

# **Jesus Came To Set Prisoners Free**

## **September 3, 2006**

### **Luke 4:16-19 (NKJV)**

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. [17] And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

[18] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
**To proclaim liberty to the captives**  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
[19] To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Several years ago I attended a Pastor's Convention in Ft. Smith Arkansas. One of the speakers at the convention was **Tommy Barnett**, the pastor of First Assembly of God Church in Phoenix, Arizona. That church is one of the largest churches in America.

**Pastor Barnett** talked about how God had given him a vision for a Dream center in Los Angeles, California and how that vision was becoming a reality. The vision was to reach prostitutes, gang members, the homeless and fatherless, those suffering from A.I.D.S., and others that society doesn't want to be bothered with.

Pastor Barnett's message was powerful. So powerful, in fact, that at the end of the service a special offering was taken to help build an auditorium for the Dream Center and \$87,000 was raised! WOW!

**I would like to share with you a few things that Pastor Barnett said that night.**

### **He made this statement:**

- What you believe tends to become your reality.
- What you believe will either attract or repel.

For instance, if you believe that money is evil, then you will repel it. But, if you think that money is good and that it takes on the character of what it is used for, and if you use it for worthwhile projects. Then you will attract it.

### **The truth is, money is neither good nor evil. It's what you do with it that determines its value.**

- The same hundred-dollar bill can feed a crack habit or put food on the table.
- It can pay for a prostitute or buy your wife flowers and perfume.
- It can feed a slot machine or feed hungry children.

It's what you do with it that determines whether it is good or bad.

God wants to bless you and me so that we can be a blessing!

What you believe shapes how you act and tends to become a reality in your life.

### **The Bible says....**

#### **Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV)**

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

### **Joke:**

**There was a man and his wife who believed in reincarnation.** They had a very bad relationship. They couldn't stand each other but neither of them believed in divorce, so they stayed together. He actually looked forward to dying so that he could escape from his nagging wife and come back in another form of life and be happy.

Eventually they both died and based on their belief in reincarnation, they both came back to life in another life form. He came back as a dog and she came back as a flea on that dog.

**Be careful what you choose to believe because what you believe shapes how you act and tends to become a reality in your life.**

My text for today is Luke 4:16-18. Most of you are familiar with these words of Jesus. They define His ministry here on earth.

He said, “The Lord has anointed me to” .....

- Preach the gospel to the poor
- Heal the brokenhearted
- Proclaim liberty to the captives
- Recovery of sight to the blind
- And to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

**The ministry of Jesus was a liberating ministry. He was sent to the earth to open prison doors and set the captives free.**

The truth is, all prison doors are not made of concrete and steel bars. Any place of confinement is a prison.

- There’s a prison of anger.
- There’s a prison of unforgiveness
- There’s a prison of bitterness
- There’s a prison of debt
- There’s a prison of loneliness
- There’s a prison of depression

**Sometimes those prisons have a greater hold on people than the ones made of concrete and steel.**

**But Jesus said, “I have come to set the prisoners free.”**

Tommy Barnett said, “Don’t you think if that is why Jesus came to this earth that we ought to be involved in that sort of ministry today?”

**Tommy Barnett told this story and it really touched my heart and I want to share it with you today.**

He said that several years ago, he was having his morning devotional, reading the Bible, and he came across the verse where Jesus said....

**Matthew 25:35-36 (NKJV)**

for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; [36] I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

And he thought to himself, "Lord, I've done pretty good at feeding the hungry and some of those other things but then he came to the part that said, "I was in prison and you came to Me." And the Lord spoke to him and said, "I want you to go and visit a man in prison today. His name is Jim Bakker."

**Pastor Barnett said**, "I said to the Lord, I can't do that. It will ruin my good name. The press will find out about it and everybody will know about it. It will hurt my church if I do that!"

But he said, "The Lord said, 'Go!'"

**So he went to the prison and spent the day visiting with Jim Bakker who was heart broken and lonely.**

He said that when it was time for him to leave Jim Bakker turned to him and said with bid tears in his eyes, "Pastor, will you visit my son?"

He said, "You know, when I came to prison, my marriage broke up and my wife married my best friend, and it devastated my son. He was only thirteen years old. He turned to drugs and alcohol. He dropped out of school. He can't even read or write. Will you go to him and try to get him to come to your school in Phoenix?"

