

Luke 4:14-30

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[0 : 00] And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country, and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written.

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 he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said to them, Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, Physician, heal yourself.

[1 : 20] What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well. And he said, Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land.

And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.

When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.

But passing through their midst, he went away. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Occasionally, you come across something in miniature form.

[2 : 33] Something small that by design was crafted to represent something much larger. Take our very own golden lady, for example.

Have you seen the gilded bronze statue? 22, 25 feet in height, a few blocks away from us here in Jackson Park.

The original golden lady was much larger, 65 feet tall. And it stood very near the lake at a time when our neighborhood hosted the World's Fair or the Columbian Exposition in 1893.

I first laid eyes on this small-scale lady in the fall of 1998. My kids' Saturday morning soccer fields were immediately adjacent to it.

What I couldn't have known then, at first glance, was that the artful bronze stood not only for its larger counterpart, but in some sense for the largesse of the entire Columbian Exposition.

[4 : 01] It was small, but it represented so much more. As I've been looking at this particular text all week, I've had the privilege of doing so while you've been working away in other ways, I have come to a similar conclusion.

Luke 4, 14 to 30, a golden lady, an exquisite bronze that, according to Luke, I believe, represents the greatness of the entire Gospel.

He's the only one who records it. His entire understanding of the Gospel in all of its fullness will flow forth from it. And so, as you gaze upon it over these next minutes, I hope that it will draw you back to something bigger, something larger, something much more impressive even than a Columbian Exposition, but to the exquisite fullness of the Gospel in Christ.

At first glance, our text shows us in miniature form that on the surface of things, people were attracted to Jesus.

Take a look. verse 14, And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about Him went out throughout all the surrounding country, and He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

[5 : 39] A couple of simple observations. There was a report about Him that was favorable, and there was a response to Him that actually exalted His work.

You see the word there, report? In a wooden way, think of this as something oral going out. It was literally, the word, in a sense, was spreading.

He hadn't, perhaps, made the Tribune or the Sun-Times, but He didn't need it. people were attracted to Him.

And there was a response that was being given by those who followed Him, being glorified by all. So it is in miniature.

First glance. People are attracted to Jesus. I want to have you look at one quiet word in the text.

[6 : 46] The word, Galilee. You see it there in verse 14? Something more is intended here by Luke than might first catch our attention.

Galilee played a role for Jesus and for Luke. Galilee, just geographically, is north, considerably, of, say, Jerusalem, and even north of Judea and Samaria.

It was all the way up at the upper regions of the Sea of Galilee where a couple of the tribes had been given their land. It was a distant place.

And yet it was a place that Jesus spent almost the entirety of His life. We think of Jesus running through the city gates at Jerusalem, but for the better part of His 33 years, Galilee was home.

It was a region or a district that had towns in it, small towns, like Nazareth and Capernaum.

[8 : 06] Even by the time of Isaiah, long before Jesus comes on the scene, Isaiah 9-2 already refers to Galilee as Galilee of the nations or Galilee of the Gentiles.

it had a long history of being a district that was populated by a pluralistic society. People from all ethnic persuasions and religious traditions.

To be in Galilee was to be among the nations. Jesus cut His teeth in Galilee.

The portrait of Galilee in the Bible is not entirely positive. We might applaud being in a pluralistic world, but for the purely Jewish adherent, Galilee had some negative connotations.

Do you remember what John, the Gospel writer will record coming from the lips of one of the disciples upon the announcement of Jesus? Can anything good come out of Nazareth? It's way up there in Galilee where they're polluted and mixed, you know.

[9 : 24] How about the deliberation among the Sanhedrin when Jesus' ministry took full wing? Go back and check.

No prophet comes out of Galilee or Nazareth. Think of the young girl pejoratively understanding even at the coal-burning fire when Peter's betrayal was there.

She recognized him as a Galilean. How? Well, it was that thick, rustic accent that he had. She knew right where he was from. And he denied it vehemently.

For Luke, Galilee takes on not merely a geographical place, but it has spiritual import. It actually controls his literary structure.

So while we're introduced to it here in verse 14, we're not quite aware, but I'm making you aware that all of Luke between now and chapter 9, verse 50 take place in Galilee.

