

Grace to the Oppressed Luke 4v1-44

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[0:00] to the nations. The Spirit signified the presence and the power of God. And the very servant that God spoke about would say this himself.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. And so for years the people waited in expectation for the power and the presence of God to come.

Now the promise has become a reality. Look back to Luke chapter 3 verse 21, which is really the start or the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Chapter 3 verse 21, when all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. Look at chapter 4 verse 1, Jesus full of the Holy Spirit. Verse 14, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

[1:23] God is on the move. Jesus, the Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered King has finally come. And God is about to do something in the world through Jesus.

Three things we're going to see about this Spirit-filled King. Who he is, what he has come to do, and why this is good news.

Who he is, what he's come to do, and why this is good news. So first, who Jesus is. Chapter 4 verse 1, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.

Tempted by the devil. Now where else in the Bible story have we ever come across that? Well, right at the very start of the Bible story, way back in Genesis chapter 1 and 2, we are introduced to the first man, Adam.

Now Luke, significantly, has just told us something about Adam. If you look back to the very end of chapter 3, in fact, if you go to verse 23, you get this long genealogy, tracing the line of Jesus.

[3:00] So we read in verse 23, now Jesus himself was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. He was the son. So it was thought of Joseph.

Of course, Joseph wasn't the biological father of Jesus. Luke has already told us back in chapter 135, that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

However, the point is of this genealogy, for us anyway, is where it finishes. Look at verse 38 at the very end of chapter 3. So it goes through all these lists of names, where it says the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Adam was the son of God. He didn't have a biological father like you or I, but God had created Adam out of the earth.

And he had created Adam in his image. So Adam was to reflect God and to be some ways God's representative on the earth. And as God's son, Adam was to show the whole world what it was like to live under God's rule.

[4:24] But then there was the temptation in the garden. And Adam failed. Rather than reflect God, he rebelled against God.

Instead of being God's representative, Adam wanted to be God. Adam, the son of God, failed. Now the thing is, we are all sons of Adam.

We can all trace our family line right the way back to the first man, Adam. And we are just like him. We've all failed. We all want to be God.

We want to be the centre of the universe. We want to do things our way. That's why the world is the way it is. It's why Stephen Paddock shot and murdered all those people.

It's why Trump and Kim are threatening to blow each other up. It's why our relationships break and our friendships fall apart. We want to be God. We want to rule our own lives and live as we please. [5:29] As sons of Adam, we have all failed. Now, with all that in mind, and I think that's why Luke finishes chapter 3 with the son of Adam, the son of God, and jumps straight in with chapter 4, verse 1, verse 1, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.

Verse 3, the devil said to him, if you are the son of God, tell this stone to become bread.

Every temptation, there were three specific temptations that Jesus faced in the desert, was ultimately a temptation to take the place of God.

If you are the son of God, go on, Jesus, take things into your own hands. Don't be bothered about what God's word says. Do what you think.

Well, what would Jesus do? Well, where Adam failed, Jesus was faithful. You see, Jesus came as the true son of God.

[6:47] The obedient, sinless, and faithful son where every other person in the history of the world has failed and crumbled under temptation.

Jesus has been faithful. Here is one that we can count on. Here is one who we can trust. By passing the test of temptation, Jesus proves that he alone is qualified to be God's spirit-empowered king.

Everything that broke through Adam's failure can now be put right through Jesus' faithfulness. God is on the move and he is now at work through his faithful, obedient, sinless son, Jesus Christ.

So, what has this Jesus come to do? Well, following the temptation, look down at verse 16.

Jesus went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom and he stood up to read.

[8:09] Now, the synagogue in some ways was like your local church. Yes, there was the temple up in Jerusalem but not everybody could get to the temple so they met in these what were called synagogues, these small buildings.

And the usual practice, similar in some ways to what we have done this morning, there would have been singing, but the singing of Psalms. And then at some point somebody would read something from the books of Moses, the first five books, and then a little bit later on there would be a reading from the Old Testament.

And then they would sit down and as was their custom, different to us, I stand, but they sat and they gave a little mini sermon about what they had just read. And on this particular day Jesus has come to the synagogue to worship and Jesus has been asked to do the reading.

verse 17. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed him so they didn't have neatly bound books like we do, but these great big scrolls and maybe divided up different parts of Isaiah.

And we can imagine Jesus unrolling this great big scroll and searching. There's no numbers, no chapters, no verses, but he knows his Bible and he specifically has turned to this section in Isaiah.

[9:34] Chapter 61, verses 1 and 2 and unrolling it, verse 17, he found the place where it is written. He reads from Isaiah, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Well, you could imagine everyone nodding their heads in agreement.

Good choice of reading. Ah, yes. The promise of God to send his spirit-filled servant. That's going to be someday when that happens.

We can even hear the little boy asking his father, when's this going to happen, Dad? Well, it's been several hundred years since Isaiah wrote this.

