

REJECTED

Luke 4:16-30

Can you imagine going into an area of the world where people were constantly sick of some disease such as strep throat and you had with you a truck load of penicillin or amoxicillin that would cure the problem? What would you do? Would you be able to keep quiet about the fact that you had a positive cure for the problem or would you want to tell everyone? I think that it is safe to say that most people would want to share the good news that there is a cure. Imagine now that you did tell everyone that you had this medicine that would heal their disease and all they had to do was to swallow a pill or be injected with a shot and just about everyone said to you, “No way, I will not swallow a pill or let you stick a needle in me, I'd rather be sick!” What a disappointment!

There have been numerous stories written about a king or a prince dressing in common clothes and living among the people so that he could know what their life was really like. In the process he would also discover which of his subjects were noble and which were scoundrels. In these stories, the king or the prince would always take on the role of an obscure person and at some later time would do something to try to benefit his subjects. These stories have a familiar ring to them. It almost seems as if they are an adaptation of God's plan of salvation. But there are some really significant differences. When God, the Son, came to live on earth in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, He was not obscure by any stretch of the imagination. He did not hide the fact that He was here and that He was going to make a difference. Similarity can be found in that both the earthly king and Jesus show great care and concern for the needs of people. While the story of the earthly king is limited to physical needs of people, Jesus came to address the full gamut of man's needs: body, soul, and spirit.

After Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, He went to the area around Capernaum and started His mission of ministry to people. After a while, He returned to Nazareth.

True Identity – 4:16-21

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” ²⁰ And He closed the book, 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.” Luke 4:16-21 (NASB95)

We can learn a few things about the culture and the things that Jesus considered important from the first verse. At this time in the history of the Jews, the synagogue was the local place of prayer and teaching from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Many times, the synagogue was the center of the community for things such as funerals, weddings, etc. The idea for the synagogue came about during the exile in Babylon and the people were not able to go to the temple to worship. Part of the normal practice was for someone read from the Scriptures.

We see also that people would frequent the synagogue on the Sabbath day. They may have gone there on other occasions, but it was customary to go there on the Sabbath day. It was also the custom of Jesus to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Since the Fourth Commandment is to keep the Sabbath holy, then we can conclude that attending a house of prayer and learning truth from God's word is a holy thing to do.

Usually someone would read from the Law and then someone would read from the

Prophets. We are not told if this was something that a person volunteered to do, but Jesus stood up and in doing so signaled His intent to read.

Jesus operated within the protocol of the worship service of the day to deliver the message of Good News to these people whom He loved. He did not bring in some strange new doctrine but relied on the word of God that had already been given. The truth of God's word never changes; however, our understanding of that truth is constantly being updated as God reveals more and more of Himself to us as we grow in faith and the ability to receive the revealed word.

It was not just coincidence that the Scripture passage for that day was from Isaiah. Jesus opened the scroll and read the mission of the Messiah. Notice that the passage began with "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, . . ." These words really define the concept of the Messiah or the Christ. He was to be One anointed by or with the Spirit of the Lord. You will remember that at the baptism of Jesus, there was a manifestation of God's Spirit coming upon Jesus. The purpose of the anointing of the Holy Spirit is given in clear terms in the verses from this passage in Isaiah.

Bringing Good News to the Poor: The phrase "preach the gospel" is one word in the Greek text. It is the word from which we get our word "evangelize." It simply means to tell the good news. In its simplest form, Jesus proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of heaven. You would think this would be good news for everyone, but for those in power, the coming of a new kingdom or rule was seen as a threat. To those who were disenfranchised and without any means of help, the message of a system based on the principle of the long-anticipated kingdom of heaven was a basis for hope.

Healing the Brokenhearted: Life is full of disappointments and always will be. It is good when there is a gap between what we would like to achieve and where we currently are. This gap drives improvement. However, when the gap is so wide that people give up and lose hope, then despair can take over. The poor people of Jesus's day had little hope and many had no purpose in life. Such a hopeless situation can be crushing to many people.

Releasing the Captives: The Jews were literally in captivity to the Romans. The Roman system brought some apparent benefits to the people. There was stability of government and some order to life, but the people were not free. We know that the kingdom of which Jesus spoke was not about the physical situation but of the spiritual realm. In a similar way, there are people who are in bondage to sin and they will justify their actions by telling others of the apparent benefits that their wrong doings bring to them. People hooked on drugs will tell you how good it makes them feel. People who steal can point to the material things they have. Those who engage in immorality will tell you how much fun they are having. What they don't realize, until it is too late, is these practices have control over them and they can't stop doing them any easier than Israel could have chased the Romans away.

