

## **BRING YOUR NOTHING**

Luke 4:16-30

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 8/29/21, Matt Heerema

Please open your bibles with me to Luke chapter 4. Today we get to look at Luke's account of the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. It is a puzzling exchange! At first people seem to be excited about Jesus. Then he says some things that, if you don't have the Old Testament memorized (raise your hand quick if you do?) Seem extremely cryptic, after which they try to kill him. (well, that escalated quickly....)

I'm hopeful today that as we slow down and take a careful look at Luke's telling of this important event in Jesus's ministry, and take a look at the passages and stories in the scriptures he's referring to, we'll see a powerful, humbling, and encouraging message.

Jesus is here to proclaim the release of those who are prisoner to spiritual poverty and blindness, and to announce God's favor for all who humbly accept Jesus's message of salvation. But he has no hope to offer those who are after pleasure, power, and or to secure the prominence of their political positions in this world.

Let's take a look.

## **JESUS BEGINS HIS MINISTRY**

### **Luke 4:14-15 (ESV)**

14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

A brief intro/connection that gets quite a bit of detail in the other gospels. Luke is aware of the others, and he's after something in his account that he doesn't need that detail for, so we get this simple, abbreviated, summary, connecting the scene of Jesus proving his faithfulness and worthiness as the Messiah, mankind's rescuer, and then we move right on to a scene Luke recounts to give us the content of Jesus's message.

One detail Luke does give us here in 14&15 is the reception he was receiving he was "being glorified by all" - as we see in the other gospel accounts, his fame was starting to spread, and the crowds were starting to gather, and then Jesus winds up back in his own hometown, and they are so happy that the local celebrity has stopped in, that they ask him to preach in church that Saturday.

# JESUS IN HIS HOMETOWN

## **Luke 4:16-21 (ESV)**

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

18 "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**,  
19 to **proclaim** the year of the Lord's favor."

20 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.

21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

## **The shortest sermon**

We do have some historical documentation that gives clear picture of what's happening here in Nazareth, and the first century readers of Luke would likely also have been familiar with a synagogue worship service.

Jesus was being asked to give the scripture reading and sermon for that Sabbath's worship service.

He finishes reading the scriptures, and then he sits in the teacher's seat, all the eager listeners are waiting to hear his exposition and insight and wisdom. It's a short sermon.

"This thing I just read? That's me. I'm the guy, and I'm making this announcement."

Mic drop.

## What Jesus was quoting and what he left out

It's hard to put ourselves in the shoes of the hearers. They had a few things loaded up in their minds that makes this reading and his statement extremely impactful.

First, nearly all of them would likely have been very familiar with that passage. It is a passage about the coming day of the Lord, for which they were all waiting expectantly.

They would have been very eager to hear what this alleged hometown miracle worker was going to say about it. After all, captivity from the Romans with their military presence and oppressive taxation. Hundreds of years without any word from God from the prophets.

And now, rumblings in the wilderness from some strange wild man named John claiming to be a prophetic voice, and now this Jesus causing a ruckus (the good kind) in Galilee.

And Jesus chooses this passage.

They could have lip sync'd along with Jesus as he read aloud. Most of them very likely had it memorized.

But he left a line out.

“...and the day of God's vengeance.” - Isaiah 61:2b

If they caught it, and who knows if they did. His disciples had a hard time with this one even after his crucifixion... they would have heard him saying something like “I have come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the release of all those in bondage... but not the year of the Lord's vengeance and the setting up of the nation of Israel over all the other nations of the world.”

It's a magnificent omission. And one that makes him a heretic, if he is not in fact the Christ.

But maybe they missed it. Because their response was very favorable. At first.

## NAZARETH'S INITIAL REACTION

### **Luke 4:22(ESV)**

22 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?”

This is not a negative statement. "Wow, could our local boy actually be the rescuer we've been waiting for all this time?" Jesus's response: I don't think you understand what the Messiah is going to do. You've been blinded by your national pride, and your religious traditions.

They misunderstand. Jesus is not the son of Joseph. The genealogy told us that. (Being "as it was supposed" the son of Joseph...) He is so much more. He is the son of God.