[10 : 36] And then there will be a turn in 9.51 all the way into chapter 19.44 where he's on the road to Jerusalem. And then from 19.44 to the end, he is in Jerusalem itself.

And then, like an accordion that comes in and then back out, he's in Jerusalem through Acts 6.7 which Luke writes. And then he begins to expand back out into the geographical places of Judea and Samaria.

And then again to the far reaches of the world. Galilee, for Luke, had spiritual import that controlled his narrative.

The takeaway is this. For Luke, he wants you to know even now, in miniature, what is going to be true in macro, that Jesus is attractive to those who not only live on the outermost corners of the earth, but even more especially, he's attractive to those who are unconnected to the religious centers of influence, power, and promise.

the gospel of Luke begins in the nations. Well, we see this.

[12 : 03] The next feature that comes to the fore is not only that people are attracted to him, but that Jesus makes an announcement that the promises of Isaiah are fulfilled in him.

that really is the summation of verses 16 through 22. We find him in Nazareth 16 where he'd been brought up as was his custom.

He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath and he stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him and he unrolls it, finds where it's written.

I love the articulation Luke brings of those who are there in verse 20. After he gave it back, he sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

paraphrastically, they were intent upon him that he had their complete attention.

[13 : 09] Wow. Local kid come home. Local kid done good. This is the homecoming, the early homecoming, you know, like a five-year homecoming, not as old as I am now where people are sold, they don't even go back for homecoming.

This is the homecoming for the hometown hero. This is clean-cut Jesus who grew up in a pluralistic world. This is the one who, although he was familiar with a region that was roughshod in pluralistic religious beliefs, here is the boy who set himself apart even from the age of 12 unto God.

He was pure, Jewish, an adherent of the law. He had learned what it was to be far away from the sinful patterns that surrounded him.

And so, they fixed their gaze upon him. He's been teaching in the region. But boy, the synagogue must have been full because Jesus has come home. they wait with bated breath.

Wow, that's got to be every preacher's dream. Maybe that's why I'm sitting on this for a while. They wanted to know what he had to say. He had stunned the countryside.

[14 : 31] Now he commences to speak in the place of his birth. He reads, 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 recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. His first sermon takes a strong text as its subject.

What does it mean that today that scripture was fulfilled? What did Jesus intend by this? It has political overtones.

It certainly is well-versed as a social construct, this liberation of the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, a setting free of the oppressed.

[15 : 51] It almost looks like it's an economic day of recovery. For us, when you read that word liberty twice there in the text, we bring a lot of things to it, especially since the age of the Enlightenment.

Think of it strictly at a political level. This is one of the premises, politically speaking, of America's revolutionary moment, liberty.

Think of more modern influences of it in regard to gender, the women's liberation movement. in regard to ethnic need for its place, the Palestinian liberation organization.

In regard to economics, Gutierrez in the late 60s and early 70s, the liberation theology movement. Think of it racially with James Cone in 1970 publishing a black theology of liberation.

liberation. When we hear liberation, it has all of these connotations of being a political, theoretical underpinning that would reorchestrate a social construct that has positive connotation for gender and race and ethnic hatred.

[17 : 18] And what they all have in common in kind of a shorthand is social justice.

A new beginning. Don't you love that last phrase there, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor? It actually borrows the idea all the way back, not just from Isaiah 61, but Leviticus 25, where the year of the Lord's favor was the year of Jubilee, where once in every 50 years, everybody gets a clean start.

It's a reset button for the whole people of Israel so that the oppressed finally get to start over. They're freed from their debt.

Jesus comes and says, well, that day has come. For Jesus and for Luke, though, there's even more. In miniature form, this is the message of the gospel.

And it doesn't stop merely with a social or political construct. Take a look. Do you see the term liberty twice used?

[18 : 41] That term has embedded within it the cancellation of legal debt. an indebted one. One who has a debt that they cannot pay and they get out from underneath it.

And everywhere else in Luke Acts, and I mean everywhere, it is translated forgiveness. It's really fascinating to me.

Take a look back to chapter 177. I want to run you through these. It's going to take a few minutes. 177. To give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins.

Notice how it's attached to sins. Same term. Liberty, forgiveness. Take a look, if you would, at chapter 3 and verse 3.

