



Luke 4:16–21

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favour.'

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 He began by saying to them, 'To-
day this scripture is fulfilled in your
hearing.'

Reflection

Earlier this year the Christian world mourned the loss of the modern era's greatest evangelist, Billy Graham. Billy Graham

preached the Gospel live to 215 million people – no person in the history of the world has spoken live to so many people and, given the rate of technological advancement, it is unlikely that this number will ever be matched. When we add in television and radio the figure is more than 2.2 billion. From his live audiences alone, 3.2 million people responded to the Gospel message and gave their lives to Jesus. These words, spoken by Billy Graham himself, I think capture the essence of the man.

‘Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.’

In the same way, Jesus' words in today's passage capture the essence of his character and mission. Let me read them to you from Luke 4:16–21,

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In Luke's biographical account of the life of Jesus he rushes to this scene. Matthew and Mark spend more time in Judea, in the wake of John the Baptist's ministry down south, but for Luke, after Jesus' testing in the wilderness by Satan, this episode provides the perfect entrance point into the

character and mission of Jesus Christ. As Jesus preaches from the book of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue, this event for Luke announces who Jesus is, what he's come to do, who his church will be and how they will follow him, and what the response to both Jesus and the church will be. And so today, three points, 1) Who is Jesus? 2) What has he come to do? and 3) What is the identity and mission of his church? We'll leave what the response to both Jesus and his church will be until tomorrow.

So firstly, who is Jesus? And again today, Luke reminds us that Jesus is Jewish. His faithfulness affirms the Sabbath, the Scriptures and the synagogue. Verse 16,

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synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him.

Who is Jesus? Jesus is Jewish and he is also the Messiah.

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'Today, in your hearing, these words are fulfilled in me.' Who is Jesus? He's the Messiah, the one the prophet Isaiah spoke about some eight hundred years beforehand in his servant songs, his songs of a suffering servant who would one day lay down his life for the sins of the world only to take it up again and bring renewal to our planet and eternal life to the people of God drawn from every nation on earth. Jesus is this suffering servant, the Messi-

ah, anointed by the Holy Spirit of God, to proclaim the good news of the Gospel in 'the year of the Lord's favour', a unique season of grace and unmerited kindness before the universal judgment of all humankind. That is who Jesus is.

Secondly, what has Jesus come to do? Jesus has come to bring good news and deliverance to the outcast and to the oppressed. Jesus mentions four categories of people: the poor, prisoners, the blind and the oppressed; those who live on the margins of society, yes; but as we think through the categories and reflect over the ministry of Jesus at a deeper spiritual level these categories powerfully portray all people. Jesus cared for the physically poor and he healed the physically blind, but when we consider that he did not free

prisoners but instead became one that we might be set free, we understand that these are just as much spiritual categories as they are societal ones. What did Jesus come to do? He came to preach the Gospel to those poor enough in spirit to receive it. He came to give sight to the spiritually blind. He came to free a world held prisoner to Satan, sin and death and bring about cultural renewal and change so that those oppressed, pressed down, and depressed in a hopeless world might find hope, freedom and new life in him.

Who is Jesus? He's the Messiah, God's long promised Spirit anointed king. What he's come to do? He's come to bring good news and deliverance to all of humankind. And finally, what about his church? Who will they be and what will they do? And

the answer is that the same Spirit who anointed Jesus now lives in the hearts of every member of his church. By the power of the Holy Spirit Jesus' church continues his mission here on earth. John tells us that Jesus returned to heaven and sent his Spirit to us so that we can go on together to achieve even greater things (in total) than Jesus did in his three years of public ministry. Who is the church? We are the spiritually poor become rich. We are the formerly blind who now see. We are prisoners to Satan, sin and death now running joyfully free. Once we were oppressed, and many of us still are, but our eyes have been raised far higher than our suffering and difficulties to where Jesus now sits at the right hand of God in heaven and where eternity beckons. Our light and momentary troubles are far out-

weighed by the glory that awaits us, but right now, even amidst them, just like Jesus did we are to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour – this precious season of grace, mercy and forgiveness before the coming judgment that awaits us all.

Think

The first word that Luke records from the adult Jesus after reading Scripture is 'today'. 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' That day extends into our day. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor 6:2). Consider today the character and mission of Jesus Christ and the character and mission of his church. Jesus came to bring the good news of salvation to the outcasts and to the op-

pressed and he would have us follow in his footsteps. Are you following him in this? Do your words and your actions proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Does the grace and mercy and forgiveness that you've received in this 'year of the Lord's favour' characterise your interactions with others? Do you live loosely to our world, do you see through our culture as one once blind who now sees clearly, are you free of sinful entanglements and rejoicing in the sure and certain hope of eternity and all that it brings to the present?

Pray

Pray that it would be so this morning. And if not, if you're really struggling in this moment, pray that the Spirit of the Lord would be ever increasingly upon you, filling you

with the joy of our salvation, and enabling you to carry on Jesus' mission here on earth.