Pastor Barnett told Jim Bakker that he would see what he could do.

He contacted Jamie Bakker but he said, "I don't want any part of God! I don't want any part of religion! Just leave me alone!"

**Pastor Barnett said that there was nothing he could do. The boy wouldn't listen.**

Several years went by and he received a phone call. It was from Jim Bakker.

Jim Bakker told him that he had been released from prison.

Pastor Barnett asked, "How are you?"

Jim replied, "I did better in prison than I'm doing out of prison."  
He said, "I'm out now, but I can't even leave the home I'm living in because everywhere I go the news paper people hound me. They hide in bushes taking pictures of me and cursing me. It's worse now than it was when I was in prison."

Then he said, "My boy is coming to live with me but he's still on drugs. He's still in bondage. Would you please allow him to come to Phoenix and be a part of the Master's Commission at your church?"

Pastor Barnett said, "Jim, I've tried to get him to come but he won't. He says he wants no part of it." But Jim said, "He's changed his mind. He says he wants to come now."

**So Pastor Barnett said that Jamie Bakker came to Phoenix and the first Sunday he was there, he came to the altar, fell on his knees and gave his heart to the Lord.**

He said that they put him in the home of the man who heads up their ministry to punk rockers.... kids with purple hair and pierced bodies. And he said that Jamie's life was transformed. He began to work with those kids.

Several months later he came to Pastor Barnett and said that he wanted to give his testimony.

Pastor Barnett said, "Are you sure? No one knows who you are. Are you sure you want to do that?"

Jamie said, "Yes." And he called his dad and told him what he was going to do.

**Pastor Barnett decided to let Jamie give his testimony at his Pastor's Convention. 8000 pastors were there from all over America.**

He said that he receive a phone call from Jim. Jim said, "Pastor, I want to thank you for what you've done for my boy. His life has been changed. He wants me to come to hear him give his testimony. I would like to come but I haven't been in a church since I got out of prison and I'm really scared."

Pastor Barnett said, "You think he was scared? I was the one who was scared. There was a lot of bad press going on at that time."

Jim said, "I know I can't come. I wouldn't do that to you."

Pastor Barnett said that something rose up on the inside of him that said, "I came to set the captives free." And he blurted out, "I want you to come. Every dad has the right to hear his boy give his testimony."

**So Jim Bakker went to Phoenix. No one knew that he was there except Pastor Barnett and his wife.**

There were 8000 pastors there.

Pastor Barnett called Jim's son to the platform. He said, "My name is Jamie Bakker. That doesn't mean much to you people but it might when I tell you that my dad is Jim Bakker. He went to prison because of his sin."

He told how sin had ruined his dad's life and his life. He told the whole story. He didn't know that his dad was in the audience.

**When he finished those 8000 pastors stood to their feet and applauded.**

Tears were streaming down Jamie's face. He said, "You don't know what this means to me. I had no idea how you react to my being here."

When he finished Pastor Barnett stepped to the microphone and said, "You know what Jamie, you're dad wanted to be here tonight but he called and said that he couldn't come because he was afraid that it would hurt me and hurt our church. But I told your dad, "You have a right to hear your boy give his testimony." And he's here."

Jim Bakker stood up in the back of the auditorium and they ran toward each other, threw their arms around each other and embraced. The prodigal son and his dad.

Pastor Barnett said, “I watched as 8000 pastors stood and clapped and cried for over ten minutes. It was one of the most moving events that has ever taken place in our church.”

**Jim Bakker then stood before that multitude of pastors and said,** “Listen to me my friends. Whatever you do, don’t spend your life winning the world and lose your own boy like I did. I was busy trying to win the world but I was losing my son.”

He said, “I remember a picture that was taken of me and the President of the United States standing in front of one of the magnificent building that I had built. We were shaking hands and right between us was a little boy peaking through our legs trying to get the attention of his dad but I was too busy.’

He said, “I was in prison for several years before my son was allowed to come and visit me. But when he turned 16 he came and we spent the whole day together. When he had to leave he looked at me and said, “Daddy, this is the greatest day of my whole life.”

I said, “What do you mean, son?”

He said to me, “All I’ve ever wanted to do was to get to spend a whole day with you.” With tears streaming down his cheeks Jim Bakker said, “I had to go to prison before I would spend a whole day with my boy.”