And he went into the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness, there it is again, this liberty, of sins. Take a look just after our verses in chapter 5 and verse 20 and following.

[19 : 49] And when he saw their faith, he said, man, your sins are forgiven. They're set at liberty. Who is this who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive? There it is again. Sins but God alone.

Or verse 23, which is easier, Jesus says, your sins are forgiven you, or to say rise and walk, but that you might know that I have authority on earth to forgive sins. Literally, to cancel the legal debt.

that you owe before God. I say to you, rise, take up your mat, and walk. You can find it further, the very end of Luke, in 24, verse 47, same term that we need to understand in regard to what Isaiah intends.

chapter 24, 24, 47, Jesus saying now after the resurrection that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in my name to all nations.

That's why I've come. To put people at liberty, namely to cancel a debt, a debt they owe to God. The forgiveness of their sins.

[20 : 58] We could trace it through Acts as well, but we won't take the time. But it's there in 2, 38, 15, 3, and 13, 38, and 26, 18.

It's there more than those times. Whenever you see Luke using this term, liberty, it is translated elsewhere, forgiveness. Well, what does that mean?

Well, notice it's connected to Leviticus 25, the year of Jubilee, which we've already mentioned. The reset button within Israel. 15 times this term in the Septuagint is used there.

Forgiveness, liberty, the year of Jubilee, debts canceled. You get to start over. So here's the significance, and don't miss it.

It would appear that God built into the history of Israel, through her laws, and in this case, a festival, a pattern of ethical behavior with one another that was intended to show you the pattern of the way God deals with us.

[22 : 13] In other words, Israel was to live in a way with one another via the cancellation of debts, to show us God's larger design to cancel our debts owed to Him.

So the ethics of Israel, this is the way I understand it, the ethics of Israel were meant to tutor the world in the ways of God, both in regard to our need before Him and what He will provide for us.

this is it, the ethics of mercy in Israel which govern their horizontal relationships are meant to show you and me how God would restore us to a proper vertical relationship.

It's acted out here that you might know His intention here. And Jesus brings them all together into Himself.

That's the uniqueness of Christianity. That is what distinguishes Christianity from merely being not the golden lady but the golden rule. If you reduce the Christian message merely to social justice, you miss Christianity altogether and you've misunderstood it.

[23 : 40] This is the year of Jubilee, Jesus says. forgiveness of sins now comes through me.

And He took all of this upon Himself. That the payment needed for the cancellation of debt is not the golden lady representing a larger image, but it is in a sense the gilded lamb upon the cross.

that's what He offers the world. And He does not offer the world a simple social, political, economic construct.

If He did, then why were there so many widows needing help and Elijah only came to one? If He did, then why were there so many leprous and oppressed and physically deranged individuals and according to the scriptures, Elijah only came to one?

Pay attention to the verbs. What has Jesus come to do? He's come to cancel the debt through His life, but how does He do it?

[25 : 06] Notice, it's fascinating here, through proclamation. That's what Jesus says. That's actually what He came to do. He sent me to proclaim, verse 18.

Again, at the very close, to proclaim, in a very literal way, that's to preach. The cancellation of debt between yourselves and God is available.

And how will it be accessed? How will it be apprehended? Through speech. And through faith and belief. Not through, not through political means.

Or my servants would be fighting, he says. Not through a social construct, for His kingdom was not of this world, he says. Not through economic means, for He came into it with nothing and left it with nothing.

But through preaching, in this little passage, the fullness of the gospel explodes.

[26 : 11] People are set at liberty through the simple, foolish proclamation of liberty that is offered to us in Christ.

Christ. This is the pattern of Jesus. This is the pattern of Luke. Just keep reading Luke Acts. Watch how He changes the world.

Why do you think you get these long extended sermons throughout the book of Acts? Because liberation is given. The cancellation of debt that you owe to God is restored through the proclamation of a word that in Christ it's fulfilled.

And if you want anything more from that than Christianity, well, it doesn't promise it.

So I make this announcement to you today. Are you receiving that liberty? are you speaking of that liberty?

[27 : 30] There is no point in service without speech if you intend to actually be articulating a Christian message.

