

## The Messiah Announces His Mission

Luke 4:16-22

August 14, 2016

If you're not already there, we'll start there in Luke chapter 4, and we'll start reading in verse 14. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 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. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

"He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, '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

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blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

"And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' 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?' 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."'"

"And he said, 'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 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, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet

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Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.'

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

And so, it begins. Seemed to have started well enough, but then it ends with this murderous anger. It started with Messiah's announcement, which is gracious, expansive, profound, but it ends with the people's rejection of him. Rejection of those words. It's as sad as it is startling. And finding out what happened and why it happened this way that's going to be the subject of our study for this morning and then next week.

But it just seems odd, doesn't it, that these gracious words of the Messiah, the anticipation of his mission, this is a mission, after all, of a restoration promise prophesied by Isaiah and then here at this moment being fulfilled in the

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hearing of Jesus' hometown friends, neighbors, relatives. So, it's really shocking that what seems to have been so well received in verse 22, it says, "All spoke well of him," they turned on him in the end. They wanted to throw him off a cliff.

And we need to note here that had Jesus left well enough alone there, verse 22, if he just let it rest there and closed in prayer and moved on, everything would have been fine. Everything would have been great. He could have simply spoken the gracious words; he could receive some pats on the back and some high fives from his buddies, have Sunday dinner, and then move on to another city, keeping everybody on his side, keeping everybody with him. But he didn't do that.

It almost seems like he's here picking a fight. It almost seems like he's provoking this confrontation. In fact, in verse 23, he almost, he almost sounds a bit rude, even, even somewhat tactless. He says in the face of them appreciating his gracious words and very excited he says, Doubtless you are going to quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we've heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.

And then in verse 24, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." Look, Jesus' insight into humanity was obviously true and profound and accurate. It was spot on, John 2:25, "He himself knew what was in man." He's spot on, but, but why point it out? Did you really have to reveal all that you know? Did you have to talk about all that you suspect? But he went further; he didn't leave it even there.

He went further to press the point. Jesus illustrated with two Bible stories, one from Elijah's ministry and one from Elisha's. Stories that didn't help at all because it's all about Gentile salvation and a turning away from the Jewish people. Seemed to make things worse, much, much worse. It seems like he pushed these poor people, these good citizens, his own people, into a murderous rage. Again, we have to stop and wonder why. Why did he do that? What was he trying to accomplish? It's simply this, folks, Jesus came to preach the Gospel. And the Gospel divides. When people really get it, they realize there's a dividing line that they must reckon with.

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Matthew 4:17 sums up the start of Jesus' ministry in this way, says, "From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Also, same kind of summary in Mark's Gospel, Mark 1:14 and 15, "Jesus came into Galilee," seems to coincide with this setting here, "Jesus came into Galilee proclaiming the Gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the Gospel.'"

That's what Luke is here showing us. Same thing. Jesus is preaching the Gospel. It was provocative. It was a Gospel of gracious words, but it was one that didn't leave people alone. It pressed people to a verdict. It didn't allow people to remain neutral. It pushed them, triggered a reaction. So Jesus came back to Nazareth here, where he was raised. He came back to tell them, to explain his mission to them, the purpose for which he had been sent.

And you see that there in verse 18, this beginning of the quotation from Isaiah 61:1, which says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because," that word, because, that word answers the

why question, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" verse 14, and why was the Spirit of the Lord upon him? This quotation from Isaiah is the passage that he read publicly. It answers the question. And to put it simply, notice again verse 18, the Spirit was upon Christ to anoint him for a specific purpose. What was that purpose? To proclaim good news to the poor.

That, that word translated, proclaim good news, you've all heard this word before. In fact, we take our name as evangelicals from this word. It's the word *euangelizo*. We get the word evangelize from that word. The Spirit was upon Jesus to evangelize, to preach the Gospel. Now the good residents of Nazareth, good citizens, right? They're faithful Jews. They attended synagogue, they gave their tithes, they fasted and prayed at all the appropriate times. They visited the Temple as they ought to at the appointed times for the feasts in Jerusalem.

And here comes Jesus returning to Nazareth in the power of the Spirit. He comes to evangelize them. And that's the point of

friction, isn't it? When you try to evangelize those who think they have no need of evangelism. Oh, that makes them mad, doesn't it? It's resistant to that. That's why Luke wanted to set this story as the opening account to Jesus' ministry. This is here, like we said last time, this is here after three and a half chapters of qualification, of set up.

Luke is the most expansive in setting up Jesus' ministry for us to acknowledge his qualification, his perfection, his suitability for the role. And now we get into his ministry; we go through the doorway to see the substance of his ministry there in Galilee. And we get this story. Luke wants us to see the entire ministry of Jesus Christ through this account.

And not only does this story set our expectations for all that follows, but it also teaches us the kind of attitude that we must have toward Jesus Christ. We can't be offended by him. We have to let him press us, push us, press us toward a verdict. Jesus came to a world here, to a religious nation, and he told them that they needed to be saved. This nation, it was his own



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nation. They didn't like that. So, ultimately, they crucified him.

Folks, how will we, how will we receive him? How will we listen? Will we try to conform the Gospel and the words of the Bible to our own set of expectations as these people did? Or will we drop all demands? Will we come almost as a blank slate to Scripture and let the Bible dictate to us how we ought to think? Will we let God dictate to us how we need to define terms that we think we know? Words like love.

Words like grace. How many times have you heard somebody, you know, in a conversation and they point out somebody so-and-so who claims to be a Christian, professes to be a Christian, but they're sinning like the devil, right? And the person will say, Well, did you point that out? Did you confront it? No, I just wanted to extend grace.

Listen, folks, I think, I think we don't understand what that word means. Jesus is here in Nazareth extending grace. And extending grace means you're going to lovingly point out sin.

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Because sin destroys. Sin kills. Satan uses sin to mangle people's souls. We want to leave people like that? Our God didn't. And I'm so thankful and each one of you who know him, so thankful he didn't leave us in this condition. But there's a biblical, divine definition of grace and love and mercy that's been unleashed on us, on our lives.

So, are we going to drop all demands, are we going to let the Bible dictate to us how we ought to think? How we ought to live? "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." Do we really believe that? Well, this account is going to press that for us. It's going to push us to that dividing line. It all started here, a very typical setting, a typical synagogue in Israel. One of many, many synagogues in Israel, and this one in Nazareth.

Let's get right into the text, set the scene. I'm going to give you three brief points if you're taking notes. The Setting, the Scripture, and the Statement. The Setting, the Scripture, and the Statement.

First point: The setting. Look back again and let's get a running start in verse 14. We'll kind of connect this with what we talked about last week. Verse 14, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 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."

Stop right there for a moment. As Luke sets the scene, he points to several elements here in the setting, in the scene, that predict that Jesus is going to be well received. We expect that by how this is set up. As we read these verses, it appears that Jesus' ministry is going to get off to a very, very positive start. Coming home to the synagogue in Nazareth, you can almost feel the nostalgia. It should be a time of warm welcome for Jesus. A time of hearty reception, finding joyful acceptance among friends and neighbors.

We already learned last week that Jesus' Judean ministry was behind him. About a year or year and a half of ministry he'd

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already done, and his reputation had preceded him into Galilee and into Nazareth as well into this little town. When it says, "Report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country" in verse 14, the word, report, there is the word, *phémé*, which is the Greek origin of our word fame. In our vernacular, Jesus was, by this time, already famous. He was a celebrated figure. There's not just the hometown feel and atmosphere, but there's also the, the reputation that had preceded him.

The spread of his reputation, it was boosted by the positive promotion of his ministry throughout Judea and all the way up into Galilee. Before he ever returned to Nazareth, people had heard the news about him; they had heard what he'd done. And just as a reminder, what we talked about last week, he'd, he'd turned water into wine, a miracle of amazing proportions. He went into the Temple complex where there was buying, selling, trading, money-changing and all that going on. He cleaned out the entire Temple complex. One man with power and authority, driving out the buyers and the sellers and the profiteers.

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Word had gotten around. He performed a number of miracles in Jerusalem. They are not recorded in Scripture but they are acknowledged in John's Gospel. Those miracles had attracted the attention of the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, and they had come to the conclusion as a body that he was, at the very least, a teacher come from God. Jesus even spent an evening with one of the Sanhedrin's most respected members, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He spent time with him, even teaching him about the necessity of the new birth, calling that man to faith in himself.

Jesus, eventually he became so well known in Judea and so popular that he was attracting the wrong kind of attention from the Pharisees. Their jealousy, their envy had been stirred, so he departed from Judea, he went into Galilee. He passed through Samaria. And as he is passing through Samaria, he evangelized the Samaritans, starting with a woman, an immoral woman. Came to a Samaritan village, evangelized them, stayed with them a couple of days. He came to Capernaum, not far from Nazareth. There he healed a nobleman's son.

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Sounds like a pretty full calendar, doesn't it? The entire region of Galilee was eagerly anticipating his arrival to see his ministry first-hand. And it wasn't just his miracles, though they were very eager to see his miracles, but they wanted to hear his teaching as well. Jesus was renowned as an amazing teacher. Word had gotten around as it says in verse 15, He taught in all their synagogues and he was being glorified by all. He is being praised, he is being heralded.

And that's where you would find Jesus on a Sabbath is in the synagogue. Always in the synagogue. That was his custom. And Jesus had attended synagogue all his life, ever since a child. He's there, raised there with his parents, and now that he has come back, he's gone through all the stages of life. He's come back, he's a respected rabbi, a popular teacher and yet nothing changes. He still keeps this regular habit, regular Sabbath day attendance.

We should just note at this point that if our Lord did that, shouldn't we? Right? Be in church, folks, every week. Synagogue, Jesus was there it was the very heart and soul of the

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Jewish community. That started, that tradition started in the days of the Babylonian exile. The synagogue was the place of instruction. It was the place where the Torah was read, the law, the first five books of the Bible. It was the place where the prophets were read and then explained. It was the place where the traditions of the elders were passed down from generation to generation to generation to generation.

That's what kept Jewish tradition and law and culture, sensitivity to God's instruction. It's what kept that passed down throughout the generations and people attended the synagogue on the Sabbath. They also attended special days of prayer and fasting, came together for those. The sabbath was a place like our churches are. The place for public worship, biblical instruction. There were even meetings during the week for community events.

Often kids would meet at the synagogue during the week, receiving instruction from the synagogue ruler, who kind of was the acting school master in their instruction. There were also days of the week that were set aside, the market days, Mondays

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and Thursdays. These are days that were set aside for the am *ha'aretz*, that's, literally, the people of the land. These am *ha'aretz* they were kind of looked down by and disdained by the people in the towns and the cities as being kind of country folk, hayseeds and all that, but they are people who farmed away from town, and they couldn't always get in because their farming and their harvest kept them out there, and they came into town to sell their goods and their products and their wares.

So the synagogue accommodated them by teaching from Sabbath to Sabbath, special feast and fast days, all during the week. The synagogue was the meeting place in the communities of the Jews. These were vital for passing down teaching and instruction from the law and the prophets. And our local churches, really, are established on this synagogue model.

It's interesting to think about that, that our churches and the church model here is, is established during the time of Israel's exile in Babylon. As Alfred Edersheim put it, he said, "The synagogue became the cradle of the church." Interesting, isn't it, to ponder the divine foresight, God's providence in



preparing back then for today's ministry of the local church.  
That must mean it's important, right?

Towns and cities were allowed to establish a synagogue if there were ten Jewish men who were available to organize it, fund it, establish it, oversee its functioning. These men are, are noted as men of leisure. That doesn't mean they are always playing golf. It just means that they are freed up from, from daily living, making a daily living so they, they have time to invest for the good of the instruction of their community. These are men who could devote their time to synagogue worship and administration, instruction.

The set up very similar to our very own church. It had a raised platform in the front, elevated so the people in the back could see clearly, so people could hear clearly, what was read and spoken. One important difference was the separation then of the genders. The women sat inside the synagogue but around the perimeter of the room. And all the men sat in the middle in rows in the main section; sort of made it like a spectacle, I guess,

for the women to enjoy as they looked at the men there in the middle.

But the men needed to be the targets, direct targets, to the mind of the instruction from the law and the prophets because then they were responsible for taking that instruction back to their homes, to their families. Synagogue arrangement emphasized that, highlighted that, even by the seating arrangements. Honored individuals, they sat in the front. Those with less honor sat behind in descending order. As I said, there was a synagogue ruler; he enforced order, he maintained procedure.

But it's interesting that he didn't teach. Teachers came from the laity, the learned men in the congregation. Some of the Pharisees were teachers in their synagogues. But they weren't formal clergy. When visiting teachers and rabbis came to town, they were vetted first. But the people were always eager to hear from people visiting from outside. They brought news, they brought some amount of culture, some amount of diversity.

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The typical synagogue service began with singing and a prayer. The congregation then together recited the shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Following from that was a reading from the Torah, no teaching from the Torah, mind you, just the reading. The Torah instruction was sufficient to stand on its own without any elaboration or explanation, just reading.

After that came a reading from the Prophets. Those who read from the text of Scripture, they stood while they were reading, as I do, in honor of God's Word. The reader then would be seated and, after the sacred, scoles, scrolls were carefully tucked into a chest or an ark, small ark, the teacher would address the congregation, teaching from a seated position. I'm partly in favor of that. I would love to have a seat up here. But Wayne's provided me with a comfortable pad on which to stand. I feel like I'm just floating in air. Not true. But it is comfortable. Thank you, Wayne.

So the teacher would go to the passage that was read from the Prophets, translate that passage for the sake of the

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congregation, it'd allow them to hear it in their own language. And then he would proceed to explain the text. It's a pattern actually that's described in Nehemiah 8:8 which was set, like I said, back in the Exile. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. That is a definition, right there, Nehemiah 8:8, of expository preaching. Folks, that's why we do what we do. This is nothing new. This goes back 2,500 years and more.

So that's the background for this particular Sabbath day as Jesus returns to Nazareth. The scene here seems to be set up for him for a good reception. The report of his miracles had built anticipation, heightened a sense of excitement among the people. They're ready for him. He entered synagogue, this center of Jewish instruction established for centuries. This is the perfect place to introduce himself as their Messiah and to explain the purpose of his coming. What is his mission to his people?

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A couple of other ways that Luke has set the scene for a favorable homecoming for Jesus, verse 16 says, "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up." Where he had been raised. Nazareth is home base to Jesus, right? This is his people. Why wouldn't he be well received, right? This is his home. They know him; he knows them. They tell young preachers, you know, Preach, preach to our own people. Try to cut your teeth on people who know you, who will be gracious to you, favorable to you.

Jesus is come back here to very familiar territory for him, all the sights and the sounds, the smells of home. It's interesting to consider his homecoming from his perspective, how he entered into town and as he entered the synagogue that day. As he entered into the town, no doubt he came with some mixed emotions. His emotions, his thinking, were probably informed by his memories of his upbringing but also mixed in with the foresight of the future. He knew what was going to happen. It just seemed incongruous with the pleasant feelings he had of his upbringing in Nazareth mixing it in with what he knew was about to transpire.