We hope sometime soon. Well, they're in for the shock of their lives. Verse 20, Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to his attendant, who would have put it back into the cupboard at the back, and Jesus sat down to give the mini-sermon.

[10:55] The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him and he began by saying to them, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

I am the one. I am the spirit-filled, spirit-empowered, promised king, the one that you have been waiting for down through the centuries.

It's me. I'm the Messiah. What you've longed for has now become a reality. I am the one.

Well, the text that Jesus reads explains to us what he had come to do. You won't notice it at first.

Well, maybe you do, but I certainly didn't. I needed a very clever commentator to point it out to me.

But when you read what is written in Isaiah 61, verses 1 to 2, we had it read earlier by Chris, if you compared that with the quotation that we have in Luke, chapter 4, verses 18 and 19, you'll notice that there was something different.

[12:14] Something is added and something is missing. What's added is found at the very end of verse 18 of chapter 4, where it says, to release the oppressed.

So Jesus is reading, but he adds in this line, to release the oppressed. It comes from another part in Isaiah. And I don't think Jesus is adding to Scripture.

It seems to be more of an interpretation. Everything that this quote is saying can be summed up in the phrase, to release the oppressed.

That's my mission. The oppressed are, as we see at the end in the middle of verse 18, the poor, the prisoner, and the blind. They are the hopeless and the helpless.

Now as we begin to read through Luke's Gospel, we'll discover that the oppressed become a model or a symbol for Christian faith. Physically and materially, the oppressed, well, they have nothing.

[13:23] They're people who are dependent on outside help. If it weren't for other people, they would die. And that becomes a model for how we should come to God spiritually.

We come as hopeless and helpless people, dependent and completely reliant upon God's grace.

So Jesus adds something to explain something of his mission, but there's also something missing.

If you were to read Isaiah 61, verses 1 to 2, it finishes like this. You may remember what it said. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God.

Now when Jesus starts quoting Isaiah here, it finishes like this, verse 19. to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Full stop.

There's no mentions of vengeance. There's no judgment here. Again, I don't think Jesus is changing scripture. He's simply wanting to emphasize that his coming, his mission into this world is a time of grace, not judgment.

[14:40] There is a judgment to come, but for now it is salvation, not condemnation. The year of the Lord's favour is jam-packed with meaning.

It comes from one of the laws that God had given to his people right back in the Old Testament. A law that God had given to his people about cancelling debts.

It was a law that said at the end of every seven years, everybody who had a debt was released from having to pay. Now, could you imagine that?

All the money that you owe, after seven years, that debt could be written off, all cancelled. If your bank statement said minus, it would be made a zero.

Wow! But better than that, in the 50th year, so get your maths into order here, after seven cycles of seven years, which is 49, well done, you're still with me.

[15:59] So in the 50th year, so after seven cycles of seven years, anything that you owned and you had had to sell because of debt problems would all be given back to you.

So not only were your debts written off, but all the property and land that you had had to sell was all restored back to you again. What an amazing, good and gracious law from God to the people.

It was, verse 19, the year of the Lord's favour, a year of grace. Now, as one writer pointed out to me, in all the history of Israel, how many times do you think the 50th year of cancelling all debts happened?

Do you think of all the history that we have, the hundreds and thousands of years of Israel's history, how many times did they celebrate that 50th year? None.

There is not one record of this ever happening in the Bible because God's people failed to obey God's good law.

[17:14] They could not deal with each other in grace. They were too greedy. If people owed debts, they demanded those debts.

If they had property, they kept that property. They could not deal with others in grace. Now Jesus comes and stands up before this small gathering and says, it's me.

I am the year of the Lord's favour. I have come to give grace to the oppressed. Yes, Jesus is concerned for those who are oppressed economically, politically and physically.

We didn't have time to read it, but read it at home the rest of chapter 4 and we'll see that there Jesus released those with an evil spirit and he restored those who were sick.

But he wasn't coming in a sense to kind of write off people's bank accounts and put money into their account. It wasn't that kind of prosperity. The cancellation of debt was not material but spiritual.

[18:26] Jesus had come to cancel the debt of our sin to release us from the coming judgment and to restore to life. Jesus has come to give grace to the oppressed to cancel the debt of sin.

God is on the move and he is working through his son Jesus Christ.

Now this is good news for people like you and me. You see as Jesus talked to the crowd and began to give his mini sermon verse 22 all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

But by the time Jesus had finished his little mini sermon look at verse 29 they got up drove him out of the town and took him to the brow and the hill of which the town was built in order to throw him down the cliff.

What a way to start your preaching career. I can remember my very first sermon. I don't think I even got beyond five minutes. I got all in a tizz and a panic and just had to sit down.

[19:57] Thankfully one very kind person said well at least you didn't waffle. Nobody came gunning for me or trying to kill me. But here's Jesus his first sermon from stunning amazement to seething anger trying to kill him.

What did Jesus say? Why did the crowd change? Why are they so angry? Well look at verse 22 the end.

