



Luke 4:14–19

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 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.'

Reflection

Only twice in Scripture do we see an encounter between Satan and a human being. At the beginning and at the new beginning. Right at the beginning, in Genesis 3 Satan tempted Adam and through him our world was broken. In Luke 4 Satan tempts

Jesus and through him our world is being remade. And the first act of Jesus' public ministry was to begin to set right what was broken at the Fall. Instead of going out to do battle with Caesar Augustus, the first act of Israel's Messiah (God's Spirit anointed king), was to go out and do battle with the real prince of this world, Satan. And where Adam failed, the second Adam did not fail. And so we have a new beginning. Through the ministry of Jesus, sin's curse will be lifted and our whole world renewed and made right again by the power of Spirit, one person at a time.

After his time of testing in the wilderness, today's passage continues, Luke 4:14–19,

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Jesus' star is rising. He's left the Judean countryside as persecution begins to heat up against John the Baptist and his message. Jesus has travelled north, he's returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit who continues to direct and empower his ministry, and news about him has spread throughout the whole countryside. His teaching and his miracles precede him. He's become an in-demand preacher. Everyone is praising his person and his preaching and yet Luke barely gives Jesus' popularity two lines. Instead, as the second major event in Jesus' public ministry Luke turns to what happened in Jesus' hometown, the place where he grew up, the backwater town of Nazareth. In John's Gospel, Nathaniel famously exclaims, 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from

there?’ (John 1:46). And over the coming couple of days we’ll learn some more about the people of Nazareth. But for today, we read from verse 16,

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We read in the ancient Jewish text the *Mishnah*, the typical format of synagogue worship in Jesus’ day. The service began with singing Psalms 145–150 which was followed by a recitation of the *Shema*, which begins ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one’ (Deut 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num 15:37–41). Next, the Eighteen Bene-

dictions, known as the *Tefillah*, were also recited aloud, one after the other. Then came the reading of Scripture. An officer went to the holy ark, took out the Torah scroll (the Jewish word for the first five books of the Bible), removed its cloth covering, opening it to its designated place, and placed it on the table where it was read by various attenders. The Torah was then returned to the ark, and a portion from the prophets, the *Haftarah*, was read. This was followed by a sermon. The service then concluded with the Aaronic benediction, the people saying ‘Amen’ at each of its divisions: ‘The Lord bless you and keep you’ (‘Amen’), ‘The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you’ (‘Amen’), ‘The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace’ (‘Amen’) (cf. Numbers 6:24–26).¹

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Preaching the word; Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015), 144–45.

Today in the small synagogue of Nazareth the air hangs heavy with expectation. Jesus, the celebrity preacher and miracle worker, has returned to his hometown and has been invited to speak. Very likely, before the service Jesus had been asked by the synagogue president to read the *Haftarah*, to read from the prophets, and had asked for the scroll of Isaiah to be brought to him. Verse 17,

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And so the second major event of Jesus' public ministry after being anointed by the Holy Spirit for the task, and duelling with Satan in the desert, is to preach God's word to God's people in his hometown. Where Adam failed and sin and death entered the world through him, the second Adam, Jesus Christ will succeed, our world being renewed and remade by him. And so the subject matter of Jesus' first recorded sermon comes as no surprise. He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the good news (the Gospel), to four classes of people: the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. The one who will lift

sin's curse off our broken world addresses the good news of the year of the Lord's favour to those who feel most heavily the effects of sin's curse: the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. And yet in truth Jesus addresses everyone through these terms. In fact, everyone to whom Christ has come and whom he will save are portrayed in these terms. Because it is impossible to be saved unless one realises their spiritual poverty, Matthew 5:3, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God'. Similarly the term 'captives' in the Greek technically means 'prisoners of war'. When Adam sinned, we were taken in battle, and became slaves to Satan, sin and death. The good news is that our Saviour has come and he begins by proclaiming the good news of salvation to captives of the prince of this world,

to Satan's captives. And to the spiritually blind – the recovery of sight is at hand! And to the oppressed, those pressed down, those depressed by the worries and fears of our broken world – hope is here, salvation is here, renewal is here in him.

Think

Pause this morning to think through each of the categories and the ongoing work of Jesus' Christ in our world amongst the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. Think deeply about the spiritual poverty, slavery to sin, spiritual blindness and the cultural oppression that marks even the best societies of our world. These are sober and confronting topics. Our world suffers from the sickness of sin. Sin's taint mars everything. And the con-

dition is terminal outside of Jesus. But Jesus came to proclaim the year, a season, a precious window of the Lord's favour. A season of mercy, a season of grace, a season of forgiveness before final judgment and the renewal of all.

Pray

Pray this morning for our world. Pray for the ongoing work of Jesus Christ, the renewal of individual lives, families, and cultures that the Gospel brings. Pray for the ever-growing kingdom and family of God. Pray for the spiritually poor, the spiritually blind, those unknowingly enslaved to sin, and who are being oppressed, pressed down, depressed in our world without hope. And pray also for the marginalised – the poor, the captive, the disabled, the

oppressed – that God’s mercy and grace would reach them through our good works and that through our generosity and love they might come to know the love and salvation of God.