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Alfred Edersheim has described the scene in this way, I love this quotation here. He says this, "As we follow Jesus to the city of his childhood, the home of his humility, we can scarcely repress thoughts of what must have stirred his soul as he once more entered the well-known valley and beheld the scenes to each of which some early memory must have attached. As the lengthening shadows of Friday's sun closed around the quiet valley, he would hear the well-remembered double blast of the trumpet from the roof of the synagogue minister's house, proclaiming the advent of the holy day.

"Once more it sounded through the still summer air to tell all that work must be laid aside. And yet a third time it was heard ere the minister put it aside, close by where he stood, not to profane the Sabbath Day by carrying it. For now, the Sabbath had really commenced, and the festive Sabbath lamp was lit. The Sabbath morn dawned, and, early, Jesus repaired to that synagogue where, as a child, a youth, a young man, he had so often worshipped in the humble retirement of his rank. Sitting not up there among the elders and the honored, but far back.

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"The old, well-known faces were around him; the old well-remembered words and services fell on his ear. How different they had always been to him than to them with whom he had thus mingled in common worship. And now, he was, again, among them. Truly a stranger among his own countrymen. This time to be looked at, listened to, tested, tried, used or cast aside as the case might be." End Quote.

It says in verse 16 there, that "As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read." This time, as he entered the synagogue, he's no longer the little kid sitting in back, straining and craning to look over the tall heads and the broad shoulders of the men sitting in front of him. Now that he has returned, he enters with the reputation, the stature, of an up-and-coming rabbi. Now he's sitting at the front in the seat of honor. He's ready to stand, to read and to take his seat and teach.

Let's get into the second point of our outline, simply put: The Scripture, The Scripture. Jesus, as the visiting rabbi, he has the honor of reading from the scroll and then giving an

exposition to the congregation. Take a look at verses 16 to 20 again. "He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, '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.' Rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him."

There is, in this section here, a chiastic structure. Chiastic structure takes its name from the Greek letter, Chi. Chi looks like an X. And there are thoughts that are parallel at either end of the X. So, they proceed toward the middle, toward a culminating point in the middle which receives the emphasis of the text. You can look down and see in verses 16 to 20. I'm just going to read through the, the verses for you, and then I'll show you the parallels.



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You've got in verse 16 the synagogue setting then Jesus stands up, then he receives the scroll, he unrolls the scroll, and then reads the Scripture. That's the center. Then he rolls up the scroll that he unrolled, he returns the scroll that he received, and he sits down where he had stood up. We are back into the synagogue setting, right? So you see the sets of parallels there? The synagogue setting in verses 16 and 20. Jesus standing up and then sitting down verses 16 and 20.

Then you have Jesus receiving and unrolling the scroll in verse 17 and then Jesus rolling up the scroll and giving it back in verse 20. There in the middle, verses 18 and 19, there's Jesus reading the Scripture. That's the center of the chiastic structure, and that tells us that that's where the emphasis is. That's where the focus is. That's why the focus of this sermon is going to be on that verse, that section.

Luke has hurried us in the narrative, he's hurried us to this point, right? As we said verses 14 and 15 they summarized a whole, an entire year and a half of ministry in just two verses. But now that Luke has hurried us here to this point, he's now

backing off the throttle. He's causing us to slow down, look carefully. And that's because this is important. This is key.

Jesus is about ready to announce the driving aims of his Messianic mission. This text of Scripture explains everything that drives him, all his decisions, everything that makes him tick. Luke wants us to stop and to watch.

Jesus received the scroll of Isaiah from the synagogue attendant. That had been pre-arranged to receive Isaiah, that scroll, whether by the synagogue ruler as he and Jesus talked, or perhaps by the wise providence of God. Just on this particular day Isaiah is given to him. But in any case, Jesus needed the scroll of Isaiah for his sermon, and that's what Jesus received. He then unrolled the scroll, called a biblion. Biblion is a long strip of parchment. It's held on a roller with a knob fixed at each end.

You've seen in the movies all that in the old settings where they unroll scrolls. It's probably the very scroll that had been unscrolled and scrolled up, read from time to time and

time and again during his childhood. He went back to that old scroll. He found the place in that scroll from which he intended to read. There are actually two places, Isaiah 61:1 and 2 and Isaiah 58:6. But it would all be contained in one reading, as the Hebrew was very compacted. And there in the Prophet Isaiah was the exact Scripture that explained the nature of his ministry.

That first line, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," that was not the question. There was no question that the Spirit of God was upon Jesus. Jesus had returned in the power of the Spirit, verse 14. Everybody knew that. That's what the report was about. In fact, everybody was talking about that, talking about how he's doing things that mere human beings cannot do.

The fact of the Spirit's power in Jesus' life was never under dispute. It was obvious but the question that no one was asking, but what Jesus felt compelled to explain was the purpose of the Spirit's power and presence. Why is the Spirit upon me? Because, verse 18, "He has anointed me" and "He has sent me." He

anointed me, and he sent me, two reasons that the Spirit rested upon Jesus. To anoint him, to send him.

