

Story #3: Your Deliverance, Pt. 1

The Christ

The Three Stories of the Bible

Luke 3:21-22; Acts 10:37-38

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Wesley J. Gabel

My relatives enjoy telling stories on one another. A cousin recently circulated an email about my death. I think the story is premature. Apparently, I arrived at the pearly gates behind a New York City taxi cab driver. I know cab drivers in New York. I've competed with those taxis for the same space on Manhattan streets. Those drivers usually do not rate high on "the fruit of the Spirit" scale, especially in categories like patience and gentleness. When St. Peter greeted the cab driver, he gave him a beautifully woven, silk robe. It was ornate with bedazzling jewels. Diamonds and sapphires, emeralds and rubies glittered gloriously. No designer on earth could have made such an incredible garment. St. Peter also handed the cabbie a staff of pure gold. It glistened. The man entered heaven in stunning fashion. Then it was my turn. I could hardly wait. "Your name?" asked Peter. "Wes Gabel," I answered. Rather quickly, Peter found my name; and then he said, "Wait here, prince of God. I will get your robe and scepter." You could imagine my thoughts. For a moment I let myself dream about what was coming. When Peter returned, he dressed me in a plain white, cotton garment and gave me a stick for a staff. Of course, my cousin knows that I always act with utmost decorum and humility and am not given to outbursts of jealousy. With tenderness and tact I quietly inquired, "Are you crazy, Peter? Have you lost a rock in your noggin? Are you out of your everlasting mind? You just decorated a Manhattan taxi driver as if he was king of the earth; and I, who have been preaching for years and sacrificed you know what, am walking into heaven like a peasant. What on earth could you be thinking?" Peter responded, "I'm not thinking on earth, Wes; and you are not on earth any more either. In heaven you enjoy the fruit of your labors, *the results not the efforts*. When you preached, people slept. When he drove, people prayed."

I don't think the understanding of heaven in that story is accurate, but it does reveal the truth that our best efforts often come up short. We Christian believers have such a great calling, yet our efforts seem feeble because the results are so slim. The Bible is high on what we can accomplish, but our experience frequently doesn't match that.

In the first story of the Bible, we learn that you and I were made in God's image. We were designed by God. We were not made to produce slim results. Meager results come from the curse associated with the second story of the Bible, and Jesus came to free us from that curse. In the second story of the Bible, we learn about a death that cut us off from fellowship with God and dominates us. In the third story, the story of our deliverance, Jesus came not only to free us from destruction but to restore us as children, companions and princes of God.

One implication is that we will produce like powerful princes. Jesus told his followers that he desired that they produce big time. He said, ***"This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."***

Frequently, people assume that Jesus produced because he was special. They believed that he affected people so powerfully because he was the unique son of God. The truth is that Jesus had no special power as son of God. Jesus could heal no one because he was the son of God. Jesus could convert no one because he was son the of God. What made Jesus so effective was his anointing.

Have you ever tracked the work of anointing in the Bible? It's fascinating! Priests were anointed before they could serve and help people connect to God. Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel and Saul then changed. Because of that change, he was recognized by his people and received as king. David, also anointed king by Samuel, wouldn't rebel against Saul, despite Saul's treachery, because David respected that anointing. The prophets understood that they had a special anointing of the Spirit. The Jewish Messiah, who was to deliver Israel, carried the name "Anointed One." Messiah means "anointed one." The Greek term "Christ" means "Anointed One." To say "Jesus Christ" is to say "Jesus, the Anointed."

Each person, who was anointed in the Bible, was given divine power, even God's own Spirit to accomplish a task or mission: helping people come to God as a priest, leading a nation as a king, sharing God's will as a prophet, delivering the world as God's savior.

If Jesus performed his great wonders because he was the son of God, his childhood should have been full of great stories. Quite the contrary, Jesus' early life was obscure. When he was baptized by John at age 30, Jesus was part of the crowd at the Jordan River. He didn't stand out. No one noticed him. Jesus spoke no message and performed no miracle until he was anointed... because there was no power for him to make a difference in people's lives without the anointing.

Jesus' life changed when he received the anointing, and this is how it happened. First, Jesus submitted to the ministry of John the Baptist. Jesus did not receive his anointing on his own. Do you suppose there's a signal to us in that? He was baptized. He prayed. He received the Spirit who descended on him as a dove. He then experience affirmation from his Father: "This is my son with whom I pleased." I believe that affirmation, that communication of love by God, is part of the anointing. When you are convinced of God's love for you, when you receive that affirmation, you have something to share.

That, however, doesn't mean everything will go well. Listen to what followed Jesus' experience.

Right away, Jesus was tested. The devil attacked him and tried to undermine his confidence in God's love. His anointing didn't spare him temptation. It did lead him to pray. Jesus prayed. He proclaimed. He healed. He now led others. He also suffered.

In describing Jesus and his work to some non-Jewish people, Peter noted how Jesus' ministry began in Galilee after the baptism of John. He said that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went around doing good. He went around healing ALL who were under the power of the devil. He did this because God was with him. Jesus did amazing things because he was in partnership with God through the Holy Spirit. That partnership was God's intention from the beginning for all humanity.

We own the name Christians because we receive an anointing through Christ. His anointing is passed. Jesus implied that when he told his disciples, ***"As the Father sent me, so I am sending you"*** (John 20:21). How could the disciples go do Christ's work in the same manner as Jesus if they didn't have the same Spirit? Moreover, how were the disciples to fulfill their calling if they didn't receive a special power. Jesus told them:

"Go... to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give" (Matt 10:6-9).

The disciples were commanded to embrace exactly the same ministry as Jesus. How could they do those things unless they had the same power that God gave Jesus? How could anyone accomplish those things without a special power, without Jesus' anointing?

Jesus promised:

"Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:11-12).

Jesus did what he did because the Father was in him through the Spirit; and he was in the Father acting through the Spirit. He promised the same for us. His promise wasn't just for 1st Century disciples. He said "anyone who has faith in me" will do what I do.

Hear this. At a place called Bethany, Jesus promised all the followers with him that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came on them. Then they would be Christ's witnesses all over the planet.

That's your destiny. That's mine. This church is about making disciples that obey everything that was commanded of those first disciples. Christ expanded their commission to the whole world, and we have that commission. Christ promised them his power, his anointing, and they got it. We have been given the same promise. This special anointing of the Holy Spirit is for us, for all who are far off, for all whom God calls.

Our deliverance in Christ is so great that God doesn't just restore us to fellowship. He gives us a full partnership in his work and in his power. When you truly recognize who Jesus is, the Christ, and believe what he said, your life will never be the same... and neither will the world!