

Responding to the Son's Manifesto

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Date: 24 January 2021

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[0:00] It would be great if you could keep that piece of paper in front of you or open in your Bibles to Luke chapter 4. Well, a manifesto is a publicly declared mission statement that teaches us what a company or a leader is on about.

So on the next slide is the mission statement for Coca-Cola to refresh the world, to inspire moments of optimism and happiness, to create value and make a difference.

I'm not sure a sugary drink can do all that. But anyway, that's what they're on about. Last week, Joe Biden was sworn in as the 46th American president at his inauguration, and there he gave a speech which was like his manifesto, what he wanted to be and do as a president.

Take a look. And I pledge this to you. I will be a president for all Americans, all Americans. And I promise you, I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did.

My fellow Americans, I close the day where I began with the sacred oath. Before God and all of you, I give you my word.

[1:26] I will always level with you. I will defend the Constitution. I'll defend our democracy. I'll defend America. I will give all, all of you.

Keep everything I do in your service. Thinking not of power, but of possibilities. Not of personal interest, but of public good. And together, we shall write an American story of hope, not fear.

Of unity, not division. Of light, not darkness. a story of decency and dignity, love and healing, greatness and goodness. May this be the story that guides us, the story that inspires us, and the story that tells ages yet to come, that we answer the call of history.

We met the moment. Democracy and hope, truth and justice did not die on our watch but thrived. That America secured liberty at home and stood once again as a beacon to the world.

That is what we owe our forebearers, one another and generation to follow. So, with purpose and resolve, we turn to those tasks of our time.

[2:45] Sustained by faith, driven by conviction, devoted to one another and the country we love with all our hearts. May God bless America and may God protect our troops.

Thank you, America. No one quite does a speech like an American president, do they? But you heard his manifesto, didn't you?

He publicly declared what kind of president he wanted to be. One for all Americans, those who voted for him and those who didn't. To bring healing and love, unity, not division, light, not darkness.

For many in that country, it was a momentous manifesto. Though, as we've heard in the news, there have been varying responses to it.

Well, as we come to our passage today, we come to an even more momentous manifesto. For Jesus publicly declares who he is and his mission in the world.

[3:47] To bring good news to the poor, not just of America, but the whole world. Sight for the blind, freedom for the prisoner, favour from the Lord God himself.

And people respond to his manifesto differently too. In fact, our passage, though, is structured around three cycles of teaching and response, which the outline follows.

So point one on the outline, but flick over to verse 14 in the reading. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

He was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised him. As we heard Graham say, Jesus has just returned from not just temptation, but being baptised as the ultimate son of God, as we heard last week.

And now he's begun teaching as God's son this week. He taught in their synagogues throughout Galilee. And his teaching is so good, it got people talking, didn't it?

[4:53] In verse 14, we're told that news about him spread through the whole countryside. How good would it be to have him as a guest preacher? But it wasn't just his manner of teaching, his gracious words.

It was also the content of his teaching, which we do have every week in the Bible, don't we? And what was the content of his teaching? Well, it was the good news of God's kingdom.

How do we know? Well, because later on in this chapter, on the next slide, he says it. He says that he must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to other towns also.

So that's what he's doing in each town, you see. Preaching, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, which is what his manifesto is about.

But how did the people respond in verse 15? Well, quite positively, isn't it? Everyone praised him, literally glorified him. And I wonder if that's still our response to his teaching.

[5:57] You know, when we hear the good news of Jesus, do we still praise him? Do we still thank God for him? Even if we've heard the gospel news for the millionth time, do we still want to live for him?

Or is our response a little more like the next one, which is they're so familiar with him that it's not quite that positive? So point two, verse 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 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written.

We'll just pause here for a moment. Jesus returns home. And notice, by the way, that he goes to church regularly. A synagogue is his Jewish church.

And verse 16 says he goes as was his custom. Not the Jewish custom, his custom, his habit, if you like. A habit that which we should have if we can, especially after COVID.

[7:03] And so, well done for coming today, for making it your habit like Jesus. Even despite the heat. It's not too bad at the moment, actually. But also notice it says, Jesus found the place where it was written.

You see, Jesus deliberately turns to that part of Isaiah, doesn't he? What he's about to read is very intentional. Verse 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

As you, I'm sure you've recognized that by now, it's from our first reading from Isaiah chapter 61, where the poor are described in terms of being prisoners or blind or oppressed.

And the good news for the poor is described in terms of freedom for the prisoners, sight for the blind, freedom for the oppressed, which if you're in any of those situations is good news indeed, isn't it?

[8 : 10] And what stands behind it all, though, is that last line, the year of the Lord's favor. In the Old Testament, the year of the Lord's favor referred to the year of Jubilee, which took place in Israel every 50 years.

And we read about it in Leviticus on the next slide, where God says to Israel, consecrate the 50th year every 50 years and proclaim liberty, or literally freedom, throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

It shall be a Jubilee for you. And so the year of Jubilee was a year of cancelled debt. You see, the poor in Israel would often have to sell themselves into slavery to cover costs, or they would have to sell their land to pay off any debts.

