**Overcoming the Status Quo (Revised)**

**Luke 4:14-37**

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**Introduction**

Even a cursory reading of the gospels reveals a Christ who is come to expose and interrupt the status quo of a sin-wrecked world. In this section of Luke, we are reminded of the good news that Jesus comes to us as the anointed- One bringing healing and deliverance to the poor, the brokenhearted, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. He has come to proclaim the time of God’s rule and acceptance—a time the New Testament refers to as “Today” (II Corinthians 6:2).

This means the present day is a time of healing and deliverance, and a time of acceptance by God, in Christ Jesus.

Then why is it we so see so little healing and deliverance in our day? The short answer is that people prefer the status quo. In today’s lesson, we examine how fierce devotion to the status quo represents a rejection of the healing and deliverance Christ came to bring you.

**Overcoming the Religious Status Quo**

Among the many lessons we can glean from the Nazareth narrative is the existence of a fiercely defended, religious status quo.

In stark contrast to this status quo, is Jesus and His mission. Luke tell us Jesus has come to preach good news to the poor (those forced to rely upon God); to heal the brokenhearted (those who mourn their sins before God); to restore sight to the blind (those blinded by the god of this world and his false religion); to proclaim liberty to the captives (those in bondage to sinful patterns); to set at liberty the oppressed (those exploited by the political, social, and religious systems of this age); and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (the day of salvation when all things are made right, again). In short, Jesus comes to free you from the religious status quo.

Do you know the very fact the poor, the weak, the oppressed, and the captive existed in Israel was evidence the Old Covenant had been broken? [[1]](#footnote-1) These conditions were not to exist among the covenant people of God, but Israel was in a state of active unrighteousness before God. And Jesus came to proclaim the time was fulfilled, the kingdom of God is come, as the kingdom of God is evidenced by this great ministry of deliverance and healing, as well as the restoration of genuine social and economic justice.

Jesus came to make things right again.

But if you like it the way it is, if you prefer the status quo, then you will want to kill Him. This is harsh, but this is one lesson of the Nazareth narrative. To cling to the religious status quo in the light of Christ’s mission, is to crucify for oneself the Son of God again, and put Him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:6). This is serious business. It was serious business that day at Nazareth, and it remains serious business, today.

**Fiercely Defending the Status Quo**

 Listen please, the status quo of this present evil age not will save and heal you. Jesus is not in it. If it is your goal is to maintain the status quo, to remain comfortable, then you are placing yourself with the synagogue at Nazareth. You are rejecting Jesus, no matter what your profession seems to be.

Let me elaborate. It is disturbing how many professing Christians view Jesus as a coping mechanism for their misery, rather than a healer and deliverer. In other words, it is disturbing how many professing Christians reject what Jesus said about Himself and His mission. They prefer a “Jesus” who fits with their agenda. And here is something even more disturbing: these same people will fiercely defend the status quo, no matter how miserable it is making them. If that sounds insane, it is because it *is* insane.

When Jesus exposed the entrenched, generational patterns of unbelief in Nazareth, they tried to kill Him. That was an act of insanity. To not only reject healing, deliverance, and acceptance from God, but also seek to eliminate the Son of God through whom this healing and deliverance comes, is the ultimate act of insanity.

The rejection of Jesus and His mission at Nazareth was also the greatest quenching of the Spirit ever to occur within redemptive history—and for many, this quenching continues, today.

And I’ve seen this insanity at work. I’ve had people tell me, “I know I can’t live like this, but I am not going to change anything.” They may be in active addiction, or have a family member who is in active addiction; they may be caught up in sexually deviant behavior, or worse. Perhaps there is domestic violence, including child abuse. Yet, these same people attend church weekly as though all is well. They prefer the status quo, and reject healing. And, if you offer a suggestion, they will grow rageful, or even hysterical. Yet they will ask for prayer. “Oh, won’t the Lord heal me?” But they do not really want healing. They request prayer, but then fiercely defend the narrative that’s keeping them sick. These are the most hopeless of the hopeless. But they will be in the front pews of their church come Sunday.

