

Putting the Last First

By Terry Dalrymple



Near the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus described his mission to people in his hometown of Nazareth. He went to the synagogue in the community where he grew up, opened a scroll, and read from the book of Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon 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.” (Luke 4:18,19)

After reading this, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. With every eye in the synagogue fastened on him, he declared, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” On that day, Jesus declared himself to be the anointed one of whom the prophet spoke and appropriated the words of Isaiah as his own personal mission statement. He used these words to explain to people in his hometown who he was and why he came.

The passage that Jesus chose to describe his mission makes it clear that the hurting, the poor, and the oppressed would be the focal point of his ministry. Jesus would take those who had been pushed to the periphery – the suffering, the alienated, and the marginalized – and move them to the center. The last would be first.

Near the end of his public ministry, Jesus describes a day when he will sit on his throne as judge and separate the righteous from the unrighteous based on how they responded to the needs of the poor. He says to the righteous: “I was hungry and you fed me”, and to the unrighteous “I was hungry and you did not feed me.” (Matthew 25:31-46) Acts of service to the poor are not only characteristic of righteousness but are received by the king himself. They are not only good deeds, but they are acts of worship.

At the beginning of Jesus ministry, he stated that his mission was to preach good news to the poor, heal the sick, and release the oppressed. At the end of the age, he separates the righteous from the unrighteous based on how they responded to the needs of the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned. Jesus defined ministry to the poor as ministry to Himself. As his followers, we want our lives and ministries to reflect these values.

For more information on “Putting the Last First” and ministering wholistically, contact info@chenetwork.org