

Sermon 14: Luke 4:14-21: The Mission of Jesus

OUTLINE

Jesus' ministry of preaching
Jesus' ministry to the needy

INTRODUCTION

What was the mission of Jesus? What did He come to accomplish? There are various answers to those questions. The reason the answer is so important is because the Church is called to line up with Christ's own mission. Today there are those who believe in a social gospel who believe that Jesus is primarily interested in social justice, transforming social structures, alleviating injustice and renovating cities. This has an extreme edge in Liberation theology that says that spiritual salvation is irrelevant, social liberation is all, and some have even advocated violence as a way of realising the kingdom of God. On the conservative side we have seen those who believe that Jesus is only worried about souls and not bodies, the church and not society, heaven and not the earth. The portion that we have before us Luke 4:16-21 is a very important one because in it Jesus outlines His mission for us.

Let me give us the context and then we will dig in. V14-15, '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.' Jesus has begun His public ministry. Luke has told us about the preparation of John the Baptist, Christ's baptism as well as His temptation. What Luke does not tell us is that Jesus did a few other things before this public appearance in Nazareth happened. John chapters 1-4 all take place before this appearance in Nazareth. A ministry on Jesus part is hinted at by the fact that there was a report of Him in all the surrounding country as well as the fact that Jesus taught in 'their synagogues,' plural. It may have been as long as a year before this portion before us happened. This is important because it means that of all the things Luke could have used to begin noting Jesus public ministry he chose this part of His early ministry. It was cherry picked because it gives a clear indication of His purpose, His identity, and is followed by a typical rejection.

We are told that He was 'being glorified by all.' This of course will not continue and will finally result in the crowds of Jerusalem calling out for His crucifixion. So here we have the honeymoon stage of Jesus ministry. He has probably done some amazing miracles, His well-articulated teachings were still a novelty, but v22-30 anticipates more of what is to come. We are told that Jesus taught in their synagogues. Synagogue worship sprung up during the time when Judah was in exile in Babylon cut off from the Temple and its worship. It became a standard form of worship when Israel returned to the land. In order for a synagogue to form you needed at least ten men to form a synagogue. So when we see Paul in Philippi in Acts 16:13 having to go to the women's prayer meeting to preach, it was because there were not enough men to start a synagogue there. Galilee Josephus tells us had about 240 synagogues, Jerusalem alone had about 480. Synagogue worship has a few aspects in common with Christian worship. The synagogue was ruled by elders, you could be cast out of the synagogue, a type of church discipline. The worship included singing, reading set prayers, readings from various parts of the OT as well as a message based on the readings. The service ended with the reading of benedictions.

V16, '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.' V16 tells us that the setting for Jesus mission statement was His hometown of Nazareth. Now we know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but He grew up in Nazareth. This was a small and insignificant town of about 500 people. It is not mentioned in the OT because it was so small and unimportant. So for people to call Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, it could have been a slight and insult as if we called someone Temuka Tom.

We must note in v16 that Jesus was in the habit of going to the synagogue. He was a Jew and was bound by the fourth commandment to set aside a day to worship God, a day that as Christians we continue to observe as the Lord's Day. Jesus was not an anti-religious rebel, but a lawkeeping worshipper of God. His critique of the system of first century Judaism is not because He is an atheist or agnostic or a mystic with a private religious point of view, but rather someone who was zealous for the pure worship of God. Jesus met with God's people to worship, even the Son of God felt this to be important, how much more so ourselves.

V16 also mentions that Jesus stood to read, this was the typical posture for reading in the synagogue, sitting was the posture of teaching. Well we have set the scene now we are ready to examine this section under two points, Jesus ministry of preaching and Jesus ministry to the needy.

Jesus ministry of preaching

V17, 'And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written.' The scroll of Isaiah did not have chapters and verses, nor did it even have spaces between the letters. But Jesus who was well acquainted with the word of God unrolled the scroll to the exact spot and read from Isaiah 61:1-2. The book of Isaiah is known as the mini-bible because it has 66 chapters, the first 39 deal with judgement, but 40 onwards changes in tone and looks forward to God salvation through God's servant. Is. 53 is in this servant section and we know that to be a prophecy of the sufferings of Christ for sinners. Is. 61:1-2 is a prophecy about a coming servant who will be sent by God with His Spirit, Is. 48:16. We have seen Jesus receive the Spirit at His baptism and now we have an explanation what that Spirit is for, this ties in with Jesus mission which we are seeking to understand.

