

August 5, 2018
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Luke 4:14-30.

1. What was the area of Galilee like geographically, demographically, and how would you characterize the people?
2. How does the fact that Jesus was “in the power of the Spirit” impact the situation of this story?
3. Why does it seem odd that Jesus appeared to merely be in attendance at the synagogue?
4. Explain the four purposes (in a spiritual sense) of Messiah as Isaiah described them in the passage Jesus read.
5. Why were the people in the synagogue filled with wrath?

DESPISED AND REJECTED **Luke 4:14-30**

Between verses thirteen and fourteen of this fourth chapter of Luke’s account, just over a year elapsed chronologically. The events of that year took place in Judea and Galilee, and what information we have is given by John in chapters 2-5. After successfully warding off Satan’s temptation in the wilderness, it appears that Jesus went back to Galilee for a short time where we found Him performing the first recorded miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

The next event was Jesus cleansing the temple in Jerusalem (2:13-21). Then He was at the Passover Feast (2:23-25). Sometime

within that framework of time, Nicodemus, a teacher of the Jews, sought Jesus out at night, which setting gives us the wonderful teaching of John 3. Then we found Jesus leaving Jerusalem for a time and heading back to Galilee. Along they way He stopped at the well in Sychar where we have the “woman at the well” story (John 4:1-45). Also in that time period Jesus healed the official’s son in Capernaum.

Chronologically, that brings us back to Luke’s account where he wrote, *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee (Luke 4:14a)*. Specifically, God the Son was on the way to Nazareth, the town where He grew up. What would the response of the people be? Isaiah already predicted it. We will learn very important lessons from this story about why sinners respond to Christ the way they do. And we can apply the same principles to people’s responses to truth in our settings.

The Situation (vv.14-19).

In verse fourteen we find that Jesus has returned to Galilee. *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country (v.14)*. As we have mentioned before, Galilee was a hilly, rural area often viewed as backwards or backwoods by the elite who lived in Jerusalem. This opinion was no doubt fostered by the attitude of many of the residents in the hill country. They were fiercely independent. They resented any government powers ruling over them. It was not unusual for rebellions to begin in that region. The people might be equated with the “fly over” people as the politically elite refer to us. Or in the common vernacular, the ruling bodies thought of them as hillbillies or red necks.

In reality, though, we must avoid thinking of Galilee as sparsely populated. Galilee was actually quite populated. Josephus (who once served as governor of the area) recorded that there were no less than 200 significant villages or towns in the region. He went on to describe “significant” by writing that none of those towns had a population under 15,000. Of course that was probably Galilee at its peak in the

first century, probably after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. If that was the case, it means that Galilee had a population of around 3,000,000 people in the area less than 2,000 square miles or roughly the size of Delaware which has a population of about 1 million.

Nazareth, unlike most of the towns when Josephus wrote, had a population of about 400. That means it was a town where everyone would know everyone. Some of us experienced childhood in towns like that. To make matters worse, back in those days we had “party lines” by which the neighbors could listen in to all our phone conversations. They not only knew everyone, but knew everything about everyone.

Jesus traveled through Galilee on His return to that quaint little town of Nazareth. Along the way, *He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all (v.15)*. Eventually, *He came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up (v.16a)*. It is significant to read that Jesus taught in the synagogues. Those places were not the same as the temple, nor did they replace the temple.

The temple in Jerusalem was the one acceptable place for God’s people to worship corporately through the offering of sacrifices. The synagogues were for teaching. The Rabbis’ law allowed for the establishment of a synagogue wherever there were ten or more families living. Often they served as schools for the children. On the Sabbath, devout people gathered to sing, to hear Scripture read, to pray and to be taught the meaning and application of the Scriptures. Jesus went “home” to where He had lived and been brought up for 30 years. Everyone would know Him.

And we find Jesus at the synagogue on the Sabbath (vv.16b-19). In that setting, Jesus was given the honor of reading Scripture. *And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read (v.16b)*. Remember that everything that happens in this setting is under control of the Holy Spirit. Verse fourteen set the stage by saying that Jesus *returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, v.14*). Apparently, people who are led by the Holy Spirit make it their regular *custom* to meet with other people who desire to learn about God and praise Him.

The synagogue service was similar to our weekly practice in our worship service. It began with the singing of various psalms. Prayer was offered like we do. There was a time of reading the Old

Testament Scripture in which a number of appointed people often participated. The Scripture reading included reading from the Torah, (the Law), and reading from the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi). The central focus of the service was the preaching. There was no full-time preacher as we are accustomed to. Rather the synagogue president would appoint someone either in advance or at the moment to present a lesson. Because news about Jesus spread through Galilee and because He was glorified by all as He taught in the synagogues, it is not surprising that He was asked to read.