They asked isn't this Joseph's son? Well everybody knew Joseph in Nazareth it was a small town and well Joseph was the town carpenter.

He was that simple character. And now his son who had taken over the business is claiming to be the Messiah. God's spirit empowered king.

Well he doesn't look much. He's a bit ordinary. I think he should just get back to cutting wood and stop dreaming dreams. Jesus it seems knows their hearts.

[21:08] Verse 23 Jesus said to them surely you will quote this proverb to me physician heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did at Capernaum.

Well you see they want a Messiah who are going to do miracles who's going to do miracles on demand and get people excited. You know all those healings you did over there do them here right now.

they want Jesus to do spectacular things and get all the people excited so he has a big crowd following him. They want a king who at least looks like a king or sounds like a king and who's going to kind of march into Jerusalem and get rid of those dirty Romans who are taking our land and everything that we own.

Who's going to follow a simple carpenter? verse 24 I tell you the truth he continued no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

It's a damning statement about their own hearts. Nobody likes anyone getting ahead of themselves. We certainly know that in our culture don't we? We don't like to congratulate people and say oh well done you know we like saying and that's what they're doing with Jesus.

[22:28] Who does he think he is coming into our synagogue claiming to be the Messiah. We want a real king not some upstart with nonsense ideas.

Well if Jesus had shut up at this point and gotten the hint he would have just sat down and saved face and maybe would have kept a few friends. But no Jesus is on a mission.

He can't stay silent. Knowing that rejection lay in their hearts Jesus shows them who he has come to welcome.

Look at verse 25. I assure you Jesus says there were many widows in Israel. Israel God's land God's special people.

There were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time God's prophet when the sky was shut for three and a half years so there was no rain and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

[23:36] Lots of poor widows who didn't have anything. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

Elijah went to an outsider a foreigner of all the people who were local. He went off somewhere else.

Verse 27 And there were many in Israel God's land God's people with leprosy in the time of Elijah the prophet yet not one of them was cleansed.

Only Naaman the Syrian who if we were to go back and read a bit about him was general of an army not only was he an outsider he was an enemy. He fought battles against God's people.

So everybody who's listening to Jesus' sermon expects that Elijah and Elisha oh well they were great prophets surely they would go to God's people Israel.

[24:42] After all they're God's specially chosen people. They deserve God's favour. God is on their side. But to their absolute shock and disgust Elijah and Elisha go to the outsider.

You see the widow and Naaman become for us a picture or an example of the oppressed that Jesus has come to release.

They are the poor the prisoner the blind they are the humble in heart. They are the hopeless and helpless. They cannot help themselves.

They are dependent and completely reliant upon God's grace to intervene in their lives. The widow is a foreigner. Naaman is an enemy.

And Jesus is saying to the gathering in the synagogue I am the Messiah and I have come to welcome those with humble hearts. I have come to welcome outsiders in.

[25:48] not to those who think of themselves as morally respectable. Not to those who have it all together. Not to those who feel they are deserving. No I have come to those who see their need of absolute help.

Now that's good news for people like us. For Jesus comes to those who know they fail and fall. he comes to those who are desperate and weak and cannot help themselves.

Let's ask ourselves some questions. Would you describe yourself as having a hard heart or a humble heart?

Have you experienced grace? or are you like the crowd in the synagogue pushing it away? You see those with a humble heart don't push people away because they keep on failing.

They don't reject those whose sexual identity is maybe different to yours. they don't write off those who have hurt you in the past.

[27:14] They don't look down on those who have a different skin colour to you. They don't distance themselves from those whose life is broken and messy.

They give grace because God has been gracious to them and they have come to experience and understand that well God has cancelled all of my sin debt and no longer holds it over me or against me.

They welcome the outsider because God has welcomed them. Or look at it this way.

Those who have a hard heart pride themselves in their own ability to do well in life. They judge other people by their own standards and expectations and nod disapprovingly.

They're not like me. They won't help the broken because well those people need to learn to help themselves first. They condemn the sinners to hell because they can't see their own sin in their own hearts.

[28:36] They withhold grace from others because well actually it's all about you deserve what you get in life. They can't welcome others because they've never ever experienced God's welcome in their own lives.

God is on the move. He is on a mission. He is offering grace to the oppressed.

He welcomes the outsider. He welcomes people like you and me who will only admit that I am helpless and hopeless.

I cannot help myself. I cannot change my life. I need you to change me. And in response we are incorporated into the great mission of God as we go and offer grace to those who cannot help themselves.

Welcoming the outsider showing them the grace that none of us deserve. let's pray together.

[29:57] Let's pray together. Father, we are astonished and amazed at your grace towards us that you would reach down even though we have pushed you away.

Thank you that you do not treat us as our sins deserve. Thank you that you do not look down upon us and say help yourself.

thank you that you have come to help us through your son the Lord Jesus and have given us a way to life and a way to be changed.

Father, help us that we would have humble hearts and any hardness of heart that you would deal with by your grace right now.

Change us so that we become welcomers of all who are in need of you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.