

Luke 4:14-21 – Understanding the Mission of Jesus

-- Read Luke 4:14-21

-- Pray

-- Introduction – Headlines – “Read the Fine Print”

The first couple of verses in this morning’s passage (v. 14-15) are a bit like the fine print we find in newspaper ads in the sense that they are a small window to an important reality. However, unlike that fine print, behind which we usually discover hidden terms and specious conditions of an offer that we knew was too good to be true, behind these two verses lies a magnificent year of ministry. Within the description offered in these two short verses, lies roughly the entire first year of Christ’s public ministry.

When studying Jesus' life, it is often very helpful to use study resources that coordinate the chronology of all four Gospels. Unlike Matthew and John (who wrote primarily to Jewish audiences), Luke was writing with the Gentiles in mind. Due to this emphasis, he moves directly from the temptation of our Lord in the desert to His Galilean ministry, which he describes from this point (4:14) through chapter 9 verse 50. Because Luke was writing to a Gentile audience, it was best for him to pass over the first year of our Lord's ministry among the Jews in Judea and among the Samaritans in Samaria, and move directly to Christ’s ministry in Galilee. It is worth noting that Matthew also describes the Galilean ministry in Matthew 14:13 to 18:53, as does Mark in Mark 6:31 to 9:50. Thus, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all dedicate great space and detail to Jesus’ ministry in Galilee. Therefore, so shall we, as we ponder it together over the next few months.

However, this morning, so that we can put Jesus’ Galilean ministry in its proper context and understand its fullness, I want to begin by providing an historical overview of this first year of our Lord’s ministry. Today, we are going to look at this year of Jesus’ life that Luke has so succinctly summarized in verses 14 and 15. To do so, we must look into the first four chapters of the Gospel of John, because it is only by John’s Gospel that we know of this first year of Christ’s public ministry. I imagine that you will be quick to notice that the first part of this morning’s message will be a bit different from what we are used to hearing on Sunday mornings—it will likely sound more like a history lesson than a sermon. However, I believe that this history lesson is vital to a proper understanding of the message of the Gospel of Luke.

While John the Baptist was baptizing at Bethany beyond the Jordan River, he told the priests of Israel that he was not the Christ himself, but identified his cousin, Jesus, as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Then, in an event which we examined over the course of the past two Sunday mornings, after Jesus was baptized by John, He was then led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan in the desert. Shortly after this temptation, Jesus began the important part of His public ministry that Luke has summarized in our passage this morning.

It was at this time that John the Baptist pointed two of his disciples, John and Andrew, toward Jesus. These two men immediately found Andrew's brother, Simon Peter, and enthusiastically shared with him their excitement about Christ. The next day, Jesus called Philip to follow Him, and Philip quickly recruited Nathanael. These five men became the first disciples to minister with our Lord in Judea.

Jesus then traveled north some 80 miles to the small village of Cana, which was about 10 miles northeast of his hometown of Nazareth. And, as you may recall, it was there in Cana, at the wedding of a friend, that Jesus accomplished his first miracle by the power of the Spirit by turning water into wine. John 2:11 – *This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

Shortly after that wedding, Jesus, his mother Mary, his four brothers and sisters, and the five disciples walked 20 miles northeast to visit the home of Peter's mother-in-law in Capernaum, which was a Roman garrison city located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Then, in the late spring of 29 AD, the Lord and his followers went south to Jerusalem to attend the first Passover of his three-year public ministry. It was then that He first cleansed the temple of the merchants who were turning his Father's house into a den of thieves. John 2:15-16 – *So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"*

Shortly after this first temple cleansing, Jesus was visited by a Pharisee named Nicodemus, whom He commanded to be born again and to whom He spoke the famous words of John 3:16. John 3:16 – *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

It is after this encounter with Nicodemus that our passage this morning begins. As Luke recorded in Luke 4:14 – “*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.*” In the winter of 29 AD, as the Gospel of John informs us, Jesus traveled from Judea through Samaria en route to Galilee. On His way, Jesus came to the Samaritan town of Sychar, where John records the delightful conversation He had with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4). As a result of the witness of that Samaritan woman and the evangelism that she instigated in the city, many people came to believe in Jesus. After these two days in Sychar, He went forth from there, traveling north to Galilee. When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the Galileans enthusiastically received Him, having witnessed all that He did in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, because many of them had also attended that same feast. Matthew 4:24 – “*News about him spread far beyond the borders of Galilee so that the sick were soon coming to be healed from as far away as Syria.*”

This is the place in the public ministry of Jesus where we find ourselves this morning. Hopefully, this brief summary of the first year of Jesus’ life is adequate to bring us up to speed as to what exactly Luke means when, in verses 14 and 15 he writes, Luke 4:14-15 – *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.* We now see that, by the time of Luke 4:16, Jesus had become quite popular and the news about His was spreading rapidly. People everywhere were familiar with his ministry of healing and His message of hope. Furthermore, because the Pharisees had not yet begun to question his authority in earnest, this was a time when praising Jesus was popular.