Given the opportunity to read the Old Testament publicly, Jesus read about Himself. *And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (vv.17-19)*.

We assume Jesus requested this particular scroll. The president of the synagogue would have retrieved the scroll from an “ark,” a protective box. He handed the scroll of Isaiah to Jesus who intentionally unrolled the scroll to Isaiah 61 and proceeded to read 61:1-2 as well as part of 58:6. Jesus read about very good news, the wonderful promise God had given 700 years earlier.

The people would have naturally assumed that Jesus was merely reading the words of the prophet Isaiah. But the words were more than that. Jesus read how the preacher was empowered by the Holy Spirit and was ordained to preach the good news. Jesus would have read the Hebrew text, and it is very likely that someone would have translated into either Greek or Aramaic, the common languages of the people. That is significant because the Greek word for *proclaim* is *euangelizo*, which means to preach the good news. We get our English word *evangelize* from this Greek word. Jesus was evangelizing the lost in the synagogue.

To whom was the good news preached. In the context of Isaiah’s original proclamation, God had him proclaim good news to the poor. In the ancient middle eastern cultures poverty was rampant and oppressive. To be poor was to be at the mercy of others to help.

But far worse than any physical poverty is spiritual poverty. We know that this is the teaching of this promise.

God sends His messengers to those who are spiritually poverty stricken with the good news that salvation is available to us without price. Early in his prophecy, Isaiah had declared, *“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1)*. This was the same promise Jesus offers to all of us in our natural condition of spiritual poverty. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3)*.

The saddest condition is to fail to recognize you are in spiritual poverty. So Jesus wrote to the church in Laodicea: *“For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see” (Revelation 3:17-18)*.

Furthermore, through Isaiah, God promised liberty to the captives. A great struggle for many years for Israelites had been the reality that they were not a free people. Since 609 BC they had been under the power of one Gentile nation after another. These people longed for a Messiah who would lead them in rebellion against Rome to secure their freedom.

God’s promise reached much further to offer eternal liberty for us who are captive to sin. Only those who are freed through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ really understand freedom. Jesus taught, *“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32)*. On the heels of that promise, Jesus explained that He Himself is the one who sets us free. *“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36)*. Jesus taught the truth that He is the Savior from sin. Everyone who trusts Him is released from the bondage and penalty of sin; we are captives set free.

Third, through Isaiah God promised restored sight to the blind. The blind being restored to see was as impossible in Isaiah’s day as it was in Jesus’s day. But Jesus did restore sight for a number of physically blind people.

More important was the promise that Messiah would give sight to us who are spiritually blind. The problem is that most spiritually blind people will not admit their problem. Again like the people in Laodicea the problem is that *You say, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17)*.

Fourth, God promised liberty to the oppressed. With the overlordship of powerful nations often came oppression. Also, even within the Jewish culture there were slaves who were oppressed by their owners. That is the perfect picture of the oppression sin and Satan impose on us in our natural condition. God promised through Isaiah that Messiah would bring liberty to the spiritually oppressed. The problem with most people is that they long for release from oppression in matters of real life but are not concerned that they are oppressed by sin.

That brings us to the essential message of the good news. God sent His Messenger to *proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*. In this Old Testament context of Isaiah, this is a reference to the year of Jubilee. It was part of God’s law. *And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan (Leviticus 25:10)*.

According to this law, every 50th year the Jewish slaves were to be released, debts were forgiven, land was to be returned to the family that originally owned it. It was a year-long celebration of freedom, liberty, and restoration. God promised through Isaiah that Messiah would usher in the everlasting “Jubilee,” the liberty of God’s grace. Surely the people in Nazareth would be delighted to learn that Jesus was the One who brought “Jubilee.”

The Sermon (vv.20-27).

Jesus gave the scroll back to the attendant and proceeded to preach a message that was well received at first (vv.20-22). We read how He spoke with authority. *And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (vv.21-22)*.

Picture Jesus rolling up the scroll, handing it back to the attendant, and sitting down on the “chair,” while everyone looked on with hushed silence for a moment. The “chair” was like our pulpit. It was the chair of authority from which the teacher would teach. And what did this teacher say about the text He just read from Isaiah?

He said, “Today this Scripture has been brought to completion even as you have heard.” That is to say that today, God’s promise of good news to the poor, release of captives, restoration of sight, and liberty for the oppressed is brought to pass. Did that mean that the Messiah was at hand and would raise the army necessary to bring these things about? No doubt many people would have thought along such earthly, mundane lines.

