

“Nourish the Hungry with Hope”

Two thousand years ago, a prisoner sent messengers to ask Jesus a question. The prisoner was John the Baptist, and the question was “*Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?*” In the original language of Luke’s gospel, the phrase “*the one who is to come*” translates the Greek word for “Christ” which in turn translates the Aramaic word for “Messiah.”

John’s question in Luke 7 is foreshadowed by earlier stories. In chapter 3 John preaches “*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins*” and answers the question, “*What then should we do?*” with the reply, “*Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.*” In chapter 4 Jesus returns from the wilderness temptations “*filled with the power of the Spirit*” to read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

The dramatic detail of the story (“*The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. . . Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*”) and its position at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry suggest that this moment constitutes a messianic announcement. Over against more “promising” messianic passages in the text of Isaiah (e.g., 9:6; 11:1-2), Jesus reads from 61:1-2 and 58:6 and announces that he has been sent “*to bring good news to the poor.*”

In Luke 6 Jesus delivers the Sermon on the Plain, which begins with the beatitudes, “*Blessed are you who are poor, . . . you who are hungry now, . . . you who weep now*” (6:20-21) and includes the instruction, “*give to everyone who begs from you.*” And finally, in Luke 7, the story of the raising of the dead boy at Na’in, “*the only son of his widowed mother,*” (7:11-17) serves as the immediate context to John’s sending messengers to Jesus.

Jesus’ answer is as straightforward as John’s question:

In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me. (Luke 7:21-23)

The last sentence of the reply is arresting. In effect, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who take no offense at *this* messianic vision.” While some may look for other messiahs to bring in other kingdoms, we are blessed if we cast our lots with *this* Messiah who brings in *this* kingdom.

Later in Luke’s gospel, Jesus multiplies bread loaves and fish among a crowd of hungry listeners (9:10-17). In answer to the questions, “*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” and “*Who is my neighbor?*,” he tells the story of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37). Upon watching the guests at a dinner party choose “places of honor,” he advises the prominent Pharisee who had invited him to dinner, “*when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you*” (14:14).

Bearing witness to Christ through caring, sharing, and praying is clearly summed up in Colossians 1:27, “*Christ in you the hope of glory.*” As we are comforted by this majestic hope, we would do well to pay close attention both to John’s question and to Jesus’ answer.

If *Christ* is in us, we are possessed by the One who brings good news to the poor, release to the captive, sight to the blind, liberty to the oppressed, fellowship with the sinner, touch for the untouchable, and welcome to the stranger. Christ in us *is* the hope of glory precisely because and only if the One who leads us is in fact the Christ who appears to us so brilliantly in the Gospels and in the faces of the world’s poor and destitute (cf. Matt. 25:39-40).

The Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger supports dozens of specific ministries around the world. These ministries provide food and temporary relief for people in need and address holistically the systemic causes of hunger and poverty through food production and income development. Initiatives of the Offering address rural and urban poverty, border ministries, disaster relief, and Christian Women’s and Men’s Job Corps. Give generously to the Texas Baptist Offering for World Hunger. Your gifts bear witness to Christ’s love and make an enormous, positive difference in the lives of hungry people in Texas and across the globe.