V18-19, '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.' Jesus is going to announce in v21 that they are seeing the fulfillment of this prophecy in Him. But we are interested in what the Spirit is given for. Many would point to these verses and say, 'You see, Jesus is concerned about alleviating poverty, about injustice, and the oppressed, He was a political activist interested in social justice and liberation.' This might appear to be what He is saying on a first reading but look a little closer. Notice how many times verbs describing preaching occur, 'to proclaim good news to the poor,' 'to proclaim liberty to the captives,' 'to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.' Jesus did perform miracles where he helped the blind and lame, but His priority is to preach. If you look at the end of this chapter you will see in v40 that many sick and demon possessed people

were brought to Christ, the people we see sought to keep Him, but He states His purpose plainly in v43-44, 'but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

⁴⁴ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.' He did not say that He must make sure all the sick are healed and all the demon possessed liberated, but that He must preach. There were opportunities when people called on Him to act as a judge and to arbitrate in legal matters like in the splitting of an inheritance in Luke 12:13-14, but Jesus said that He has not been appointed in this legal capacity at this time. When the Pharisees sought to trap Him in His words asking whether they should pay taxes to Caesar, Matt. 22:15-22, Jesus did not grab the opportunity to make known His manifesto for tax reforms and lay out God's ideal economic policy making a verdict on whether Capitalism or Socialism is better. No, He merely called for faithfulness as citizens and as worshippers.

In theology we talk about the primacy of preaching, that it is of utmost importance because this the way that God accomplishes His work, the Spirit and the Word work to make us new. And so just as Jesus prioritizes preaching, so do we. This is why we are called witnesses, we have a message. Paul sees his role as a preacher of utmost importance as well. Listen to what He says as he describes his ministry to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. 5:18-20, 'All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.'

Preaching has fallen on hard times. With our access to multimedia, with the new and stimulating forms of entertainment we have created, with interactive and instant social media many have suggested that teaching and preaching should be put aside and the church should catch up with the times. Monologues need to give way to dialogue and community interaction; authoritative pronouncements need to more humble and accommodating of different opinions. Not only that there are others of the opinion that we don't need more teaching but more power and miracles. The thinking goes that if we just have more healings more resurrections from the dead, if we have the gifts of the Spirit operative in the book of Acts operative today, then people will just believe. They will point to Jesus ministry of miracles and those promises which appear to say that we will do greater miracles than Jesus.

The miracles are signs of authentication. False prophets can perform miracles, they are nothing in and of themselves, it is what they point to or verify which is of importance. They have the role of spotlighting the truth, but they are not the message. But it is the message, the word that brings faith that saves. We cannot believe unless we hear, not unless we see. This emphasis on proclamation must be noted as we try and understand Jesus mission.

Jesus ministry to the needy

Now we must look a little deeper into the meaning of the words, 'poor,' 'captives,' 'blind,' 'oppressed.' Is Jesus saying that He has the Spirit and has come to improve the economic situation of the poor; to get prisoners released from prison; to heal all blind people; and to seek political emancipation for the oppressed? The simple answer is no, all of these are pictures of our sinful

condition. Jesus does care about these things, and as the church we should to, but we must not confuse them with the main thing that Jesus came to do.

What would the Jews have understood when they heard these words? They would have erred on the side of a flat literal reading that politicized its meaning expecting the anointed one to come and overthrow Rome and set Israel free. But Jesus message was countercultural to this expectation, it cut across the grain of their perceived needs to their true needs. Firstly, the word for poor is used 10 times in the NT and 7 out of 10 it means the literal poor, but there are also metaphorical uses of it. Matt. 5:3 being a clear example, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' Jesus came with a message of universal poverty, that all are sinners, that all have nothing good to give to God that can save them, that all are in the desperate position of begging before God and needing what only He can provide. The Pharisees who were very religious were poor but thought themselves rich just like the Laodiceans in Rev. 3:17, 'For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.' Here is the point, many today say that 'religion is a crutch for the needy, but I don't need God I am doing ok.' The truth is you are not doing ok. You are a sinner, a lawbreaker, you cannot stop sinning, you have broken the law and must now be judged. But Jesus has good news for those who wake up to this truth. He gives freely what poor people cannot provide. You need forgiveness of sin, He gives it freely. You need righteousness, He gives it freely. It comes freely to you, but here is the sticking point, He has to pay to make it free for us. We are all familiar with this issue of admitting our faults before we can be helped. We are all aware of drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs that say that the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem. This is what Jesus came to do for the Jews, to show them they are poor, to get them to admit they have a problem and to avail themselves of the good news, that God gives freely what we need.

