

Today this Scripture is Fulfilled

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Date: 02 February 2020

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[0 : 00] Welcome again. If you're just joining us, my name's Tommy. I'm a pastor here. This is normally a time in our service when we turn our attention to God's word and somebody comes up here to preach, to help us understand what the word says, what it means, and what it means for us personally.

Wouldn't it be wild if at this point in the service, Jesus came up to preach? If it was Jesus himself and he came up here and he opened the Bible and he read from the scripture and then he began to preach.

I think I'm probably not alone in thinking I would long for such a thing to happen. I've long wondered what that would be like ever since the first time I read this passage.

And a lot of people have said to me over the years, you know, I'm not a Christian but I'm just not convinced. And I say, well, what would it take to convince you?

And they say, well, if Jesus himself were to appear to me and if I could see him and hear him with my own eyes and ears, then I would believe. And then alongside those people, many Christians have said, you know, I really struggle with doubts and questions and a lot of uncertainty.

[1 : 13] I'm just, everybody believes something different and how do I know that this is the thing? How do I know that this is true? You know, if I could just see Jesus and hear Jesus for myself, then my faith would be stronger. And I felt that way many times when I'm struggling with deep doubt.

So that's our question this morning. Is that true? If you're here and you're not a Christian, if Jesus appeared to you face to face and you could see him and you could hear him and you could touch him, would that be sufficient for you to put your faith in him?

If you're here and you're a Christian, you're struggling with doubt like many of us are. Would that strengthen your faith? To answer these questions, we're going to look at this passage from Luke chapter 4.

Jesus preaches in a synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. And this passage is really important because it shows us something about what you might call the dynamics of faith. Why some people believe and why other people don't.

And this is not Jesus' first sermon ever, we don't believe, but this is the first one that Luke records in his account. And the most interesting thing about this passage is the response that Jesus gets from the crowd.

[2 : 33] People who knew him growing up. And their response kind of progresses through three phases. At first, there's a kind of superficial interest in who Jesus is.

And then their expectations are challenged. And then that brings them to a moment of crisis. So there's a superficial interest. But then there's a challenging of some of their expectations.

And then there's a moment of crisis. And so what we're going to do is we're going to walk through the story to try to understand what's happening here. And then we're going to talk a little bit about how this looks in our own lives. So let's pray.

And then we'll open the gospel together. Lord, we thank you for your word. And we thank you that our hope does not rely on merely the preaching or the thoughts or the insights of pastors and commentators.

But rather, Lord, your promise is that your spirit speaks to us through your word. And so as we sit here this morning, may it be your words that we hear.

[3 : 38] May you be the preacher. May you move us out of the way so that you can say what you need to say to our hearts. We pray this in your son's holy name. Amen. So let's look at the story in a little more detail.

By this point, there's a serious buzz about Jesus. Jesus has been going all through the region over in Capernaum. He's been saying wild, amazing things.

He's been doing wild, amazing miracles. He's been casting out demons. He's been healing people. He's been speaking and teaching with a kind of authority nobody's ever seen. So there's a huge buzz about Jesus.

And it's a big deal when Jesus comes to his hometown of Nazareth. I don't know if you guys ever used to watch American Idol, but at some point after the contestants in American Idol got famous enough, part of the show would be what's called the hometown visit.

Where the idol goes to their hometown and then they would film it and then they would work it into their episodes to kind of heighten the drama. And so there would be parades and they would go into restaurants and there would be the little, you know, the teachers saying, I taught you when you were in first grade and I always knew you'd be a great singer.

[4 : 44] And, you know, it's really sweet. And that's kind of what's happening here. Jesus is a hometown hero. He comes back to Nazareth. Everybody's excited to see him. His custom was to go to the synagogue every week and to worship.

And so as was his custom, he does so again. And he gets there and he stands to read from the scripture. And everybody realizes that Jesus is going to be the preacher.

Because it wasn't always the same person. And they said, Jesus is going to be the preacher this week. And so it says in verse 20, the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And at this point, their interest is fairly superficial.