First, let's talk about that issue of anointing. What is the significance of that? We've talked about that here before. And, simply put, anointing means divine commission. Prophets were anointed, priests were anointed, kings were anointed. And that's to show that this is not man's doing, but it's God's doing. God had set him apart, and, rather than anointing him with physical oil, he'd anointed him with the very Spirit of God. That's the exclamation of John the Baptist, right?

John 1:32 and following, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." That's an anointing. "I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on' he, 'whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."

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Anointing. The significance of that may have been lost on this congregation in Nazareth. But John was saying it. And word had gotten around. As I said, there was about a year for the word to spread from that event to Galilee to reach Nazareth, that Jesus is the anointed Son of God. Commissioned by God. Set apart for God's purpose.

So, what he says he does not say on his own. What he says, when he speaks, is the very Word of God. When Jesus speaks, God speaks. So what's the purpose, what is the divine commission for the Messiah? He has anointed me. Very specifically, it says there an infinitive of purpose, "to proclaim good news to the poor." As we said, that's the word *euangelizo*, to evangelize, to preach the Gospel. He anointed me to preach the Gospel.

Let that sink in for a moment. God commissioned Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. He empowered him with the Holy Spirit, giving mighty acts of power for what purpose? To evangelize. Is that striking home for any of you? If God commissioned Jesus to evangelize, and then Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20, a passage we refer to as what? The Great Commission, right? If God

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commissioned Jesus to evangelize, and then Jesus said this, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Listen, if our Lord, his commission to us, it's an extension of God's commission to him, right? When we evangelize, we are participating in this commission that God, by the Spirit, had given to the Messiah, had prophesied about back in Isaiah 61. That's pretty exciting, isn't it? Listen, when you and I have these simple conversations with unbelievers, and we tell them about this great Gospel, these are Gospel-centered conversations calling people to repent and believe. You're a part of this. We're all a part of this. We become his delegates, right? Bringing the Gospel. That's significant, right? That's worth living for.

Notice that word, poor, though; the word poor. Jesus is commissioned by God, he's anointed by the Spirit, to preach the

Gospel to the poor. Now, does that exclude the wealthy? Are we talking about economics here? Personal finance? No. No, we're not. The word here is *ptōchōs*. Technically, it refers to someone who is in abject financial poverty. That's the technical use, but it's referring to someone who's starving and they're penniless and they're reduced to begging. That's how they can survive is just by the good graces of somebody else having mercy on them. But the term had taken on a more figurative meaning, and it broadened the definition a bit.

The word *ptōchōs* could also be used to speak about someone in a pejorative way, a negative way. Kind of an insult, kinda with a social stigma, to it, attached to it, especially in an agricultural community where hard work is valued, where hard physical labor generated productivity and that meant income and food and provision. Someone who's *ptōchōs*, they could be viewed as somebody who's in that condition because they're either under God's judgment or maybe because they're foolish people, drunks and gluttons who don't want to work. Maybe they're just lazy and indolent.

So there's a negative connotation to this. Some people were very critical of *ptōchōs* like we can sometimes be when we see people holding signs by freeway off-ramps, able-bodied people, seem like they could go out and work a job but they're asking for your money. We believe them to be indolent, lazy, pan-handling. Same kind of an attitude here.

The term could also have an even wider connotation than that. One commentator, Joel Green, writes, "In that culture, one's status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities but depended on a number of elements, including education, gender, family heritage, religious purity, vocation, economic, so on."

Poor would serve as a cypher or code for those of low status. Status is a matter of our own judgment, isn't it? Status is inherited. Status is imbued upon somebody, given to somebody. But it's not a real measure, is it, of a person's worth? It's a matter of judgment. And for those who are *ptōchōs*, humble sinners, they are going to readily acknowledge their low status. They're going to acknowledge and think, not just before God, but



before their fellow men, they're going to acknowledge, You know what, spiritually speaking, I am *ptōchōs*. I am of low status. I am a beggar before God. I have nothing to bring to him.

Proud sinners take exception with any insult to their status. Proud sinners like to think highly of themselves. They don't like an insult to their status at all; any kind of non-acknowledgement of their status is cause for insult. Any diminishment of their social standing, their sense of honor, their self-worth, their dignity before men to admit a lower status than anyone else. Well, there'd better be a good reason, right? I mean, after all, Don't you know who I am?

Listen, it is not the case with those who know their spiritual poverty, for people who have self-examined and know their sin; they're not commending, theirselves, themselves to anybody. They know themselves to be of low status before God because of their sin. They are the lowly, those whom Mary identified as being of humble estate. They're the ones, as Zechariah pointed out, that are looking for forgiveness of their

sins. They're humble before God, they're meek before men, not proud. Not proud.

For them, the Gospel comes as welcome news. It comes as really, really good news, because they know they're low, they know they're nothing, they know they are beggars, and here comes this Gospel, the proclamation of grace. So these people are the repenters; they listened to John's prophetic ministry. They came forward at his baptism. They're the ones who, are, had been readied by John, by the Spirit of God, to receive Jesus' ministry, his Gospel ministry for the *ptōchōs*, for the lowly, this condition of abject spiritual poverty.