**WOW! What a story!**

A few months later Jim Bakker showed up at the Dream Center in Los Angeles and said, **“Can I stay here tonight?”** That night he went out with those who ministered to abused children. They asked him to talk to them and he shared his testimony. For three hours they listened. It was a wonderful night.

**He said, “Can I spend one more night?”**

That night he went out with those who took food for the hungry and they just reached out to him. Inner city people don't care how bad you've been. They've been worse.

**That night he said, "Can I spend one more night?"**

That night he went with those who witnessed to prostitutes.

After seven nights he said, "Pastor would you let me just stay here as one of the people who is recovering? This is the only place I've been that I feel accepted."

For two years, Jim Bakker stayed at the Dream Center. He went there a broken man, afraid of his own shadow, totally abandoned by his religious friends. But because of the love he received there he got back on track.

He wrote a book entitled, "I was Wrong". He denounced his old extravagant lifestyle.

He's built a youth camp in Florida for abused and wayward kids. He has a television show again that originates in Branson, Missouri. God has changed his life around.

**Jesus came to set the captives free! He has commissioned us to do the same.**

Somebody must reach the children and youth of this generation! So many of them don't have a clue about what the Bible says and what God's plan is for their lives. There are being taught by MTV and that is fatal. Unless the church reaches them with the truth, they will be lost forever.

**Let me tell you a funny story that Pastor Barnett told.** He said that Jan Crouch was interviewing a biker girl. She had been involved in every sin imaginable. She had been a prostitute, a drug addict, a gang member. You name it, she had been involved in it.

**She told about things she had done that were so bad that even God was shocked.**

As Jan interviewed her, Jan's mascara looked like the grapes of wrath. It was pouring down her face.

Finally, it was time for the interview to end and Jan said, "That mean old Devil. I just hate that mean old Devil." Then she said, "I think we ought to curse that mean old Devil."

**You know what Jan meant and I know what Jan meant but that biker girl didn't have a clue.**

Jan look at her and said, "Don't you think you ought to curse that mean old Devil?" And the girl said, "OK". And she called the Devil every dirty name You've ever heard right there on national television.

When she finished Jan was like (Mouth Open). But she came back and said, **"Well, all I can say is, every thing she said about the Devil is true."**

**Pastor Barnett talked about how the church must get beyond our traditions and methods if we are going to reach the lost.** He said that the message is sacred, the method is not. Limitations that have been placed upon us by our traditions are keeping us from being relevant to our generation.

He talked about trying to reach the inner city kids in Los Angeles with the same music they sang in Phoenix. Songs like "It is Well With My Soul" and "How Great Thou Art".

Those are great songs! But he said that one of the kids came to him and said, "Pastor, just once, can we do our own kind of music"? He said, "OK."

That night he got the shock of his life. He came in and guitars were wailing. Drums and bongos and cymbals were pulsating. The music was so loud that insects were dying in the atmosphere and they were singing, "My Lord, talkin' 'bout, my Lord, Jesus!"

**He said, They're singing "My Girl."**

Then he said, "It's not my kind of music but they are reaching thousands of young people in Los Angeles with the gospel of Jesus. Kids that everyone else gave up on.

**Pastor Barnett preacher for over two hours that night and no one wanted to leave. Why? Because he was passionate about what he was doing.**

**God reminded me that night that He has called Elim to reach out to those around us;** to the hurting; to those who are prisoners in the own minds; to the lost; to everyone who needs to be saved regardless of who they are.

There are thousands of children in this area who do not go to church anywhere. How can we reach them? There are thousands of teenagers in this area who do not go to church anywhere. How can we reach them?

We must not be so bound by our traditions that we become irrelevant. Jesus came to save the lost and open prison doors and set captives free.

Next Sunday night we are going to begin a four-night revival that has the potential of sitting hundreds of captives free. They will not be set free if they are not here. It's our job to bring them. I am asking you to join me again this week in inviting the lost and in praying and fasting that hundreds will be saved.

**If you signed up to help or to be in the drama, don't forget to be here Friday night.**

**I wonder if there is anyone here today who is bound.** You may not be in a prison made with steel and concrete but you are bound by sin or by a habit, or by depression, or loneliness, or something else. Jesus came to set you free.

He wants to set you free right now. He wants to break those chains that have you in prison.

Give invitation!