They've heard about some of the amazing things that he's done and said. And they're here in synagogue and realizing that Jesus is going to preach. Their interest is primarily in the question of whether he's going to do something or say something amazing in their midst.

Probably most people are at this point hoping to see a miracle. But then Jesus does something that's completely unexpected. And many of their underlying assumptions and expectations are deeply challenged as a result.

[5 : 59] Jesus comes up front. He takes the scroll from the attendant. He unrolls it because at this time we don't have Bibles. We just have a long scroll. So you have to roll, roll, roll to the place where Isaiah the prophet is recorded.

And he reads from this place in Isaiah. It comes from Isaiah chapter 61. He reads, the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

You can imagine Jesus up there reading this. Everybody watching him. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who were oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

This is Isaiah 61 with a little bit from Isaiah 58 kind of lumped in. What this may mean is that he read a larger section and Luke is summarizing the core of what he read here.

This passage that Jesus chooses to read is all about God's promise that he made to his people.

That one day he's going to send this divine deliverer. And this deliverer is supposed to usher in this new age of deliverance and renewal.

[7 : 06] It's likened to the Old Testament custom of the Jubilee year. So every 50 years there would be this year where all debts would be nullified. And all slaves would be set free.

And everything would sort of be restored to the way it was originally. And so this passage is about God's chosen deliverer who's going to bring about a kind of ultimate Jubilee for the world.

For his people. And so Jesus reads this passage of all passages. And you need to understand this really intensifies the drama in the room. People are already fixed on him.

And then he reads this. And you can imagine kind of nudging each other like what in the world is he going to say? Because at this time in history the Jews are placing an enormous amount of hope in promises like this.

One day God's going to send a deliverer who's going to do what they believed they most needed. End the Roman occupation. Restore Israel to her former glory.

[8 : 08] That's what they're waiting on. That's what this promise means to them. That's what they most desire in their hearts. And so then Jesus sits down and he begins to preach.

You can imagine he's kind of clearing his throat. Getting ready to talk. And everybody's craning their necks. And they're straining their ears to hear what he's going to say. And Jesus says, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

And you can just imagine this moment of utter shock. And then somebody says what everybody's thinking. You? Is this not Joseph's son?

Aren't you the kid I knew in first grade? Aren't you the kid that I used to see running around in the alleys, the streets, playing with the other kids? You?

In other words, they're saying how could the son of a poor peasant possibly make such lofty claims? What we need, what we're expecting is a great military captain.

[9 : 20] You're a carpenter. What we need, what we're really expecting is a conquering king. You're a commoner. There's this incredulity that rises to the surface.

This deep skepticism. And the point of the passage is this. Jesus is not the kind of savior they want. Because they know exactly who they want.

They can picture the savior that they want in their mind. And Jesus is simply not it. He falls way short of their expectations. But what they don't realize is that even though Jesus is not the kind of savior they want, he is the kind of savior they need.

And that's what this passage is really about. And the next thing that Jesus says shows us why. Why he's the kind of savior we need. And it brings this whole situation to a crisis point.

Because Jesus knows that what they really want is proof. They're like, just stop talking. Do a miracle. Heal his foot. Clear up my psoriasis. You know?

[10 : 27] Fill my bank account with money. If you do that, then we'll believe in you. But just do something amazing. Right? But look what Jesus says instead. First he says in verse 24.

Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. What's he talking about? He's not just talking about Nazareth. When it comes to recognizing divine prophets sent from the Lord, Israel does not have a good track record.

And that's what he's talking about. Right? Pretty bad track record. So why should anyone, here's Jesus' point. Why would anyone believe that they would be able to recognize God's own son if he were to come?

They don't have a very good track record realizing what's true and what's not. And then he goes on to remind them of two events from their past that are kind of sore spots in their collective memory. These are the things, you know, when grandpa's sitting around the fire telling stories of the good old days to the grandchildren, this is not one of the stories they tell. The great prophet Elijah, during a famine in Israel, many are dying.

[11 : 32] There are many widows because people are starving to death. It went on for years. When God sends help, he sends Elijah, but not to them. He sends Elijah to bless a woman in Zarephath.

And then Elijah's successor, Elisha, though many in Israel had leprosy, God doesn't send Elisha to them. God sends Elisha to heal a Syrian named Naaman.

What's the big deal here? Why do they get so upset? They aren't Israelites. There were times of great need in your history when faith was really low and there was an enormous amount of skepticism.

When people were turning away from the Lord in droves. And when God sends help, he doesn't send help to you. He sends help to the Gentiles. The people who, by definition, are not blessed by God.

And what this brings to the surface are these deeply held expectations of what the Messiah should be. Who the Messiah should care about.

[12 : 34] Here's what Jesus is saying. You assume that because you're Israelites descended from Abraham, that you're already in good with God. And you think that your biggest problem is political.

You think that your biggest problem is that the wrong administration is in control of your life. But here's two examples from your own history of times when God chose to show mercy to Gentiles instead of you.

He showed mercy to the wrong people, not the right people. In other words, God doesn't show you mercy because you deserve it. He shows mercy because his eternal nature is to have mercy.

He doesn't love you because you deserve his love. He loves you because he is love. Because that's what he does. He can't not love. That's the reason that Jesus is the kind of Savior that we need rather than the one that we might want.

Because here's the rub. We don't actually know what we need. We don't know what we need. My kids believe they need to stay up all night watching movies.

[13 : 47] My kids last night at our dinner that we had, men's ministry dinner, they believe that they need to light everything that they could find on fire. They believe that all they need to eat is sugar and candy.

That's what they believe they need. And it's my job as their dad who loves them to help them understand that what they think they need is maybe not always what they actually need. Especially in the case of last night and the fire.

And it's the same with us and God. And if I was contractually obligated to fulfill the desires of my children, I don't think they would last a week.

Or a day. Certainly Laura would never go out of town and leave me in charge. So we don't know what we need. And so what we need is the kind of Savior who knows what we need and will give us what we need in spite of what we want.

If that's what it takes. And so when Jesus is saying this, he's forcing the crowd to choose between two Saviors. Do you want the Savior that you want? Or will you choose the Savior that you need?

[14 : 54] This is the moment of crisis. What will they choose? The image that they had in their mind or the reality sitting right in front of them? And of course it says in verse 28, when they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

When you set your heart on what you believe you most need. And Jesus doesn't give it to you. Sometimes we hate him for it. And that's exactly what happens here.

So they drive Jesus out of the synagogue, out of the town, up to the edge of a cliff where they intend to throw him off and kill him. Right? Peter's first sermon at Pentecost, 3,000 convert on the spot.

Jesus' first recorded sermon in Luke, they want to throw him off a cliff. Now that is something worth thinking about. But we don't have time to get into it now. But Jesus is able to mysteriously pass through their midst.

There's the miracle. And he goes away to Capernaum. Right? So here's the progression that I want to look at with you all as we think about our own lives. Right? There's this progression from superficial interest.

[15 : 58] What's he going to do? Something amazing? And then their expectations are challenged. And then that brings them to this crisis where they have to make a very hard choice about what kind of savior they want.

And this is how we grow in our relationship with Jesus. When we go through this cycle, sometimes again and again and again, where we navigate expectations being challenged and having to decide, what kind of savior am I following?

The one that I want or the one that I need? I think everybody starts out coming to Jesus for superficial reasons. Some of us grow up in church and all of our parents and friends, they're all believers and so we just adopt the beliefs.

And it's more about fitting in than what we really believe. Kids are like that. Right? Some of us come to Jesus because, you know, you maybe had some wild years but then you get married, you get a stable job, you get a house, you start having kids and you think we need a little religion in our lives. So you start going to church because you think it will be a good influence on your kids. Right? Some people just, they didn't really have any interest in religion but then they come on hard times. You know, they lose their job or they go through a hard breakup or something happened and they're feeling kind of dark and empty and they're just reaching out for something.

[17 : 09] That will offer comfort. You know, that was my story. I mean, the only reason I was even interested in Jesus in college is because I was pretty depressed and kind of hopeless and going through a really hard time.

And I was just kind of looking for anyone or anything that would be of any comfort. But everybody starts out with a kind of superficial interest in Jesus. And when you're at that place, you have what you might think of as a kind of low resolution snapshot.

It's like a low res snapshot of who we believe Jesus to be. And for a lot of people, that low res image is enough. And there are people who spend their whole lives going to church every week and they never move past that low resolution snapshot.

And they're comfortable with that. But the problem with a low res Jesus is that a low resolution Jesus is so fuzzy and so hard to define. You know, you imagine looking up on the screen, this image is so fuzzy and so pixelated.

You can't really make it out. And so a low resolution image, you can really kind of see whatever you want to see in that kind of fuzzy pixelated kind of, you know, chaos.

[18:17] And so people feel free to redefine that low res Jesus however they want. And so this is why in our society we have so many different definitions of who Jesus is.

You know, you talk to people around town and some people say following Jesus, what that really means is devoting yourself to love and tolerance and inclusion no matter what.

Period. End of sentence. Some people say following Jesus is primarily about moral conformity and holding to the traditional morality that we have been handed from our forefathers. Some people think that all we should be doing is evangelizing the lost.

That's all the church should be focusing on, right? Some people think that evangelism is closed minded and even a form of bigotry. And that what we should really be doing is focusing on social justice and loving those around us.

All of these are low resolution snapshots of Jesus. They all capture part of the truth but it's so pixelated that it's incomplete.

[19:18] We're not seeing it clearly. So you can go your whole life with a low res Jesus. But your growth as a Christian will be stunted. Because by definition what it means to be a Christian is to know Jesus.

And you'll be limited for the rest of your life in how well you're able to actually know him as a person. So then the question, you know, arises, how do we get to know Jesus? In this sermon that Jesus gives, he shows us the answer.

Right? Preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. He reads the scripture and then he says, I am the fulfillment of this scripture. And here he's talking about Isaiah 61 with part of Isaiah 58.

But what he also says is that all of scripture is about him and points to him and reveals him. All of scripture is that which he fulfills.

And so he's giving us a way of reading scripture. Right? If you read scripture through that lens. If you're reading anywhere from Genesis to Revelation and you are reading it with the expectation that this is going to teach you something about the character and the heart of Jesus Christ.

[20:33] The mission of Jesus Christ. Why he came. Why we can trust him. If you're reading through that lens, you will begin to develop a higher and higher and higher resolution image of who Jesus really is.

The pixels will start to clear up. You'll start to see the lines more clearly defined. The textures and the nuances. The lights and the shadows. You'll begin to make out his face more and more and more clearly.

But the problem with that is when that happens, some of your previously held expectations will be challenged. And that's hard. Right? You begin to read scripture.

You begin to realize, you know, Jesus is incredibly loving towards sinners and outcasts and outsiders. And yet Jesus has a higher view of personal holiness even than the religious leaders. You read in one place, Jesus prays this beautiful prayer that all would be one, all would be unified. And then in another place he says, do you think that I came to bring peace?

[21:30] I didn't come to bring peace. I brought a sword to divide people. You read where sometimes Jesus is incredibly meek and mild. You have people wanting to stone him and kill him.

And he just slips through the crowd and walks on his way. Right? In other places, Jesus is furiously flipping over tables in the temple. And how do you hold these images, these ideas of Jesus together?

That's what it means to develop a higher resolution understanding of a real flesh and blood person. Low resolution Jesus fits easily into our categories.

Low resolution Jesus fits into categories like liberal, conservative, democrat, republican. Socialist, feminist, whatever your category is, low res Jesus fits right in.

The problem with high resolution Jesus is that he doesn't fit any of those categories. He doesn't fit any of those categories. And the problem for us is the more we follow him, the less we will fit into any of those categories.

[22:34] And this is why it causes a crisis in us. Because throughout the Christian life, we invariably come to crisis moments where we have to choose between the savior that we want, the low resolution Jesus who fits our categories and expectations, or the savior that we need.

A high resolution God who took on flesh who doesn't fit any of our categories, and instead calls us to fit into his categories. But that means he can actually change our lives.

The savior that I want fits my categories, the savior I need doesn't. The savior I want is the savior who promises me that I will always be happy and fulfilled. The savior I need sometimes calls me to suffer with no explanation.

The savior I want says the partner of my dreams is just around the corner if I just have enough faith and believe and pray. The savior I need may be calling me to a long season of singleness.

You know, the savior I want always says yes to my dreams. Always. The savior I need loves me so much that many times he says no.

[23 : 46] Loves me so much that he says no. Loves me so much that he slams the door right in my face. And sometimes when Jesus defies our expectations, and when he rejects our agendas, we hate him for it.

I bet if I asked you to take five minutes and just think about some of the things that you've brought to the Lord, some of the times when you felt either his silence or his clear no. If you're honest, there are probably times for all of us when you hated him for it.

You hated him for it. Times where if we had the chance, we would drag him up to the edge of a cliff, and we'd throw him off. How dare you say no? But here's the point.

At the beginning of this, we asked, if we were to see Jesus face to face, if we could see him clearly, if we could hear him, if we could touch him, would it make it easier to believe in him?

Right? That was our question. And this passage shows us the answer. If we are blinded by our own desires and expectations, we will never be able to see Jesus, even if he's standing right in front of us.

[25 : 00] If we're blinded by our own desires and expectations, we will never be able to see Jesus, even if he's preaching in our church. And this is why we need the gospel.

Right? See, these people, they try to kill Jesus here, but he doesn't let them. But three years from this moment, Jesus is going to let them. Right?

He will go willingly to his death. And on that day at Calvary, it wasn't just the people in Nazareth who rejected him and wanted him dead. It was every single person involved, even his own disciples.

And I told you that Jesus read from Isaiah chapter 61, which he does. That was true. But if you go back and you actually read Isaiah 61, and then you look at where Jesus ends his reading, you realize that Jesus stops reading halfway through a verse.

Now that's interesting, right? Jesus is reading and he stops midway through a verse. Right?

Halfway through a completed thought. Why would that be the case? So you go and you read.

[26 : 03] Okay, Jesus reads, to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberty to free the oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. There's not a period there.

The actual verse in Isaiah goes on. It says, proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, comma, and the day of vengeance of our God.

He leaves out the vengeance part. The day of the Lord's favor is also the day of vengeance. And Jesus omits that from his reading because that's not something that's going to happen to us.

It was always meant to happen to him. To us, he proclaims good news to the poor, sight for the blind, liberty to captives.

That's what we need to hear. But God's vengeance was reserved exclusively for him. God took all of the guilt, all of the sin, all the problems that we've caused by rejecting him, by choosing the Savior that we want, often ourselves, rather than the Savior that we need.

[27 : 12] And he put all of that on Jesus, and then he punished Jesus in our place. And that is why Jesus is such good news for people like us. That's why he's the Savior that we really need, right?

How do you save people? How do you save people who would rather throw you off a cliff than hear what you have to say? You let them kill you, and then you make your death the means of their salvation.

And the kind of Savior that would do that is the kind of Savior that we need. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word, and we thank you for your son.

And I know that even as I stand up here, I have things that I expect from you, that I demand of you. I know that I'm blinded, Lord, blinded by my own desires, my own priorities.

We pray that you would strip these things away, that as the scales fell from Paul's eyes, so these things would drop away from our eyes. And that as we come to you in prayer and song, as we come to you and come around your table and receive your flesh and your blood, Lord, we pray that our eyes would be opened, that we would be the blind to whom sight is given, and that we would be able to see you face to face.

[28 : 40] We pray this for our good and for your glory. In your son's name, amen. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Thank you. Yes.