

6th February 2022

“Jesus’ Mission statement”

Luke 4:14-21

Luke has just revealed to us that Jesus was in fact righteous. It was DECLARED at His baptism Chapter 3, and it was DEMONSTRATED during His temptation in Chapter 4. Jesus is the righteous and holy Son of God, and the only one capable of imputing righteousness to us. Now our scripture this morning Jesus is beginning His ministry, and it is absolutely nothing short of Him offering that righteousness to the world.

Luke gives us a SNAPSHOT of that, right off the bat.

v14-15 *“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised Him.”*

Many of these Galileans had been recently at a feast in Jerusalem and had seen Jesus clean out the temple and challenge the Pharisees, these Galileans in his home town of Nazareth were primed and pumped to welcome Jesus in. So, Jesus’ ministry in Galilee can be categorized by 3 things. POWER – PREACHING – POPULARITY He really did return “in the power of the Spirit”

This implies the power we enjoy of the Spirit in things like boldness and sanctification and love and spiritual gifts. But for Jesus it was even more, God had allotted for Him to work miracles through the power of the Spirit. These miracles were for the purpose of validating His message.

v15 *“And He began teaching in their synagogues”*. You don’t find synagogues in the Old Testament; they began as a result of the Babylonian captivity when God’s people had no access to the temple. After the exile, the idea stuck so that Jews would have a place to gather and worship God together. If there were at least 10 men a synagogue could start. They had no official preacher, just a synagogue ruler and a man in charge of keeping the texts of Scripture. Any visiting teacher could come to the synagogue, and with the ruler’s permission could speak.

You’ll remember the apostle Paul used this liberty many times. That is what Jesus is doing here. He is traveling from village to village, entering synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. And His preaching, coupled with His power, culminated in extreme popularity all throughout Galilee. v14b *“and news about Him spread through the whole countryside.”* v15 *“Everyone praised Him.”* So, we now understand sort of the culture. Jesus’ frenzy is at an all-time high. He is the hottest ticket in town.

Jesus returns to the Nazareth synagogue; He is asked to read the lesson from the prophets. There is no book to flip through. Instead, a bulky scroll of the prophet Isaiah is handed to him, in a voice strong with anticipation, he reads aloud these words:

“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 to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Finished with these few verses, Jesus rolls up the scroll, returns it to the attendant, and takes his seat.

It is the custom for teachers to sit, rather than to stand, so when Jesus sits, everyone looks at him, expecting some commentary, some explanation of this text, a text well known to many of them.

There are no professional clergy. The synagogue president can invite any appropriate person to comment on the text. Often these remarks are less than inspiring. While the people are biblically literate, commentary on scripture by local folks is often no more than rote recitation of lessons all of them learned at an early age. So, the congregation usually knows what will be said before it is said, and the only question is whether it will be said correctly or not.

Not so today, when Jesus sits down. The people are all looking at him. He looks around at them, those familiar faces from his early years, older in appearance than before: his childhood friends, now present with their children; the parents of his friends, now senior citizens.

He begins a sentence that remains fresh and provocative down to our own time. Jesus sets free the scripture passage he has just read; he lets the lion out of its cage; he overthrows the ho-hum expectations of the people around him. Here is what he says:

“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Jesus does the unexpected, the unimaginable, on that memorable sabbath morning in Nazareth. In today’s jargon, he claims for himself the ancient prophetic words as his own mission statement. The reason God’s Spirit came crashing down on him at his baptism was to empower him to do precisely this: bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, let the oppressed go free, proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, the sweet Jubilee Year, when the economy will be conformed anew to God’s justice.

Jesus takes all this as his mission statement, and is not content to leave it as only a string of high-sounding words. Everything that follows in his life, as presented to us in the Gospel, amounts to the living out of the prophecy he claims for himself that sabbath morning in Nazareth.

He keeps doing these things every chance he gets, every time he turns around, until finally it kills him. For some welcome what Jesus does, but others do not, because it upsets their unfair advantage, questions their complacency, and pushes them to recognize their habitual infidelity to God.

They find their discomfort increasingly intolerable, and think that his judicial murder will bring an end to the matter. They are wrong, of course. Jesus rises alive from the dead, and continues today to do what he talked about that sabbath morning long ago.

Now the way he works is through His body, the Church. Through each of us, and all who are baptized into His body, Jesus strives still to live out his mission statement, bringing good news to those who don’t have any, setting free those chained in captivity, opening blind eyes, helping the oppressed and exploited find a life, and unrolling the floor plan that sets out God’s reign where justice and peace prevail.

Jesus still does these things, because his Church does them. The poor gain hope, whether it’s their souls or their bodies that are starved. The captives experience freedom, whether they are prisoners in a jail or prisoners in a mansion. The blind receive sight, whether it’s cataract surgery at a hospital, or the scales of prejudice falling off the eyes of a zealot. The oppressed are set free, whether oppression is a political regime or a chemical dependence. When Jesus reads that passage in the Nazareth synagogue, he announces a mission statement for himself and for His body the Church.

Citizens: All of us are citizens of this world. Unfortunately, in this world millions of people suffer. They experience the devastation of war, the sorrows of oppression, the decimation of disease, the slow death of starvation, and the indignity of poverty. Beyond the physical conditions, millions of people live in spiritual darkness. They are crushed by a load of sin and habits that torment them. The light of truth has not yet dawned in their lives.