But every 50 years, the year of Jubilee, slaves were to be set free. Land was to be given back, all because debt was cancelled.

Imagine if our banks did that for us today. How could that be? But by the time of Isaiah, it took on a spiritual significance. You see, Israel were taken into exile, into Babylon, because of their sin.

[9 : 25] And so while people in Israel may have been physically prisoners in Babylon, and may have physically been blind and oppressed too, their physical condition really reflected a spiritual one, their sin.

And so for Isaiah, the poor were those who were poor in spirit, as Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel. Those who knew they were sinners. Those who were spiritually imprisoned and oppressed by sin.

And so God promised to send one anointed by his spirit, Isaiah says. And that one anointed by his spirit in Isaiah is both the servant, as we saw last week, but also the Messiah, or the King.

In fact, the Hebrew word for anointed is where we get the word Messiah from. And God promised to send this servant Messiah, this servant King, to proclaim the year of cancelled debt.

The year of God's favour. The year of Jubilee, where the debt of sin that sent them to exile would be cancelled. They would be set free to be God's people again.

[10 : 33] This is the passage Jesus read that day. It's a momentous passage. But what happens next is even more momentous. For as was the custom in the synagogue, after reading the passage standing up, you then sit down to teach.

Look at verse 20 and 21. Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. Notice how Luke slows down the action. 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. Now, no doubt Jesus continued to teach after that, but Luke just records the punchline, the bombshell, that today this passage has been fulfilled in your hearing.

In other words, Jesus has just made that passage in Isaiah his manifesto. Jesus is saying that he is God's anointed one, the servant king.

He's here today. That's why it's fulfilled in their hearing. And he has come to proclaim good news of freedom from sin and favor from God.

[11 : 53] It's a momentous manifesto. I don't know if you noticed, but Jesus actually stopped short when he quotes Isaiah 61. So on the next slide there, in the yellow there, he stopped at the first line and didn't say the second line.

I don't know if you noticed that. For as Luke will go on to show, Jesus came the first time to pay for our sins in our place at the cross, didn't he? So that our debt of sin that each of us has might be canceled, forgiven, that we might have favor from God.

And he will come a second time to bring judgment, the day of vengeance or judgment of God, where he puts the world right. But today he's saying, for now, favor from God is available.

This is a massive manifesto. The company Sony has a slogan on the next slide, make and believe. And the manifesto is to be a company that inspires and fulfills your curiosity.

It's kind of meh. I mean, that's nice. But compare that one to this one. I am God's anointed king.

[13:07] Come to proclaim freedom and favor for life eternal. It's chalk and cheese, isn't it? Now, the way we can have our debt canceled from sin, the debt of sin canceled, the way we receive favor from God is, of course, to believe in Jesus and his word about himself and his mission, to believe he is the servant king who brings favor from God.

But people can only believe it if they hear it, can't they? That's why his mission is to proclaim it. I don't know if you noticed the threefold repetition.

I've got it on the screen highlighted for you on the next slide. Sorry, Tim, you have to... Notice, three times we're told to proclaim that they might hear it, believe and receive it.

You see, Jesus' primary mission is not to heal the sick, not to reform the Roman government, not to unify the nation like Joe Biden, all of which, don't mishear me, they're all good things to do.

And certainly, Jesus does heal the sick. But as we saw before on the next slide there, from later in this same chapter, he was healing the sick, yes, but then Jesus said, I must proclaim the good news because that is why I was sent.

[14:31] It's why as a church this new year, our manifesto stays the same, if you like. Our mission statement on the next slide, to go gathering growing Christ, how?

By prayerfully proclaiming and promoting God's word, the good news in love. Don't mishear me again, not to the exclusion of caring for others.

We need to keep doing that. That's essential that we practice what we speak. But our primary mission is to proclaim the good news as a church, through our various ministries, and even as individuals, that people might hear it and have a chance to believe it.

Well, Luke has been preparing us as readers for this moment, actually, by constantly reminding us, on the next slide there, sorry, Tim, on the next slide, by reminding us that the Spirit is on Jesus from the very beginning.

Remember, the Spirit ascended him on the baptism. Luke tells us twice that Jesus is full of the Holy Spirit, led by the Spirit, and even at the start of our passage, he returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.

[15:42] That we might, you know, realize that when he says, the Spirit of the Lord is on me, in verse 18, of course it is. We've seen it all the way through. But how will his hometown respond?

Verse 22. All spoke well of him, and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. Isn't this Joseph's son?

They asked. Now here, the response isn't really one of praise, like we saw before, is it? It's a step down. Yes, they're amazed at his gracious words, but then they say, look, isn't this just Joe's son though?

In other words, they can't seem to reconcile what they hear with the person they know. I used to teach a youth group, one of my old churches, and there was one youth group kid who was a bit of a goose.

He completely disorganized. There was the class clown, that kind of guy. If someone dared him to eat food from the rubbish bin, he would do it. So I couldn't believe it. Some years later, when I went to a youth ministry conference, and he was the keynote speaker.

[16:51] I know you. You're that goose of a kid. I can't take you seriously. And for a moment, my familiarity meant I dismissed him. As the old saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt.