The second reason for the Spirit of God resting upon Jesus, first, "He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor," and then second, he starts to unpack a little bit more what the poor look like. Verse 18, "He has sent me." He has sent me. That's the verb *apōstēllō*, from which we get the noun apostle. This carries forward this commission idea, adds the idea of delegated authority.

Jesus is here as one sent by God, *apōstēllō*. He is the special envoy of God. There are three infinitives that follow that verb, showing purpose for which God sent Jesus, the purpose of his anointing by the Spirit. There's a three-fold purpose here. And each purpose is a further unveiling of God's grace in saving his people from their sins.

Look at purpose number one. God sent the Messiah "to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind." Liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind. When Isaiah originally wrote this, the Babylonian captivity was fresh on Israel's mind. Luke has given us this text in the Septuagint, that's the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scripture. But the original phraseology in the Hebrew text says, "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and opening of the prison to those who are bound."

And now we read here, "recovery of sight to the blind." Why do we see a discrepancy there? What's the difference? The difference comes, really, just from the translation of a Hebrew phrase that could go either way. It's the phrase, *p'koch koach*.

I'm not going to say that a lot. But it refers to the opening of the eyes, as in after an extended imprisonment in a deep, dark, dense dungeon. This is a graphic picture here of the effects of sin; imprisonment in the deepest, darkest depths renders people practically blind, unable to see.

And that's what Israel's captivity had done to this nation. It was the result of persistent, unrepentant sin. The growing darkness had become a state of spiritual blindness for the entire nation. It was as real and dreadful as being bound in chains, rotting in a dungeon, blind in the darkness where you can't see your hand in front of your face. And pretty soon your eyes just become accustomed to that. The spiritual significance of the metaphor is this: Sinners are in a state of spiritual captivity where darkness is so deep, so dense, so oppressive that blindness becomes the state of being.

They have no hope of rescue. They have no hope of seeing again, of walking free except someone remember them there rotting in the dungeon and someone come to their aid, unshackle them and set them free. Folks, that's what God sent the Messiah

to do for you and me, to proclaim that kind of freedom, to unshackle us.

Purpose number two: God sent the Messiah to set at liberty those who are oppressed. It sounds like the same thing, right? But it's not. This is the portion that comes from Isaiah 58:6. And this, this is coming in a context of rebuke against the way Israel had been conducting its fasts. The fasts were to be a day of humbling before God. But the verse says, in contrast to their opulent fasts and, and wrong-headed and spiritually insincere fasts, the verse says in Isaiah 58:6, "Is this not the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

You know what that's pointing back to? That's pointing back to Leviticus 25, which is a passage that commanded Israel to celebrate every 50 years what was called the Year of Jubilee. And that was to be a year of releasing people from their debts and their burdens. Releasing people from their financial

obligations, social obligations. Setting them up to start over again and enjoy the prosperity, the bounty of the Lord.

It's to be a gracious time, a merciful time, a time to let the oppressed go free. The freedom from economic hardship, from debts that could never be repaid. That pictured what Jesus came to do. He proclaimed liberty to free people from the burden of debts that can never be repaid.

Beloved, this again is us. Sinners owe an eternal debt to God because all our iniquities are sins against an eternal person. Eternal person, eternal debt, eternal consequences, nothing we can do can repay the debt. That's why any system that teaches you to build up your good deeds to outdo your bad deeds is completely corrupt because it diminishes God and it elevates man.

Look, we, we are indebted in an eternal debt that we can never repay. Nothing we can do can repay it. That's why the Gospel comes as such good news. God sent Jesus to set sinners

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free from the eternal, unpayable debts that they owe to God. For us, it's a continual Year of Jubilee.

The third part of the three-fold purpose for which God sent the Messiah, this brings us to Luke 4:19. It's the final word that Jesus read from Isaiah 61:2. God sent the Messiah to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord; "the year of the Lord's favor." Full verse, as you may know, in Isaiah 61:2, we read it earlier, shows a contrast in time, right? So you've got "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn."

So there's the year of the Lord's favor, that's a longer period, right, than the day of God's vengeance. That's not talking just about the strength, the wideness, the depth, the profundity, the breadth of God's mercy, though it is. It's also talking about the harshness of his wrath. All that wrath stored up, expended in a single day. But Jesus didn't read that part, did he? He stopped mid-verse. He didn't read the portion about the Day of Recompense. He was there at this time, in this advent

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and that year of the Lord's favor had just begun.

Now, notice the emphasis in verse 4:18 on preaching. Notice the continual emphasis on preaching. Why was the Spirit of the Lord upon him? To preach the Gospel. As we said, that's the verb evangelize. Evangelism was originally cast in terms of preaching, in terms of proclamation. Not sharing, by the way, preaching. There are also two uses of the verb, *kērussō*. *Kērussō* is a very common, strong word refers to preaching, translated here in the ESV as proclaim.