And these people are not in the minority. These are not the so-called “hard cases.” They are the majority sitting each week in churches all over America. They make up the modern synagogue at Nazareth. They are filled with religious tradition, but unwilling to see their condition, unwilling to repent, and unavailable to know the healing and deliverance Jesus came to bring them.

**The Healing Power of Confession**

After the fifth-century bishop, Augustine of Hippo, had written his famous, *Confessions*, He was once introduced to a crowd as the one who says,

“See. I do not hide my wounds.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Augustine understood the path to healing was the path of honesty before God, and before the community of faith. It is not scandalous that people need healing, what *is* scandalous is that they reject the healing in favor of the status quo. Unlike the great Augustine, they choose to hide their wounds.

The Bible tells us, “Confess your trespasses one to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16). The Bible presupposes people will need confession and healing on an ongoing basis. I am not referring to sacramental confession to a priest; I am referring to confessing to a trusted brother or sister in Christ—I am referring to the priesthood of all believers in action. The Bible prescribes remedial confession to one another in a caring, non-judgmental manner; in what Paul describes as the gentleness that the Spirit provides (Galatians 6:1-4).

Being born of the Spirit is the cure for sin, but renewal requires ongoing care. The ministry of confession and healing is therefore not a one-time event at conversion. It is a continuing admission of need. It involves trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to be to you who He says He is—your Spirit-anointed healer and deliverer. He alone is the One in whom you find acceptance with God the Father as His beloved child. God calls you to embrace your already existing status as His chosen child, “holy and without blame before Him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

It was to secure you in this status before the Father that Jesus has come to heal and deliver you. It is by submitting to the Spirit-anointed power and authority of the teaching of Jesus that brings healing and deliverance into your life. But this means you must be willing to change. You must be willing to examine yourself. There is no other way to be become like Jesus. Growth in His image is not passive. It is an active pursuit. It is a passionate devotion to developing His character within you, by the Spirit (Romans 8:12-17). And Jesus is worth it. The ministry of the church is a healing ministry, not a coping mechanism. Coping belongs to the status quo.

The Gospels make it vividly clear that His word and His healing touch are inseparable. Many teachers today present a Jesus who is only concerned with your soul, but not your sick body, your marriage, your job, your family, and daily life. But that is not the Jesus you find in the gospels. And that is not the Jesus who will confront us time and again as we go through the Gospel of Luke.

The questions then are these: are you prepared to follow Him wherever He takes you? Are you prepared to both call Him Lord, and then do what He says? Are you willing to trust Him for healing and deliverance? Are you willing to lay hold of that for which Christ laid hold of you? (Philippians 3:12-14).

**Overcoming Christian Nominalism**

The status quo for the individual Christian more often than not originates within the greater community. So, it is important to ask, what is the status quo in our churches?

When Jesus came to the synagogue at Capernaum, a demon-possessed man cried out, saying, in essence, “Why this interference?”[[3]](#footnote-3) That demon also referred to “us,” implying he was not the only demon at work in that synagogue (Luke 4:34). Do you know the devil goes to church each week? In fact, in many churches the devil is quite comfortable. In some churches, just like that synagogue, the devil has a good thing going, and Jesus represents a great interference to his status quo.

I’ll say it plainly: The devil is behind the status quo today in many of our churches. And what is that status quo? We can call it, Christian nominalism. By nominalism, I mean the notion that to be a Christian is to believe certain essentials about Jesus Christ, attend church regularly, be assured of heaven when one dies, but bear no Christlike character. Nominalism has nothing to say about life in the present. It is a powerless form of godliness. And while what we believe about Jesus is certainly essential in determining one’s eternal destiny, it also remains entirely possible to believe certain truths about the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and yet fail to incorporate His teaching in order to become like Him.

The demon at the Capernaum synagogue knew exactly who Jesus was, and it did the demon no good. A. W. Tozer once wrote,

“The devil is a better theologian than any of us, and is a devil still.”

