
Luke 4:14-21. *¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on 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, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

The Message of Jesus is Jesus

- 1. It is the message of utmost importance.**
- 2. It is the message that Christ and his Church will always proclaim**

What kind of sermon would Jesus preach? He was standing at the front of his hometown synagogue? Would He talk about the wars the Romans were fighting? Would He make it His point to talk about the social injustice against those who had little or little opportunity? Jesus had an opportunity to preach before a captive audience. His sermon is preached to the people of his own hometown. His sermon was for the people who had watched Him grow up in favor with God and with men.

What bit of scriptural insight would Jesus have for those who He knew well and in turn, thought they knew Him well? What important point would He want everyone to know?

What do you think he would want people today to focus on? In a world of social action, in a world of moral decay, in a culture of religious pluralism that misconstrues who Jesus is and what his message is, what kind of sermon would he preach? His message today is a good place for people of any time and any place to go. For in this lesson we see that ***the Message of Jesus IS Jesus.***

Our lesson takes us to a worship service in a synagogue in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Worship in a synagogue wasn't always the norm. God commanded the Jewish nation to worship at the tabernacle from the time of its wanderings in the wilderness until the time of Solomon. When Solomon ruled as king, he oversaw the construction of a beautiful temple that replaced the tabernacle as the central place of worship. When the Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple, the central place of worship was shattered. The exiles in Babylon developed for themselves a new form of worship, the synagogue. Even when the temple was rebuilt, this tradition of gathering at the synagogue remained.

What was the difference between worship at the temple and worship at the synagogue? The answer lies in the emphasis. While the temple did have scripture readings, worship, and prayer, the temple's key emphasis was on sacrifice. Animals were sacrificed to God as a shadow of the sacrifice needed to pay for sin. On the other hand, the synagogue's emphasis was on reading of the Scriptures and the explaining and teaching of the scriptures. The synagogue was not meant to replace temple worship. In fact, all synagogues were built facing the temple. As the synagogues became the central place of worship in each community, they in turn, pointed the people to the temple and to the sacrifices there.

I think we would find a lot of similarities to what we do here compared to what they did at the synagogues in Jesus' day. They had a portion of time for prayer, they recited a creed confessing what they believed about God, they sang the psalms, they often listened to a deeper explanation based on portion of Scripture, and they would hear God's blessing.

The Bible tells us that Jesus went to the synagogue regularly, as it was His custom. Jesus, from the time He was young, he went to hear the word of God and pray to His Heavenly Father. What it would have been like, to be the Son of God listening to Scripture being read? Imagine that! He would hear about how sinful mankind was, and their desperate need for a Messiah. Here He would also rejoice that He was the one who was sent to fulfill that need.

So here Jesus is teaching and preaching in His hometown synagogue at the beginning of His ministry. What would he say? The beginning of His ministry was marked with visual and significant statements about who he was and what he came to do. His baptism had revealed He was the anointed one. The temptation in the wilderness revealed He was different from Adam in that He successfully resisted the Devil's temptation. The wedding at Cana revealed that He was God, able to answer our prayers in accordance to His Will. Now He was going through the cities and villages preaching and teaching in their synagogues. What would be his message? His ministry led Him to Nazareth, His home town. There, in His hometown church, He would preach and teach; and he would tell the people who he was and what he had come to do.

At the front of the synagogue there was a raised platform where the worship leaders would sit - as was custom in those days. Jesus stood to read, and he would sit down to teach. The attendant opened the ark or cabinet in which the Old Testament Scriptures were kept on scrolls. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Now there weren't any chapters or verses designations back then, so you can picture Jesus opening the scroll, unrolling the parchment from one stick to another and looking for the portion of the Bible He would talk about. It seems that he had a particular portion in mind as he carefully made his way to this section of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

As Jesus read from the Word of God, the Holy Spirit used the word of God, to direct people to Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah. So after the scroll is rolled up and put away, Jesus sat down and everyone's eyes were fixed on him, and he began by saying to them, ***"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*** You can imagine how these

words caused quite a stir among the people of Jesus' hometown. Next week we'll look more into the reaction of the people to Jesus' sermon, but today we focus on the message itself. The message of Jesus is that He fulfilled the Old Testament scriptures. All Scripture was fulfilled in him, and today we will look specifically about what was written about Him in this portion of the book of Isaiah. Let us take apart how Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah.

