**The Work of the Messiah**

**Luke 4:14-30**

**Luke 4:18** “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

**Part 1**: Jesus On His Way back to Nazareth

These past few weeks we’ve been looking at some events marking the very beginning of Jesus ministry, from his baptism to his fasting in the desert, and then to the devil’s temptation after 40 days. In all of these accounts we’ve seen a running theme of the Holy Spirit, from “the Holy Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove”, to Jesus being full of the Spirit, and then to the Spirit leading him into the wilderness for 40 days. In today’s passage as well, this theme continues as we see in verse 14 where “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee”. Jesus was not simply traveling to Galilee as another ordinary teacher, but instead he returned with power, and his message had genuine authority.

Let’s look at verses 16-17. Here the author is reminding his readers that Jesus grew up in Nazareth. We can also see how seriously Jesus took “worship services”. Looking at this verse it was his regular habit to attend these synagogue services, where he most likely both taught and worshipped. While this may seem like a side note, the fact that Jesus faithfully went to participate at the synagogue is actually kind of radical. I mean, he could have simply argued that the “religious system” was corrupt, or that he didn’t need need any spiritual instruction. After all, at this point he was already full of and being directed by the Spirit. But instead Jesus sets a powerful example for us to follow, that refutes those arguments like “I don’t get anything out of the service” or “corporate worship isn’t my thing”. Personally, when I look at Jesus here, I’m convicted by this truth in his actions: that worship isn’t about high quality preaching or fancy decor, but worship is about meeting *God*.

**Part 2**: Isaiah’s Prophecy of the Coming Messiah

Let’s read verses 18-19 of Luke chapter 4. “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” This is a quotation from isaiah chapter 61, where isaiah writes about the glorious Messiah coming to usher in a new age. Of all the passages in the old testament, this was the one chosen to be read at the synagogue that day—coincidence? I think not. This passage prophesied the mission of Messiah, and it was definitely appropriate for Jesus to read it at the beginning of His ministry. We see in verses 1 and 2 that the coming Messiah would possess "the Spirit", would be a bringer of good news, and would bring “release the prisoners from darkness”. Looking at Christ’s earthly ministry we can see that these prophecies from Isaiah are all right on the money. But more than that, we see in Jesus a marvelous fulfillment of God’s promises, and we’re able to see just how faithful God is. He didn’t forget his covenant with his people, but instead kept every word, as he sent his only Son to earth. By seeing how Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, we’re reminded that God’s promises are for real, and when he promises us something, we can take him at his word.

Firstly, as we looked at in part 1, Jesus was filled with Spirit as he ministered to those around him. Second, throughout the book of Luke, the author emphasizes the ministry of Jesus as one of proclamation. From many of the people’s responses we can see that he was viewed as a prophet, and indeed during his lifetime Jesus made it a point to proclaim the gospel to people of every area of society.

But it’s the third point that I want to emphasize in particular today—that is the specific *work* of the Messiah. First, we see that Jesus is sent to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. In our own lives today, how can we see this work of the Messiah? Though we live in an essentially “free” nation, and our generation prides itself on each person “doing their own thing”, in reality we are not as free as we think. It’s true that we are generally free to pursue what we want, but sinful pursuits also leave us in bondage. Even though we may feel we are free, when sinful desires dictate how we live, we’re actually prisoners to sin. So it is amazing news for us that Jesus came to proclaim freedom to the prisoners—to us—freeing us from the bonds of sin.

In a similar way, we see in verse 18b that the Messiah came to grant recovery of sight to the blind. If you stop someone randomly on the street and ask whether they’re held prisoner, or blind, they’ll probably think you’re crazy. But I can testify that before Christ opened my spiritual eyes, I was definitely a prisoner, and was completely blind to the things of God. For me, I felt like I knew who God was, and had no desire to deepen my understanding of him. Though I went to youth group every week, I would just tune out what I was hearing about God. This blindness led me to hold onto false notions of who God is, all throughout my time in middle school and into high school. Because I saw God as impersonal, I didn’t think he would have anything to do with the temptations I was facing. I thought that bringing my problems to him would just mean getting more confirmation of how bad I was, with no real solution. As a result I never brought the addictions I was struggling with to my heavenly Father in prayer, and as a result of that, I was unable to feel his love for me. But after Jesus began to open my spiritual eyes through some people God had put in my life, I was finally able to feel God’s love genuinely. I was able to see the abundance of God’s grace in my life, and I gained a real desire to know him more.