And that seems to be the hometown's response here. Yes, your words are gracious, Jesus, but we know you. You're Joe's son from down the road.

We can't take you seriously. Here is a response of familiarity that dismisses him. I wonder though, if we too can become like him, like them rather.

Oh sure, we believe he is more than Joseph's son. We know he's God's son. But after a while, we too can become so familiar with him and with his teaching that we can inadvertently dismiss him.

Yeah, yeah, Jesus says to forgive others. I know that, but I am so angry. I'm going to get them back anyway. Or on the flip side, yes, I know Jesus promises to forgive me all my sins, but can he really forgive me of that one sin?

[18:05] Or yes, Jesus's words are really gracious, but I've heard it all before. I think I'll look for something new or culturally more acceptable. Here are responses of familiarity that dismiss him or his teaching.

And given this response to his manifesto, Jesus teaches them again. Point three, verse 23. Jesus said to them, surely you will quote this proverb to me, physician, heal yourself.

And you will tell me, do here in your hometown, what we have heard that you did in Capernaum. It's as though Jesus is saying here, look, I know what you're thinking. You think I should prove myself.

And the way a physician might heal himself to prove he's a physician. So you want me to do some miracles like I did in Capernaum to prove that I'm God's Messiah, God's servant king.

But Jesus knows it won't make a difference. He knows they're just using it as an excuse not to believe. I've met people like that.

[19:12] No matter how much evidence I give them for Jesus, they always want one bit more. Why? Because they're not really interested in believing.

And so Jesus instead teaches them a warning. Verse 24. Truly I tell you, he continued, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha, the prophet. Yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian, he says.

See, during the time of Elijah, people rejected God's word spoken by God's prophets and they went and served other gods, Baal. And so there was a severe famine in the land that was meant to wake them up, turn them back to God.

And even though there would have been many widows in need in Israel during this famine, God sent Elijah to a widow outside of Israel to Sidon, which on the screen, it's a bit hard to see, it's in Lebanon, which is the pinky red, orange, that color at the top of your screen, Israel's in the white.

[20:33] So in other words, he sent them to a Gentile, a non-Jew. And so the warning is, if you reject God's word spoken not by God's prophet, but God's king, then you'll miss out on God's favor like Israel did.

And it will go to Gentiles instead. As same with Elisha. During his time, there were many in Israel suffering from leprosy, but God sent Elisha to heal a leper called Naaman from Syria, which is the dark purple at the top of your screen.

In other words, another non-Jew or Gentile. And so again, the warning is, if you reject God's word spoken by God's king, then you'll miss out on God's favor and it will go to Gentiles instead.

Yet instead of heeding the warning, look at how they respond. Verse 28. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw him off the cliff.

But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Here it seems they're so angry, they tried to kill him. They've certainly rejected him and his message, haven't they?

[21:52] But ironically, Jesus proves he is God's king again. Because did you notice, he simply walks through the crowd, doesn't he? It's like they're suddenly unwilling or unable to touch him.

But the question for us this morning is how are we responding? I doubt any of us here or listening online will respond with anger that wants to kill him.

Though perhaps some might be responding with indifference that still rejects him. If that's you, whether it's here or online, then do heed the warning.

Don't miss out on God's favor. His offer to cancel your debt of sin, otherwise it will go to others and you'll have to pay the debt yourself on the day of God's vengeance or judgment, as we heard from Isaiah.

So instead, believe in Jesus, trust in him and find favor from God. And for us, most of us here this morning who do believe, then we're not to respond with familiarity that sometimes dismisses Jesus or parts of his teaching, but we're to respond with praise that lovingly proclaims him as we have opportunity.

[23:17] I mean, imagine your bank decided to cancel your home line or that of a child or grandchild or niece or nephew. I mean, you'd be telling the story whenever the chance arose, wouldn't you?

Now I realize Jesus cancelling our debt of sin, we've heard it all before, and it's a bit more abstract for people than a cancelled home loan by ANZ or whoever.

And not everyone wants to hear about Jesus, so it can be harder to share it. And yet, a cancelled home loan gives people some financial freedom for this life, but cancelled sin gives spiritual freedom for eternal life.

It's chalk and cheese, isn't it? We're to respond with praise that proclaims him as we have opportunity and praise that lives for him. As we sometimes pray in the general thanksgiving, we are to praise him not only with our lips, but with our lives as well.

We are to thank God with our lips for Jesus, but we are also to live for him too. Lives that please him, which in turn bring honour to him.

[24:38] Lives that give him a good name so that people might become interested in hearing of him. In other words, lives that bring him glory or praise. And if we're ever feeling overly familiar or finding it hard to praise him, then remember two things.

One, how serious our debt of sin was. And two, how much he loves us to pay the horrific cost of it for us.

Our debt, his love, that we might not become too familiar with him, but continue to praise him. In the words of our next hymn, love so amazing, so divine, it demands my life, my soul, my all.

Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning of who Jesus is and what he came to do, his manifesto.

Help us, we pray, to respond rightly to him by praising him not only with our lips, but in our lives as well. For we ask it in his name.

[25:51] Amen.