Sight to the Blind: Medical practice has always been inadequate and one of the most feared conditions was and is blindness. Physical blindness causes a person to miss so much of life and there is such a sense of helplessness. Similarly, spiritual blindness causes us to fail to see or realize the spiritual significance of what is going on around us. Jesus wanted to bring relief in both areas. Just as it would take miraculous power to heal the physically blind, it would also take a miraculous touch to open spiritually blind eyes. You might recall what Jesus told Nicodemus that unless a person is born again, he cannot even "see" the Kingdom of Heaven.

Liberty to the Oppressed: Oppression of people is a reality even in today's world. It is the cause of uprisings, civil wars, and troubles throughout history. Jesus came to release people

from oppression in that the root cause of one person oppressing another would be eliminated. The major factor in oppression is greed and the desire for power over others. The only cure for that problem is real love for our fellow man.

Year of Favor: Isaiah may have had in mind the time when the Jews would be released from their captivity in Babylon. Some think that this concept may also refer to a Jubilee year in which all debts are canceled and land returns to the original family. Jesus may have had both ideas in mind as types of the spiritual favor that God would give to His people.

Jesus was standing in front of the congregation when He read the passage. When He finished He closed the scroll, handed it to the minister and sat down. Sitting down in the front was an indication that He was going to teach. Of course, He had the attention of everyone there.

An interesting exercise is to tie this prophecy with the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who were mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted and reviled. Let's see if we can find a correlation of these persons with what Luke recorded of the message that Jesus shared in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Obviously we can relate the poor to the *poor in spirit*. The Good News that was proclaimed to them is that of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. We can, without too much of a stretch, link the poor with the *meek* and their promise to inherit the earth or enjoy the benefits of the kingdom of heaven in this life.

The brokenhearted (crushed) are to be healed and this would likely relate to *those who mourn* and need comforting.

If those who are captives are in that condition because of being trapped in sin, then these could certainly be related to those who *hunger for righteousness*. The promised freedom could also be translated as deliverance or forgiveness.

The promise of sight to those who are blind applied in a spiritual sense would allow them to see the true character of God. Once that is seen, then they can follow His example being *merciful, pure, and a peacemaker*.

The oppressed would be a good description of those who are *reviled and persecuted* and all these need freedom or deliverance.

False Understanding – 4:22-27

²² And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" ²³ And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.' " ²⁴ And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. ²⁵ "But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet 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 Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:22-27 (NASB95)

We are not told all that He taught them, but He started out telling them they were witnessing the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. As He continued, they were amazed at His ability to open up the meaning of the Scriptures. They whispered back and forth to each other about Him being Joseph's son. They just couldn't see beyond their paradigm of who they thought He was. They could not even consider the possibility of Him being God's Messiah.

Jesus had done many miracles in Capernaum before coming back to Nazareth and the people had heard about it. Many may have been expecting to see some miracle performed, not because they believed that He was the Son of God, but just because they were fascinated by the

unusual. Mark tells us that Jesus could not do any great miracle among them because of their unbelief. It was easier for the people of Capernaum to believe in Him than for the people of Nazareth simply because they were so familiar with Him. This was not the first time prophets were able to help people outside of their own area but not those who knew them. Jesus used two examples to make His point: Elijah and Elisha both had helped foreigners when their own people had the same needs. The real difference was that the foreigners had faith and the Jews didn't.

The people became enraged with Jesus because all they heard was that Gentiles had received benefits that had been denied to Israelites. Now in their own time, people of another area had received help that was being denied them. They could not receive the help because of their lack of faith. Can you imagine the outrage and the vitriol that would occur in a church today if someone were to be told that they were not being blessed because they did not have faith? That is a very serious claim to make and even if you are Jesus you will get a negative reaction from everyone.

Misguided Response – 4:28-30

²⁸ And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹ and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, He went His way. Luke 4:28-30 (NASB95)

While it is understandable that the people would react in the way they did, it was not an appropriate response. If we were to have someone tell us that we don't have adequate faith, then our response should be to have a serious counseling session with the Lord in prayer. There was an example of such a response by a person later on in the ministry of Jesus. We see this recorded in Mark chapter 9 in which Jesus told a father who wanted his son to be healed that all things are possible if you can believe. The father's response was "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Those who are really lacking in faith want to "kill the messenger." People today would not do anything as drastic as the people of Nazareth attempted to do with Jesus, but they would likely attempt to discredit and ridicule the messenger in such a situation.

The account by Luke tells us that Jesus passed through their midst and went His way. Some commentators believe this was a miraculous act and others claim that He simply walked away in the midst of all the confusion that followed. It is good to know when to simply walk away and when to continue a confrontation. We could learn from the wisdom of Christ.

Jesus told His disciple that they would do the works that He did because He would send the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit was upon Christ so that He could fulfill the prophecies of Isaiah, that same Spirit is available to us to actually walk in the character described in the Sermon on the Mount and to minister to people in the power of the Holy Spirit.