In a lot of cases, being spiritually blind means being aimless, without purpose or direction, and with no idea of who God is. But the amazing news we see in verse 18 is that the Messiah came to heal this blindness, opening our eyes to truly know God.

The last point we see in verse 18 is that Jesus came to free the oppressed. Though the common perception of the Messiah at the time of Christ was that he would free God’s people from political oppression, there is a deeper meaning in Isaiah’s prophecy. Today we live in a relatively peaceful society where we aren’t oppressed in an obvious way. Even if someone has a outwardly peaceful life, though, there can be a war raging inside. During a discussion we had on Friday, we talked about the emotional oppression involved in earthly relationships. A lot of times we find ourselves slaves to trying to please people, and we feel hurt and alone when people don’t give back the affection we give them. The sad reality is that a lot of people aren’t going to reciprocate your affection, even if you’re being an awesome friend, and there are times we feel completely powerless and rejected.

Another type of oppression is demonic, which is also a reality in our time, as the Devil uses more subtle means to bring us down spiritually and emotionally. Even after believing in Jesus, we so often find ourselves in the vicious cycle of Satan’s lies, doubting God’s plan and doubting who we are in Christ. As we saw in last week’s passage, the temptations of the devil may seem pretty reasonable at times, and so many are under this subtle but dangerous form of oppression. We see in today’s passage, however, that the Messiah came to break these bonds of oppression.

So what’s the end result of all these amazing works of the Messiah. Well let’s look at verse 19. The reference to "the year of the Lord’s favour" is an allusion to the year of jubilee, a time when all the enslaved in Israel would receive their freedom (Lev. 25). It points prophetically to the messianic kingdom to come, but it also indicates more generally how God would show his favour to the gentiles, bringing all nations into his kingdom. It was a time when all debts were forgiven, and people could start from scratch, no matter how much they owed before. Even land ownership was affected, where property would revert back to the original owner. But as crazy as this system may sound in ancient Israel, this is precisely what Jesus is proclaiming, except on a global basis, for all humanity. All of these works of the Messiah point to a new beginning. A new era, not of the law, but of grace. And we can see how this is amazing news especially for the poor, the blind, and the oppressed—people who usually get no attention or favour, but are instead outcast by society.

But what’s more remarkable is that THIS is the year of the Lord’s favour. When Jesus proclaimed the prophecy fulfilled, it wasn’t just for his time, but it’s a reality for us today.

But as we’ll see in the next section, even such amazing news as this can be tuned out, and rejected, if we don’t have ears to hear.

**Part 3**: Rejected in His Hometown

We saw in verse 14 and 15 that Jesus had already received a warm welcome in other regions of Galilee, but now he’s preaching in his hometown, Nazareth. These were the people who would have the hardest time getting their heads around this idea that Jesus was the promised Messiah. After all, they had seen him grow up. Among the people in the crowd were probably some of those who had taught Jesus in the synagogue, and probably some of the people were even past customers of-- Joseph and Son’s Carpentry Firm. How could Jesus honestly be the promised Messiah?

After the whispering began to spread in the crowd, Jesus made a harsh but accurate point about those who would hear his testimony. Let’s read verses 24-26. “24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.”

Here Jesus is emphasizing the spiritual blindness of God’s people at the time of Elijah. Though there were many people God could have worked through, God had to send Elijah to the land of Sidon to find someone who would respond genuinely. This anecdote does not just apply to God’s plan for the gentiles, but specifically Jesus is talking about the spiritually blind people before him. They were proud in their own eyes, and were merely looking for Jesus to work more miracles. When they heard these convicting words from Jesus we see in verse 29 how the crowd responded with scorn and rejection. Though we see a great deal more of this rejection throughout the book of Luke, God nevertheless was able to work through many unlikely individuals. Despite the pride and unbelief of our generation, just as in the time of Elijah and Elisha, God continues to find people who will respond to him.

**Conclusion**:

In summary, we’ve seen that the work of the Messiah is truly good news for us today. It means freedom for the prisoners—that those suffering under the dominion of sin would experience true freedom in Christ. It means recovery of sight for the blind—that the spiritual eyes of our generation would be opened to who Jesus is, and see God glorified. And lastly it means freedom for the oppressed—that no longer would we be subject to Satan’s oppression, but instead that we would be more than conquerors through Christ who has set us free. And we’ve seen that through this work, Jesus has brought about the Year of the Lord’s Favour, a new era of grace that we’re living in today! Let’s pray that that we would have Jesus’ compassion for those around us, and that God would use us to shed light in a blind generation, bringing freedom to those who are being held prisoners!

Let’s close in prayer...