If everyone is poor, then everyone must be a captive as well. Jesus came to preach liberty to the captives, what does He mean by captives? Please notice that Jesus did not set any prisoners free literally. Think on John the Baptist in Luke 7 where he is in prison, and is confused and so has to send some of his disciples to ask Jesus whether He is in fact the promised one. John is a prisoner and is not being set free, this confused him. But Jesus affirms Himself as the promised one. John 8:34, 'Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.' The Jews would have thought that their physical poverty and physical captivity is their biggest problem, but it is not there is a bigger problem than poverty, bad health, and political oppression, it is sin. Paul paints a dark picture for us in Ephesians 2:1-3, 'And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.' It is a sad picture, the devil puts a carrot in front of us and we follow and he leads us down a path of destruction and bondage. Here is the insanity of our captivity, we love our chains. Paul describes our sinful desires as deceiving desires Eph.4:22. In other words, we gladly and willingly believe the lie that we need our sins, that they are better for us than holiness; that God's ways are impoverishing and sins are enriching. It is a great mercy to set free those who do not want to be free who can't want to be free because they think they are better off. True liberty is in doing what you are made for, to walk in holiness and love and truth not sin, hate and lies.

Is this you today? Are you a slave to sin? Are you on a path of self-destruction and singing happy songs while you go to the slaughterhouse? Christ has come to set us free from the slavery of sin.

Next we see that Jesus gives sight to the blind. Jesus did literally give sight to the blind, many miracles of this nature were performed. John 9 is a wonderful look into the significance of giving sight. This is the chapter where Jesus declares Himself to be the light of the world, 9:5. 9:35-41 is most important. Jesus finds the man who has been healed and asks if he believes in the Son of Man, the man says, who is he? Jesus reveals that He is the Son of Man, the man believes and Jesus says, v39-41, 'Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.' Here is the test to see if you are blind, do you believe that Jesus is the promised Saviour or do you reject Him? Those in darkness do not see, those who have the light see. If you claim to see but do not see and follow Christ, no matter how clever you think you are, you are blind.

Jesus also sets at liberty those who are oppressed. Jesus did not set free any political captives or drive off any foreign invaders, but He did set people free from demon possession and when He saves us He brings us out from the tyranny of the devil's power over us. Col. 1:13, 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.'

V19 tells us that Christ came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, this is the year of Jubilee. The year of Jubilee was the year that all debts were cancelled and all lands that were sold off restored and if you had sold yourself into slavery to pay a debt you were automatically freed. This year came around every 50 years. Jesus is telling us that He has come to announce a year of Jubilee like no other. Jesus has come to not only set us free but to put an end to everything that can enslave us. Satan, sin, death, and a fallen world will all be overcome through what He accomplishes in His death and resurrection.

An important point to note is what Jesus does not quote from Is. 61:2, 'to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.' What is missing from Jesus quote? He does not mention the vengeance and the justice of God. He only talks about the Lord's favour not His wrath. This is the case because Jesus will come twice, there is the first coming where He comes not to judge but to save by dying on the cross, and when He comes again He will come in judgment. But we have to ask the question, How? Why doesn't God come in punishment? How is it possible that only part of the promise is fulfilled? Here is the answer. None of us deserve to receive a free salvation, to be set free from a slavery we love, to be granted sight when we love darkness, and to be set free from the one whose will we gladly perform. But God does these things for us because Jesus became poor for us, He became a prisoner for us, He suffered the darkness of God's displeasure for us, and He was handed over to Satan to be tortured and killed for us, He lost His freedom for us. The good news of what Christ offers is all benefits for us, but it came at a cost for Him. We often have a sense of entitlement where we expect these things not realizing what it cost to secure them.

So what is the mission of Christ? It is to save sinners.