Well, Jesus was attractive to people people. He had an announcement that was available to people. The text goes on and you see in miniature form what become two responses to that message.

First of all, you can see it there in 23 and 24, Jesus anticipates their rejection of him. And then 25 to 27, he indicates that outsiders will be the recipients of what God has to give through him.

Two responses here and even today. You find Jesus attractive? even now that you know the nature of his full announcement?

Jesus anticipates that the religious insiders will reject him and then God by divine initiative will find recipients among the outsiders for him.

[28 : 50] Notice 23 and 24, it's not really a rejection here of all of Israel, at least not yet. I mean, it's not even the entirety of the religious guild.

This is just one synagogue, one church, one pastoral staff, if I could put it that way. His hometown pastors said, you know what, this is not going to be something we're going to go down well with.

I mean, Jesus actually anticipates it. Doubtless you will quote to me the proverb physician, heal yourself. You know, we think of doctors and we say things like, you know, a doctor, they know how to take care of everyone but themselves.

You ever notice that about doctors? I mean, you know, their own health just goes to pot. You know, they don't even look at themselves. But boy, they can take care of you. Well, this is an ancient proverb. Physician, heal yourself.

Hey, pay attention to your own need, not just doing other things. But Jesus actually goes beyond that. He says, hey, there's going to come a day where you actually want me to do things that are of lesser import in regard to why I came.

[30 : 03] It's an accusation. If you really were the son of God, why wouldn't you straighten things out? At least for yourself. Or why wouldn't you do it here?

You do stuff other places, but when you come home, you do nothing. What, are we supposed to sit around and sit at your feet? Why don't you do today for us, at a human level, what we hear you doing out there, so grand and great.

Jesus anticipates the rejection of him. Later, you're going to see in Luke that what starts here grows and what finishes in Paul in Romans is almost laid out as an entire nation that will not have Jesus on his terms.

He anticipates the rejection of him, but 25 through 27 he indicates that outsiders are going to be the recipients of what God has to give through him. Look at the two examples.

This is his illustrations in his sermon, his first sermon in his home church. While it may be the rejection on one hand, there's going to be reception on the other. There are a lot of widows in Israel, the religious insiders, who will not have Jesus as their Savior, but there will be people on the outside, the Galileans, the pluralistic ones who didn't grow up with him.

[31 : 37] They're going to get hold of it. So he shows you one from Sidon, Naaman, and he shows you another, well they're both from Sidon, but from Zarephath, these out of the way places of people who were not the people of promise.

Guess what? You reject Jesus, he's going anyway, and he's going to the uttermost parts of the world. I guess I would say he comes to you.

people are attracted to him. There's an announcement of massive proportion made by him.

There are two responses you can give concerning him. And the emphasis of the text, of course, 28 and 30, shows that they land on the first response, there is a wrath induced sentence of death that is pronounced upon him.

When they heard all these things in the synagogue, they were filled with wrath, and they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built so that they could throw him down the cliff, but passing through their midst, he went away.

[33 : 07] So much for being the hometown hero. Well, it started great, didn't it? Verse 14, I mean, the word was good, glorified by all.

One sermon, he went from a full house to a remnant gathering. How'd you like that? It'd be the close of your first recorded sermon.

What a fall, the distance between 414 and the end. What a scene, in miniature form. For indeed, it shows us we can expect what we can expect in the gospel.

They will seek him out unto death, but in the end, they will not be able to do him in. Let me close.

Let me close. let me put it clearly for you this morning.

[34 : 29] God says, although you may be attracted to him, and though you now understand the announcement that came from him, one of two responses will be made by you concerning him.

And if you reject him, know this, you cannot overcome him. in fact, there will be a day when you stand on the precipice of that final eschatological edge, and it will be you, not him, who falls headlong into an abyss.

and he will go on forever with those who embrace him.

May you in your heart this day enthrone him. Our heavenly father, this, this text just gets bigger and bigger and bigger, bigger.

And I pray that as Luke's gospel falls right out of it, you would give us opportunity over the next weeks and months to just saturate ourselves in it.

[35 : 53] We thank you that we see here a concern that you have for the outsider. And I pray that each heart would be attentive to him with faith in Christ's name.

Amen.