The Battle: While we are in this world, a battle rages for our spiritual allegiance. On the one hand, Satan and his allies vie for our attention and loyalty. On the other hand the body of Christ, led by our Lord, reaches out with love to all of us. The members of the body want others to be included. Through accepting Christ, we can become members of the Kingdom of God.

Broadly Speaking: Jesus was concerned about the Kingdom of God and our membership in it. According to Mark He already had declared, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”* Mark 1:15

The Kingdom of God arrived, in some sense, in the presence of Jesus on earth. Jesus said, *“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* The full power and presence of the Kingdom of God will not be realized until Jesus comes back. However, by the power of the Spirit, the influence and presence of the Kingdom of God is made known in our lives now.

1. Proclaim the Gospel to the poor

Jesus is deeply concerned about poor people. Here, Jesus means those who are impoverished economically. Does this mean that He is not concerned about the wealthy or the common people who are not poor? No, it does not. He just did not have to express that concern here. His audience would have understood that a leader would be concerned about those who are better off. By focusing on the most needy, He includes all who have needs. Thus, He begins by expressing concern for those who were despised by others. It would not be politically correct to speak against the poor today. Yet the actions of some people signal their contempt for them. If they only worked as hard as we do, they say, they would not be poor. Even the uneasiness felt when confronted by the homeless is a powerful silent testimony to a wrong attitude.

Application: Where are you at today? Are you struggling to make ends meet? Then Jesus speaks directly and simply to you. He wants you to believe and enjoy the benefits of salvation. Are you wealthy? Jesus loves you as well. Being His disciple is demanding. Your allegiance to Him must be stronger than to your possessions. But the spiritual benefits are abundant.

2. Proclaim freedom for the prisoners

Jesus is concerned about captives. According to Robertson, the captives are those who have been captured at spear point. We can think of them as prisoners of war.

During His days on earth, Jesus was concerned primarily with those who were enslaved by Satan. They were prisoners of Satan in a spiritual war. Millions of people today are Satan's captives. They are under his influence. They may be captives of habits, attitudes, and lifestyles that they cannot control.

The captives, however, are not limited to people who are in spiritual darkness. Some believers are captives of oppressive forces. This, too, is a form of enslavement by Satan, for the oppressors are the servants of Satan. Some researchers estimate that there are more persecuted Christians today than ever before in the history of the church.

Application: What is your condition today? Are you enslaved by habits, by thoughts that you cannot control, by circumstances that overpower you?

The Internet can be a powerful force for good. Unfortunately, evil messages can be as quickly distributed. We sometimes receive evil invitations via email. We must ask the Lord to guard us and keep us from evil. Some Internet users will be trapped and enslaved by this. We must be on our guard at all times.

3. Proclaim recovery of sight to the blind

Jesus is concerned about blind people. The primary reference no doubt was to people who were physically blind. However, we cannot overlook the spiritually blind. When you sit and listen to the commentators of the world, the talk shows, you know that millions are spiritually blind. They have no idea of spiritual truth. The eyes of their souls cannot see. They live in darkness. However, tens of thousands of people who have been spiritually blind are being set free. Jesus opens their eyes. Do you have some doubts or scepticism? Have you closed your eyes to the truth? Do you feel a need for someone outside of you to help you see? Cry out to Jesus. He is here to minister to you!

Application: Today, Christ is present to heal. The recovery of sight simply meant that the person who was blind could now see. While we seldom see people healed of physical blindness now, it does happen. Moreover, tens of thousands of people who have been spiritually blind are being set free. Jesus opens their eyes.

4. Set free the oppressed

Jesus is concerned about the oppressed/downtrodden. Who are they? They are the ones who have been bruised by life. The Greek verb means to break into pieces. The bruising can be both in body and in spirit.

Many are broken and crushed spiritually and physically. Here, Jesus refers primarily to being downtrodden and bruised by others. We are broken by their oppression and, in a sense, are enslaved by them. What they have done to us captures us and our attention. We must be set free from the oppression and the oppressors.

Application: How many times have you felt downtrodden and broken? The circumstances of life have taken their toll. You don't know whether or not you can get up and go again. Just remember that Jesus identifies with you in every moment of brokenness. He understands.

CONCLUSION

Favourable Year v19 will provide our conclusion. Jesus was anointed to "*proclaim the favourable year of the Lord.*" It may be that Lev. 25:8-13 provides the Old Testament precedent for what Jesus would do. In Old Testament times, every fiftieth year was a year of jubilee. A trumpet was blown. Throughout the whole land, the liberty of Hebrew slaves, the cancelling of debts, and the restoration of possession to their original owners was proclaimed. No doubt this was a favourable year of the Lord.

Whether or not the fiftieth year is meant, the phrase "the acceptable year" means the time when it would be acceptable to God to proclaim such a message of deliverance. The gospel assures us that now is the time when men may come to God, be delivered from their sins, and be redeemed.

The good news is that we are still in the "favourable year" of the Lord. Jesus is still fulfilling His mission. He has anointed us with the Spirit to bring the message of good news to you. Now, we are helping fulfill the mission of Christ.

The good news is for you now. The gospel is being preached to the poor, the captives are being set free, the blind are seeing, and the downtrodden are set at liberty. Will you believe and receive? Prayer: