

Fulfilled in Your Hearing

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[0 : 0 0] So today is the third Sunday of Epiphany. So we're in a season right now of celebrating and observing how God revealed himself through the person of Jesus Christ to the world.

God's revealing of himself through the person of Jesus Christ. 2,000 years ago, the ancient world had an epiphany. Here's who God is. Here's what he's like.

And here's what he's doing. Jesus. The particular epiphany, revelation, that the people of Nazareth had when Jesus came home to preach was twofold.

First of all, Jesus told them in no uncertain terms that he is the fulfillment of one of the most hopeful passages of the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah 61.

And second, he gave them a vastly more inclusive picture of the kingdom of God than they had. Jesus says, I'm the fulfillment of this promise, but not quite in the way that you've been thinking.

[1 : 0 4] Maybe not even the way you want me to be. And Luke records their response in the following paragraph, which we didn't read. They mob him and they try to throw him off a cliff.

Not exactly the response most guest preachers want from the congregation, but I take comfort for my own sake that there's no cliffs in the area. So as we look at this text, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for revealing your truth to us in Jesus Christ. I pray now that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be pleasing to you.

Lord God. Amen. So why was Jesus's sermon so unpopular? What part of his message triggered that harsh reaction?

To understand the people of Nazareth's response to the message, we have to understand more about the people of Nazareth. So like citizens of the United States today, first century Israelites had a number of differing opinions on what was best for their country.

[2 : 1 4] And there were four main competing views, visions of what the kingdom of God should look like and how it would arrive. So one, you've probably heard of the Pharisees.

They expected the kingdom of God to arrive when people started, were truly following the cultural practices that surrounded the Torah, the teachings of God's word.

That's the Pharisees. Get everyone living right and we'll be ready for the Messiah to come and usher in the age to come. The Sadducees, the priestly ruling class who ran the temple, they had life already about as good as they could have it.

And so they didn't really want any kind of kingdom of God coming and disrupting their status quo. Then you have the Essenes who saw corruption pretty much everywhere at the heart of both these parties.

So they said, we're tainted by any contact with other nations, with faithless Israelites. So for the sake of our purity of life, we're going to remove ourselves.

[3 : 19] And so they joined these communes out in the wilderness and they waited for the return of the Messiah. For the coming of the Messiah. And then finally you have the Zealots who they believe the best way to usher in the kingdom of God was, let's throw off the shackles of our Gentile Roman overlords and let's have a revolution.

By the time Jesus was an adult, a number of men claiming to be the Messiah had laid groups of zealots on bloody riots and revolts, which the Romans in their classic brutal fashion had put down with mass crucifixions and other gruesome, painful forms of execution.

So Galilee, the region where Nazareth was and the region where Jesus is preaching this sermon, was known for having very strong zealot sentiments.

There were a lot of zealots from Galilee. Luke records, so that's the context, right? That's Jesus' audience. That's who he's preaching to.

Let's look at his preaching text and his message. Luke only records a summary of the sermon. It's not a word-for-word record of the sermon.

[4 : 34] So what we have here is the highlights. Really, it's the thesis statement. So here's Isaiah 61, the text. According to the ESV, the version of the Bible we're using, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn.

I'm going to read verse 2 one more time, just so we can keep it in our heads. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God. Now listen carefully to what Jesus reads out of the scroll.

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.

And the eyes of all the synagogue were upon him. Did you notice where Jesus stops? Did you hear it? Anything missing there?

[5 : 47] As far as the folks in Nazareth are concerned, he stopped right before the best line. Yes, yes, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, right? You say you're the Messiah, Jesus.

Let's do this. Come on. Isaiah was writing about vengeance on the Babylonians, right? But anyone claiming to be Messiah nowadays, if you're not going to talk about vengeance on the Romans, like, let's not talk about that other stuff.

But he doesn't read that line. He stops. He stops with the year of the Lord's favor, sits down, and tells them, today this scripture has been fulfilled. The Messiah has arrived, but he's not talking about a day of vengeance.

He's announcing his mission, what he came to do. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me. When Jesus is baptized, at the start of his public career as a prophet, the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit descends on him as a dove.

And his father says, you are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus retreats to the wilderness, and goes through temptation by his greatest enemy, Satan, and he rejects Satan's offers to allow him to become great and provide him a name for himself by the world's methods, or by diabolical methods, we might say.

[7 : 11] Instead, he trusts in his identity as revealed to him by his heavenly father. He's a beloved son. In the power of the Spirit, he returns to Galilee, as we read today, and he becomes a traveling preacher, finally coming back to his hometown of Nazareth.

So what's he preaching? Well, let's go through Isaiah 61. Good news to the poor. The economy of God's kingdom doesn't work the same way our economy does in this country or any other nation I've ever heard of.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God setting up a nation and a social worldview that favors the poor. Those who are wealthy are called by God to share the provision they've received, to use their wealth for the sake of others, not just for their own comfort.

Those who are strong are called by God to care for, to protect the weak and vulnerable, not just their own, not just their selves, but those who can't protect themselves.

But all of it is done in a way that gives dignity. The poor, the widows, the orphans, they're not just vessels who exist for the rich and powerful to earn good karma or get points with God.

[8 : 27] They are brothers and sisters, fellow bearers of God's image. Next line, liberty to the captives, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

In the Roman Empire, as in the United States today, there were many men and women locked up for unjust reasons. In the Roman Empire, as in the United States today, there were many men and women who were captured by slavers or as prisoners of war and taken far from their homes and their families.

And Israel was no exception in the Roman Empire. But a look at the history of God's people will show that God's program, almost from the beginning of the Bible, has been to rescue the captive and the oppressed.

He freed his chosen people from slavery in Egypt and rescued them from the oppression of other nations numerous times. Jesus' mission is not different.

Sight to the blind. Jesus' ministry was characterized by a concern for and a care of those who were sick. The Gospels are full of accounts of Jesus and his disciples healing those with physical ailments and not only healing, but visiting the homes of those who were terminally ill, touching those who were contagious or considered unclean, visiting and treating those who, because of their maladies, were isolated or lonely.

[9 : 56] And finally, the last line, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. In saying the scripture has come true with his arrival, Jesus is saying that his life and work, his ministry and his mission is the beginning of a new age of grace from God.

In applying this verse to himself, Jesus is saying, you want to know what good news for the poor looks like? You want to see captives and oppressed or liberated? You want the blind to see?

Watch me. Watch how I do it. Listen to me. Walk with me. This is what I'm doing right now. This is what it looks like.

This is good news. This liberation, though, it's not just for one tribe or for God's chosen people. In fact, his acts of deliverance from physical maladies, they point beyond a single individual affliction.

His promises of deliverance from captivity, which recall the ways God has saved his people in the past. They point beyond the deliverance of a single people group to the deliverance of all humankind from the chains that have held all people in bondage from close to the beginning of time.

[11 : 09] His mission, his purpose here on earth, is not to deal with the Romans. That's why folks in his hometown were so angry after he finished preaching. He didn't come to deal with a single corrupt or oppressive government.

These people, Jesus says, are not our ultimate enemies. Our enemies at work, in our nation, in our neighborhoods, internationally, they are not our ultimate enemies.

They are fellow human beings who are captive under the same cruel rulers that we are, apart from Christ and his work. The strife that we see today and throughout history between tribes and nations, families, the divisions between persons, they're all products of the fact that our world's relationship with God is fundamentally broken.

Through disobedience to God, humankind has become sinful, which means separated from God. And as a result, we've become subject to the powers of death and the power of Satan and his angels who are rebellious against God.

Jesus came to a world that was captive to these three powers. Sin, separation from God, death, the proclivity to violence, disease, loss of life, Satan, the spiritual forces that influence individuals and nations to oppose God and his people.

[12 : 40] Church of the Advent, I have good news for you. The day of vengeance foretold by prophet Isaiah has come already. The justice required by God for the crimes of humanity has committed against God and against one another has been exacted.

Jesus bore those crimes in his person to the cross. He took the sin, that separation from God that afflicted all humanity into his own person and he put it to death with his own death.

In the body of Christ, the way to God is now open. He rose from the grave three days later as a proof that death is now powerless.

It's a serpent without things. It's an insubstantial bogeyman. He has taken his rightful place as king over this world and he will return to serve final vengeance on his enemy, Satan, whose power is now bound and restricted.

Church of the Advent, I have good news for you. Jesus has passed his mission to us. We, the church, his body, can now say to a world that is poor, captive, and dying for good news that in our baptism the spirit of the Lord is upon us because he has anointed us to proclaim good news to the poor.

[14 : 08] He has sent us 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.

This is now our mission. In the power of the Holy Spirit, we get to proclaim good news to the poor in body and in spirit. This is why serious Christians from the beginning of our faith care for the poor and seek to give them dignity.

This is why serious Christians from the beginning of our faith care for those who are poor in spirit, who are poor in non-material things, whether they're economically wealthy or not, we seek to uplift them.

In the power of the Holy Spirit, we get to proclaim liberty to the captives and the oppressed. This is why serious Christians, we seek to reform prisons, call corrupt or evil governments to account for unjust imprisonments and give help to those who are trapped in addiction.

This is why serious Christians from the Apostle Paul to William Wilberforce, from Harriet Tubman to Martin Luther King Jr., have opposed slavery and fought for equal rights for all citizens of their lands.

[15 : 24] This is why serious Christians take Jesus at their word when he says in John 8.34 that whoever sins is a slave to sin. So we seek to be honest and free from sin.

This is why serious Christians hate the work of Satan and in the power and authority given by Christ drive out demons from those who are afflicted. In the power of the Spirit, we get to proclaim recovering of the sight to the blind.

This is why Christians seek to bring healing to those who suffer in body or mind. This is why Christians seek to learn, know, and proclaim truth in a world that is spiritually blind.

Christ has passed his mission to us. And as you and I seek to carry it out, I pray we don't fall into either of two errors.

We dare not spiritualize matters that God's word gives us no reason to spiritualize. Isaiah 61 is talking about good news for the poor in body, the poor in relationships.

[16 : 32] And we, the church, are called to proclaim good news to the poor by seeking to relieve poverty. But in following that call, let's not miss the fact that this physical mission is a signpost to the great reality of God's lavish charity in giving all the treasures of heaven to his finite creations, us.

We, the church, are called to proclaim liberty to the captives, which means we are called to actually oppose and fight against slavery, economic oppression of physical or economic, you know, evil debt, usury is what is the sort of medieval term for it.

We must, but let's not miss the fact that this mission is a signpost to the great reality of God's liberation of his people from the captivity to sin and the oppression of death.

We must hold these things together, church. Jesus forgave sins and made the lame walk in the blind sea and he calls us to follow in his footsteps.

As I close, I want to invite those of you who don't consider yourself to be a Christian or those of you who have been hurt by the failure of the church to carry out Jesus' mission perfectly.

[17 : 49] After the service, come and talk to me or to a staff member or a leader in the church. We would love to tell you more about this year, this era of the Lord's favor, of his grace.

Whether you're a Christian or not, whether this is your first Sunday at Church of the Advent or your 500th Sunday, I want to invite you, if you're poor of any sort of poverty, if you're oppressed or captive to addiction, if you are suffering in your body or in your spirit, I invite you, come receive prayer from our prayer ministers during our time of communion.

God works powerfully in the prayers of his people. For those of you who are baptized who consider yourselves to be Christian, I invite you to ask yourselves, and I'm asking myself this as well, I'm preaching to myself here, are you, am I, carrying out the mission Jesus has given us?

Are we neglecting one aspect of Jesus' message in favor of another? Are we holding these things together as Jesus did? My prayer for you and for myself and my family is that we proclaim and live out the full gospel given to us by Jesus.

2,000 years ago, the world had an epiphany in the person of Jesus Christ. Here's who God is, here's what God's like, and here's what he's doing. May he use us, may he use this church to give the world that same epiphany.

[19 : 27] Here's who God is, here's what he's like, and here's what he's doing. Amen.