## **JESUS CLARIFIES HIS SERMON**

### **Luke 4:23-27 (ESV)**

23 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." 24 And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

25 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, 26 and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 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."

### **Physician, heal thyself.**

Notice their unbelief: "what we have heard you did at Capernaum..." not "...what we know you did at Capernaum..." - in other words... "Prove it."

### **No prophet is acceptable in his hometown**

He knows they don't want to hear what he has to say. "The poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed..." He's talking about Israel's political enemies, the unclean gentiles. They don't see themselves as poor, blind, oppressed, and captive, in need of being set at liberty. They see themselves in a privileged position with God, deserving his favor.

### **Reference to the Widow at Zarephath in Sidon**

Jesus refers to 1 Kings 17:8-16: a time when Israel was hostile to God's chosen messenger Elijah, so Elijah was sent to bring healing and salvation to a gentile widow.

A poor, blind, oppressed, captive widow.

The widow's poverty, oppression, and captivity are easy to see.

Elijah was sent to this widow, and he asked her for a little bread and water. Her reply was that she was on her very last handful of flour, and last bit of oil, and she was about to prepare it for herself and her son, and then get ready to die.

Elijah's response: "Don't be afraid. God will make it so that your flour jar will not become empty and your oil jug will not run dry..."

And she believed him, and it happened. And her blindness was healed.

Her response: "Now I know you are a man of God and the Lord's word from your mouth is true."

The widow was asked to give up her reliance on her very last earthly hope for survival, and instead trust God's word.

(Note that the right application here is not a modern day promise from God that according to 1 Kings 17, you won't run out of food. But rather that you can rely on him for everything you need to have for the work he has for you to do, and that he gives you everything you need in this world to cling to your faith in him. Not one scrap of food is going to be denied you if it is required for what he wants from you.)

Jesus's message to the hearers at Nazareth and to us is the same: take care that you are not hostile to God's chosen messenger: Jesus, when he does things you do not expect, that are hard for you to accept culturally or politically, and that cause you to have to rethink deeply held ideologies, in order to hear him clearly, and follow him truly.

## **Reference to Namaan**

This reference to 2 Kings 5:1-19 is a triple whammy for the hearers. God's chosen messenger Elisha healed a commander of the oppressor's army.

That commander brought a load of treasure to pay for his healing, that payment was rejected and the healing given for free. *And* the healing was to be done without any religious ceremony or great feat.

He was expecting to have to pay a great sum for an extraordinary religious ceremony involving some great act of faith. Instead he was told to go wash in the river, and his payment was refused.

Poor, blind, oppressed, captive Naaman.

Naaman, unlike the widow, had plenty of money, and therefore his oppression and captivity are harder to see. But he was just as blind, thinking that his money and position meant anything to the prophet or to God.

The response from Naaman: "Now I know there's no God in the whole world, except in Israel."

## **NAZARETH'S REJECTION OF JESUS**

### **Luke 4:27-30 (ESV)**

28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 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. 30 But passing through their midst, he went away.

Poor, blind, oppressed, captive, Nazareth.

That was Jesus's message to them. If you would follow me and see the miracles you want to see, you must recognize that you are like the gentile widow. You are like the Syrian general.

(By the way: last week we read about the temptations of Jesus, that the devil was tempting Jesus to prove the truth of God's promises for protection by hurling himself off the top of the temple, to test Psalm 91's promise that you won't strike your foot against a stone. Here, that promise is shown to come through in Jesus' time of real need. )

That was Jesus's message to them, and that is Jesus's message to us: If you would follow Jesus and see the miracles you want to see, you must recognize that, apart from Christ, you are like the gentile widow. You are like the Syrian general. You are like the Nazarene synagogue goer, You are like the Taliban terrorist. The bleeding heart liberal. The raving right winger.

Poor, blind, oppressed, captive.

Rejoice at Jesus's proclamation of freedom to those who are in spiritual bondage. And so prepare yourself for the still-to-come day of the Lord's vengeance, when he will come back:

Amen.