So the Spirit was upon Jesus to empower him and to draw attention to his preaching. That's why the Spirit was upon Jesus in power and I might add, miracle-working power. He had miracles that validated his message, miracles that validated him as God's messenger, miracles that pointed people to the truth of the message he preached.

Spirit of the Lord was upon him because he had, God had anointed him to preach the Gospel. God had sent him to proclaim



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liberty, to free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That is the point of the miracles to direct people to the content of Jesus' ministry of preaching and proclamation. It's about the truth. It's about the written and revealed Word of God.

And, beloved, this is where our charismatic, Pentecostal friends are misguided, terribly misguided. The sign, in and of itself, is nothing. The sign, it only has significance because of what it signifies because of what it points to. All those who are caught up in signs and wonders they're really missing the whole point and the point is so beautiful. We tend to see the missing the point as misguided, and it is.

We even tend to be forgiving about it, quite understanding about it because, after all, we could be caught up in the same thing, to put our attention on the dramatic sign rather than what it signifies, what it, rather what it pointed to. But you know what, God doesn't see it that way. He doesn't just forgive it. He clearly intended the miracles to point people to the

preaching. And that's why to ignore the preaching and seek the miracles instead is to put God to the test.

The focus on signs and wonders is exactly what Jesus rebuked Israel for doing. He said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign." Sadly, folks, it all started right here in his own hometown, gathering at the synagogue among Jesus' childhood congregation in Nazareth. Like the rest of Israel, they wanted miracles, they wanted signs and wonders. "What you did at Capernaum, do here as well."

What they missed was the true light that was shining right in front of them. Isaiah 9:2, "The people who walked in darkness," that's them, "they've have seen a great light." The people indwelling in a land of deep darkness, then the light has shone. The light shining brightly in Nazareth that day, brilliant like a, like a strobe, like a lighthouse, called them all to the light to see that there's Gospel, good news, for the poor, there's liberty for the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, there's freedom for the oppressed, this is the favorable year of the Lord.

So, did they see the light? Well, after reading from the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus rolled up the scroll. After all, by the way, he's not giving any of the explanation I've done. He's just read it, at this point. He rolled up the scroll. He gave it back to the attendant, and he sat down. While everyone in the synagogue waited for the attendant to place the scroll carefully, honoring it, putting it back in its chest, verse 20 says, "the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed upon him."

They're staring intently at him. They're not wanting to take their eyes off him for a moment, lest they miss something. Tension is building here while they wait to see what's going to happen next and Jesus, as he opened his explanation from the text, he opened it with a simple, straightforward, by the way, absolutely shocking statement.

This is the third point in the outline: The statement, the statement. Look at verse 21, "He began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" Listen,

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when you get the gravity of what he just said, that is an utterly stunning statement of fulfillment. Just to show you what I mean, just to get the full significance, look back at verse 18 and notice this repeated use of the first-person pronoun. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon," whom? "Me. Because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives."

Look, who's at the very center of that passage from Isaiah? It's not the prophet Isaiah. It's some other voice. It's not some other unnamed, indeterminate prophet of the future. This anointed one is none other than Messiah himself. Because after all the word *ha'mâshach* refers to anointing. It's the anointed one and now, here he is. Jesus points to the voice recorded in Isaiah's prophecy and he says, that's me. That took the air out of the room.

By the Spirit, Isaiah looked ahead to this very moment and, also by the Spirit, Jesus was looking back to Isaiah's prophecy. A little time warp thing is going on here, as the past has met the future in the present, right? Or, if that sounds too

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complicated, just stick with what Jesus said, "Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." This is the beginning of the year of the Lord's favor, and Jesus came here to announce, the Messianic program is now underway. It's kicking off.

So as I said, they asked the question, but how did they receive the news? The next verse seems to indicate they received his words very well, right? Verse 22, "All spoke well of him, marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth." But sadly as we know, we've read the whole account, this initial reception hid an unbelieving heart. Rather than see him for who he really is, as the Messiah of God, they couldn't stop seeing him as Joseph's son.

They weren't getting it. It's not necessarily that that's an insult to call him Joseph's son, it's just what they thought was the most important fact. But they're making a grave error about Jesus' true identity. They're not listening. And notice what it says there, the contrast, the eyes of all were fixed

upon him, and Jesus says this is fulfilled in your what?  
Hearing.

He gets the attention off of the eyes, off of the visual, and puts it on what can be heard. Jesus says, Are you listening? Are you listening? He had told them clearly, but they were not listening. And the reason is that their hearts were not right. Condition of their hearts, it does become readily apparent as we keep reading, but we can also see a subtle and yet very clear indication of their heart condition in what we've already read. It's clear in what Jesus read, yes, but it's also clear in what he didn't read from Isaiah 61.

When Jesus read the passage in the synagogue that day, he read from the Hebrew text. He unrolled a Hebrew, a scroll of Hebrew writing. What Luke has provided in his Gospel for us, the readers who are reading it, it's the same thing that Jesus read, but it's from the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. And when Luke puts it in here, this Greek translation, and when Jesus read it, both Jesus and Luke omitted a clause from Isaiah 61:1.