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on 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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The Holy Spirit was on the Messiah or the Christ, both titles means that Jesus is the anointed one. The Messiah, Jesus Christ, was going to preach good news to those in great need. He would bring the message of salvation and restoration to those who were held captive and who were blind in their sin. To those oppressed by sin and death and the punishment of hell, was "God's redemption is here." God's promise of forgiveness, restoration, reconciliation, it was here, wrapped up in the person of Jesus Christ. The Year of the Lord's favor was dawning.

In the Old Testament, the year of the Lord's favor, or the Year of Jubilee was prescribed by God to happen every 50 years. You see, every 7th year was a year of rest for the land, and the year following a group of 7 Sabbath years was the Year of Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favor. During this year, all debts were to be canceled, all Israelite slaves were to be freed, and the land was to be returned to the families that God had assigned them to. It was a time in which forgiveness and restoration were manifested in this very tangible way.

We needed a Year of Jubilee, a time of atonement, as far as our relationship with God is concerned. Our account with God is overdrawn. We have incurred a debt with Him. We have embraced sin and so enslaved ourselves to it. Disobeying God can never be a good thing for us spiritually. Sin never just rolls off our backs, it sticks to us, it wraps itself around us, digs in, enslaving us in guilt and regret. It ties us up into habits of disobedience and disgrace. And for all of this we should be on the hook for some serious restitution before God. Our debt before God is real for God holds no one else accountable for your thoughts, your words and your actions. You and I are each accountable to Him. To Him you must give an account. Each time you disobey Him, you elevate yourself above Him. Your needs and your desires become more important than God. You break the first and greatest commandment, whenever you break any of the commandments. As you serve yourself rather than serving God. This is our rightful status before God. You and are indeed spiritually poor, spiritually blind, and spiritually enslaved.

However, the Messiah comes to announce as message of forgiveness through him, and him alone. Through faith in Jesus, your time of jubilee is now. Your pardon is here. Your debts before God are canceled, you are free from sin's enslavement. God does not hold your sin against you.

This is the good news that our Messiah not only proclaim, but he is the alone one who could make it possible. As all the synagogues pointed to Jerusalem, all of Scripture points us to what Jesus would do on a hill and in a cave outside of that holy city. For Jesus would go to Jerusalem and at the altar of the cross he would pay the debt we owed God. He enslaved himself to God's punishment for sin, and his resurrection from the dead signaled that all debt was paid, and new life and eternal life was found in him. Sin and death itself would be defeated by our Messiah, by Christ Jesus.

Jesus had one sermon to preach to the people of Nazareth, and of all the things He could have talked about, He chose a topic that was the most controversial yet the most needful. Jesus, a human being, born of seemingly natural means, one who lived grew up among the people of Nazareth, is more than a man. He is the anointed one. He is God. He proclaimed and accomplished the time of the Lord's favor, the year of Jubilee! Yes, the central focus of this message of Jesus is Jesus. The good news about who Jesus is and what he came to do, that is what Jesus wants us to know and to hang onto.

In this world of social action and outrage, in this world of moral decay, in this world of political upheaval there is certainly a time and place for God's Word to address the issues of the day. God's Word certainly calls us to live a life according to his will. It calls us to respect his gift of life and to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. It speaks to our civic responsibilities and how we are to love our God and love our neighbor. It reminds us how we are to live good and productive lives.

But in this world of such trouble and turmoil, in this world of sin, disobedience, shame and guilt, the central message of God's Word in all its truth and purity is always Jesus. This is a message that is always needed, always relevant, always important. For it is a message of eternal importance. Jesus came, just as God promised since the beginning, to restore our broken relationship with God. This is what the Savior came to proclaim, this is what God's church will continue to proclaim.

As we prepare for some nasty weather this coming week I was reminded of some stories of hard winters and how years ago in blustery snow storms a rope was sometimes tied from the barn door to the home. This was done to make sure that everyone got through the storm and safely home. In the blustery spiritual climate of our day, with all that is howling around in the news and in our daily lives, the message of Jesus, his work of salvation, will always be that singular message that is there to guide us through life and bring us safely to our heavenly home.

Thanks be to God that the message of Jesus is Jesus. Thanks be to God that the message of His Church is and will always be, Jesus our Messiah. For He is the one who came as the Scriptures had promised. He is the one who came to bind up our broken hearts, to proclaim to us freedom from sin and death and hell, to comfort us, to restore us to God's favor, and to give us peace. May we all praise him and proclaim his work of salvation continually, without hesitation, and without end for this message is given and fulfilled in his name. Amen.