirit of the Risen Christ.  
Unite and equip your people for the work before them.**

Father, empower your children to live as your children.  
In times of distress let us respond, not as those  
who would instinctively entrench for our own  
self-preservation, but rather as those who—in imitation  
of their Lord—would move in humble obedience toward  
the needs and hurts of their neighborhoods and communities.

You were not ashamed to share in our sufferings, Jesus.  
**Let us now be willing to share in yours, serving  
as your visible witnesses in this broken world.**

Hear now these words, you children of God,  
and be greatly encouraged:

The Lord's throne in heaven is yet occupied,  
his rule is eternal, and his good purposes  
on earth will be forever accomplished.  
So we need never be swayed by the brief and  
passing panics of this age.

**You are the King of the Ages, O Christ,  
and history is held in your Father's hands.**

We, your people, know the good and glorious end of this story. Our heavenly hope is secure. In this time of widespread suffering then, let us rest afresh in the surpassing peace of that vision, that your whole church on earth might be liberated to love more generously and sacrificially.

**Now labor in and through us, O Lord, extending and multiplying the many expressions of your mercy.**

**Amen.**

From *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, and Hope*, a new collection of liturgies for seasons of dying and grieving. Coming fall 2020.