At first it seems like everyone was happy with Jesus. *And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”* (v.22). Soon a murmur spread through the audience. “What good news!” “What a wonderful promise.” “Isn’t He a nice man?” “He is so articulate.” “But wait! Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Suddenly the people stumbled over the “rock of offense.” Paul wrote about the “rock of offense” to the Roman Christians. *“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame”* (Romans 9:33). He quoted from Isaiah 8:14. The “rock of offense” is that Jesus the man from Nazareth was actually God the Son. It is still the same rock of offense: Jesus was a good man, a great teacher, a doer of good works. But He could not have been God in the flesh! Every false religion still stumbles over believing Jesus. To admit that He fulfills Isaiah’s promised Messiah is impossible for human wisdom alone.

Like good preachers ought to do, Jesus explained the text and then made application of the truth. That is where the problems started. The people rejected the application (vv.23-27). The problem flowed out of the expectation of a principle. People expected Jesus to do what He was known to do. *And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well”* (v.23).

Jesus lived with them for 30 years and didn’t need omniscience to know what they were thinking. In other words, they were thinking,

“Do a mighty work and we will believe you.” Later the people who wanted free food demanded that Jesus give them a miraculous sign as proof that He is who He said He is (John 6:30). Even while He hung on the cross, fulfilling the critical work of Messiah, the hypocrites mocked Him, daring Him to do a mighty work. *And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”* (Luke 23:35).

So it is not surprising that also in Nazareth the people were thinking, “Do a miracle and maybe we will think about accepting the fact that you are the Messiah who brings liberty.” Notice how these sinful people picked up where Satan left off tempting Jesus to do miracles according to their demands.

There was another common principle in play at the same time. *And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown”* (v.24). This is the same principle with which we are familiar, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” It was as though the people murmured to each other, “How dare this hometown boy imply that we are poor, captive, blind and oppressed!” And when you try to tell the good news to your family and friends you grew up with, you will often receive the same response.

Jesus applied the truth of the problem and it was no doubt very painful to the people. The truth is that God loves Gentiles too! Jesus illustrated this truth by God’s work through Elijah. *“But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow”* (vv.25-26). God could have used Elijah to help any number of widows in Israel during the famine. But God sent Elijah to a Gentile woman to perform a miracle that sustained her and her son through the famine.

Jesus also illustrated this by the way God worked through Elisha. *“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian”* (v.27). God could have healed any number of lepers in Israel. But God did a miracle through Elisha to heal the Gentile commander of Israel’s enemy. God provided for the poor, delivered them from

oppression and set them at liberty from captivity to sin and sins effects. But they were Gentiles!

The Response (vv.28-30).

The truth filled the sinners with wrath. *When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath (v.28).* We learn here that the people heard all that Jesus said. They understood what Jesus said about God's promise of "the year of His favor." They understood what Jesus said about them being spiritually poor, captive, blind, and oppressed. They understood what Jesus said about God favoring Gentiles over Jews in the past.

Understanding was the problem. Response to what they learned was the problem. The people were suddenly overwhelmed with wrath. Their Rabbis had taught them that the Jews were God's chosen people and no one else mattered. Their Rabbis had taught them that God created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. Now Jesus had just taught them that God favored some of those Gentiles over His own people. And Jesus wasn't going to do a miracle as they demanded.

When sinners are confronted with the reality that God grants freedom from sin according to His design alone, it infuriates them. Human pride is quite convinced that there are ways for us to gain our salvation apart from God's grace. To tell the truth often creates wrath in proud people.

Being so full of wrath, the sinners attempted to murder the "Teller of Truth." *And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff (v.29).* There are still cliffs on the edge of Nazareth, any one of which might have been the spot. It is downright amazing how confronting someone with the fact of their spiritual need can change them from a person who admires you to a person who desires your end.

Well, the people could not bring about the end of this hometown boy they came to hate because the authority of God prevented them. God the Son was untouchable. *But passing through their midst, he went away (v.30).* It was only possible for Jesus to escape because God the Holy Spirit was in control. As we will see

throughout the Jesus story, all the forces of hell could not kill Him until He fulfilled His mission of winning our salvation.

God the Son was on earth to accomplish God's will. Jesus told many doubters and skeptics that He was on earth to do the Father's will. He was going to accomplish that in spite of threatening resistance.

God the Son came to earth to reveal God's grace. He not only brought the good news of salvation, but brought about the sacrifice that is the foundation for the good news. God the Son proclaimed God's favor toward all who will agree that we are spiritually destitute, spiritually captive, spiritually blind, and spiritually oppressed. All we need to do is agree with God's assessment of our condition. It is typical and expected that sinners will respond with wrath when their pride is accosted by the truth of their condition. How much better to humbly acknowledge what God says about us, agree with His assessment, and by faith embrace the pardon for sin He offers through Christ.