And it's fascinating to see what Jesus did not read to the congregation in Nazareth. Here's the phrase, "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted." In fact, listen to the whole quotation from the Hebrew of Isaiah 61:1 and 2, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." Here it is, "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted," and then, "to proclaim liberty to the captive, the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance," of our Lord, "of our God, to comfort all who mourn."

Jesus omitted the part about binding up broken-hearted sinners and he ended the reading in the middle of the verse before, of the day of the Lords' vengeance. Why? He read the rest of the text, so why omit these two portions? Because, quite simply, those portions didn't apply to those people. The condition of poor, captive, imprisoned, blinded, oppressed or bound, those descriptions are facts.

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Those descriptions are true of all fallen sinners no matter what they think about themselves, whether they know it or not, whether they realize it or not, whether they acknowledge it or not. All of that just described their true state of being. The omitted sections, though, the sections he didn't quote, the part of the text that refers to broken-heartedness, that, that refers to mourning.

Those sections describe people who have come to recognize their condition and acknowledge that they are, indeed, poor, in prison, blind, and oppressed. These people did not realize that yet. They weren't broken-hearted over their sin. They didn't mourn. They were like the Laodiceans that Jesus rebuked later on for the same mind set, by the way, Revelation 3:17; it sounds like the same language, "For you say 'I am rich and I have prospered and I need nothing,' not realizing," Jesus said, "that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked."

People of Nazareth, like many people in our own day, many, by the way, beloved, religious people, church-going people, good friends and neighbors and relatives of yours and mine. They're



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in the same condition. They are all also wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked. But you know what? They don't see it because they won't see it. They won't admit it. And so, they have cut themselves off from the promise.

This word broken-hearted is very graphic. It's the word *shâbar*, broken, and it's connected, joined together with the word for heart, *lêb*. It's the, it's a verb stem here, which is the passive voice, and so it means to, to be broken-hearted, that broken-heartedness has come upon me. It's to be broken, to be shattered, to be crushed; it's for those people, that they will be healed; it's for those people, that they will be comforted.

Listen, no one finds salvation who doesn't realize that they're lost. Coming to Christ means that you come broken-hearted over your sin. It means that you become, you come mourning over your pitiable, wretched condition. And that's why Jesus said, right in the Beatitudes, early on, he said, "Blessed are those who mourn," right, "for they shall be comforted."

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Those who mourn, the broken-hearted, they mourn, because they're *ptōchōs*, they're spiritual paupers, they're beggars. They have no claim on divine grace at all. They mourn, they're broken-hearted because they recognize their enslavement to sin. They recognize their spiritual captivity and blindness in the dungeons of sin. They're broken-hearted because they, they know that they're weighed down with a debt that they can never repay. And they have no hope that anybody from the outside will ever see them there, ever set them free. So they mourn.

The broken-hearted find no hope in themselves, so they look for all they can look for, mercy. They longingly plead for help that comes from outside of themselves. They look for someone else to save them. Someone else to set them free. Someone else to heal them and comfort them. Those who mourn, the broken-hearted ones, they are the ones, and, by the way, they alone, they're the ones whom God will heal, whom God will comfort.

A lot of people that come to the church for counseling, and they, they want something fixed. I mean, we all want something fixed; we all want to grow. But some people come and they

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receive counsel from the Word of God, they receive, and many of you have done this, you have counseled people, you've given them the Word, you've given them solid principles, and intellectually they understand everything you're saying, they even assent to it, they agree with it. But you know what? Their hearts aren't truly broken. That's something you and I can't see on the outside. Only God knows. Their hearts aren't broken.

Only a broken heart can be healed of its broken-heartedness and Jesus omitted this part from Isaiah 61 because these people in front of him were unwilling to examine themselves in the light of God's Law. They were, unlay, unwilling to lay themselves out before the sterile light of the examination room that would shine all the light on all the darkness in them. They didn't want to come humbly to Christ, to bow before his holiness, to admit that they're poor, in prison, blind and oppressed.

Nazareth was not ready. In fact, all of Israel wasn't ready for the extension of this promise. Not yet. The people, they still need to learn to be broken-hearted over their sin, to

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mourn over their spiritual condition, to look upon him whom they have pierced and to mourn and to long for his salvation. I'm so grateful to know, because it's written in the Word of God, that that will happen to the people of Israel one day. I pray that God would speed that repentance.

What about you? What about you? Would you come to the sterile light of God's truth and let yourself be examined? Will you let God flay you open by his Word, by that sharp, penetrating sword, and open up your life and let his Word do its healing work?

For the time being, Jesus intended to confront his friends and neighbors in Nazareth to expose their true condition and need for his salvation. He knew that they were not broken-hearted and they were not mourners. He knew they were not repenters. And, you know what, if he didn't love them, he would have let it go at that. He would have walked away. But he wants to extend grace, and by extending grace he wants to show them love, and by showing love he's going to press forward and draw them to a verdict. The hardest substance on earth it's not some

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steel alloy; it's not some diamond. The hardest substance on earth is a proud, unrepentant heart.