Nominalism is the great deception of our day. It teaches one may confess Christ, and yet possess no desire to become like Him in character and walk of life. This deception has come about largely due to the cheap grace and easy-believism rampant in American evangelicalism. This has become the new status quo.

This nominalism exists in opposition to Christ and His mission. And it exists in spite of the great truth that conforming to the image of Christ in thought, word, and deed, is the *paramount purpose* of God for every Christian; it is the “good” for which God causes all things to work together (Romans 8:28-30). It is the salvation that we are to “work out” in our lives, with fear and trembling, knowing that is God who is at work in us (Philippians 2:12-13). It is God’s purpose to conform you into the image of His Son.

Yet, it is this failure to conform to the character of Christ that now defines American Christianity. And it is not new. Tragically, this deception has been the leading challenge to the veracity of the gospel since the apostolic times. Jesus Himself condemned such fruitless religion (Matthew 23:25-28). As did the apostles in their writings (I Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:1-7; Colossians 2:23; II Timothy 2:19; 3:1-5; James 2:14-26; II Peter 2: 18-22).

So what side of church history do you want to be on? Do you want to stand with Jesus, or with the nominalism of our day?

Some contemporary Christian leaders have rightly condemned this fruitless brand of Christianity. And yet, the notion that one may profess Christ, and fail to *follow* Him, meaning, participate in His character, is commonly accepted among the majority of evangelicals. Whether one is a Christian or not is far more likely to be judged based upon on one’s social and political views, than whether the character of Christ shines through one’s life.

What I hope you have heard in this lesson is the religion of the status quo stands in murderous opposition to the life of Jesus among us. The status quo is self-centered, worldly, and superficial, and demonic. It shows up in the form of active addiction, codependence (control and manipulation), confusion, and all the other forms of demonic “wisdom” (James 3:13-18).

Jesus stands apart from it, you won’t find Him in it. Rather, He commands us to follow Him, meaning, to become like Him. Do not be seduced by the nominalism of our day (II Corinthians 11: 1-4). Jesus comes to you as God’s Spirit-anointed healer and deliverer, and final prophet. Nowhere does the New Testament teach that Jesus came to help you cope with your misery; rather, He came to heal and free you.

**Summary**

That day at Nazareth, Jesus graciously announced Himself as the Spirit-anointed Messiah. “Today,” Jesus said, “This Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21). But the people of the synagogue knew Jesus, so they thought. “Is this not Joseph’s son?” They could not see Him for *who He said He was*, because they had already decided who He was based upon their familiarity with Him, and their religious tradition. He was just “Joseph’s son.” Likewise, many today have become familiar with Jesus. They think they know Him. They are comfortable in their religious tradition; but worst of all, that tradition has become a place to hide their miserable condition. So, they feel no need of Jesus as a healer and deliverer, let alone God’s final prophet to them. They prefer the status quo.

If you challenge these people, they will become enraged. If you present Jesus for who He says He is, they will become hysterical. So, most pastors and leaders are resigned to being people-pleasing managers of the status quo. What the people of Nazareth likely did not realize, was that they had rejected the only hope God would ever bring them; they had quenched the Spirit. Likewise, most pastors today are presiding over an organization that has quenched the Spirit.

My challenge to you today is to confess your own status quo. It ought to be good news that Jesus is not interested in enabling you. It ought to be good news that He is not interested in helping you merely cope. The fact that Jesus has come to heal and deliver you is a cause for great joy! The fact Jesus came to bring you into an experiential relationship with the Father whereby you know His full, and unconditional acceptance, is cause for great hope.

It is time to step away from the old ways, and embrace a new and living way, in Christ Jesus. “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” Are you listening? **AMEN.**

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1. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, (New York, NY: Cambridge, 1986), p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paul R. Kolbert, *Augustine and the Cure of Souls* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Frederick Danker, *Jesus and the New Age*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988), p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)