To conclude this morning’s trek through the first century, let us consider where the progression of the Gospel of Luke has brought us thus far. As we have examined the book of Luke, we have observed that the first three-and-a-half chapters show Jesus in a time of preparation, from his birth in Bethlehem until his temptation in the desert. In addition, our first two verses this morning (v. 14-15) have demonstrated that the first year of His public ministry was Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered, widely known, well-received, and synagogue-centered. Now, over the next few months, we will be studying our Lord's Galilean ministry in Luke 4:14-9:50. By God’s grace, we will carefully observe Jesus’ interactions with a variety of people from every walk of life. By God’s grace, we will be able to recognize the spiritual warfare that bombards the Lord in his ministry in the same way that it bombards believers today. And, as we do, we will endeavor to give Him glory in the highest as we discern biblical principles and apply them to our daily lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 – *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for*

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Alright, now that we have had our history lesson, let us pick up our passage again in verse 16. After preaching and teaching in many synagogues in Galilee, we see Jesus finally returning to his hometown of Nazareth. He enters the synagogue on the Sabbath, as was His custom, and begins to minister in the power of Holy Spirit. He stands up to read, and he is handed the book of the prophet Isaiah, which He opened and found the place where it was written: Luke 4:18-21 – *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

The passage of Scripture which Jesus quotes here is Isaiah 61:1-2. After reading it, He sits down, looks at the crowd of worshipers in the synagogue at Nazareth, and shocks them with the words, “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Many of Jesus’ hearers may have thought that He was just another prophet, like John the Baptist, announcing that the Messiah was on His way. But that is not at all what Jesus meant. No, no! Listen to the following exchange between Jesus and some men whom John the Baptist sent to inquire of Him in Luke 7:20,22 – *When the men came to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, ‘Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” So he replied to the messengers, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.”* So what Jesus meant in the synagogue at Nazareth on that glorious Sabbath day was that the Day of the Messiah has arrived! The long-awaited king, the hoped-for Son of David, the Great Liberator of His people, the Savior of the world, the King of Kings, the Bringer of justice and peace...the Messiah has come!

Using Isaiah's words, Jesus was boldly declaring that His coming was the perfect fulfillment of Year of Jubilee to which Isaiah was alluding in Isaiah 61. The Year of Jubilee, which found a place in our worship singing this morning, comes from Leviticus 25:8-16, where God mandates that the Year of Jubilee must take place every 50 years. Its purpose was to proclaim freedom throughout all the land. Leviticus 25:10 – *Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty*

throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.” In Christ Jesus, the ultimate Day of Jubilee had arrived. He had come to proclaim freedom from sin throughout the land. He had come to provide the only way in which you and I can ever be freed from our slavery to sin and jubilantly return to the family of God.

But the manner in which Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 reveals a remarkable mystery about the Messiah's coming. Not only was this passage an extraordinarily short Scripture reading for a synagogue service, but, even more significantly, Jesus breaks off the Scripture reading right in the middle of a verse. In Luke 4:19, Jesus declares that he has been sent to “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” and then He just stops. But look with me at all of Isaiah 61:2. The whole verse says: “*To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God.*” So, the question is, “Why didn't Jesus finish the sentence?” Why not... Because the mystery about Christ’s coming is the fact that it is, in reality, a two-act drama. The Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, saw the drama whole, and they didn’t separate the two acts by centuries; they seem to anticipate that salvation and judgment will come together. For them, the Year of Jubilee and the Day of Vengeance were simultaneous.

However, in John 12:47-48, Jesus declared, “*I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.*” You see, the first coming of Jesus Christ ushered in the year of God’s favor—that is, it ushered in a period of time for salvation instead of judgment. As Paul says, in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “*I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*” Today, we live in a day of tremendous grace and great patience. At present, God is withholding His awesome judgment, and He offers full amnesty to our rebellious hearts while this year of His favor lasts.

But know this for certain: Isaiah’s prophesy is not half-true. According to Christ’s own declaration, we can be certain that His coming has fulfilled the first half of Isaiah 61:2. The day of God’s favor is surely upon us. However, when this day of salvation is over and the time appointed by the Father has come, then the day of vengeance will just as certainly arrive, and the prophecy of Isaiah 61:2 will be completed. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 – *This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his*

holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. As God promises us once again, this time through the Apostle Paul, at the end of this period of patience, the day of God's favor will end, and the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance upon those who do not know God and upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In summary, then, the message to which we must respond this morning comes from the mouth of our Lord, and it is this: Jesus Christ is the long-awaited Messiah, and He has ushered in an era of good news. And because of this season of grace, we now live in a day of release, of healing, and of liberation; and for now the day of vengeance is postponed. Since the proclamation of this good news was the mission of Jesus Christ, it must be our mission as well. We must passionately declare the good news of Jesus Christ while God's favor can still be found. And for anyone here today who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, I implore you to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 55:6 – *Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.* Know this: Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.