

What Is Jesus Asking Us To Do

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] But beyond these words we seek the person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So by the in-breathing of your Holy Spirit, bring us to the place where we are being taught by him, and instructed by him, and in communion and fellowship with him, and so with one another. In his name we ask it. Amen. Which is in the series that we're doing on these Sunday evenings. It's the Gospel according to St. Luke, and it's the fourth chapter, beginning at the 14th verse.

I preached the first sermon of my life 42 years ago. So I've been doing this a long time, and I tell you that because the curse that afflicts me most now is that I've heard all this before.

And I feel the weight of it sometimes when you come to a very familiar passage like the one we are to deal with tonight. But then I want to tell you that the necessity and discipline of standing up to preach to you tonight forces me to go at the passage again, even though the terrible familiarity makes me think, I've heard all this before.

[1 : 31] And that once you have, I mean, in my experience, once you have taken it upon yourself to look at it anew and afresh, it's not long before you wonder if you've ever read it before, and ever seen what is there.

And so my prayer for you tonight is that you will read it as you have never read it before, and you will hear and experience through this Word of God something of the present reality of God.

I think one of the trouble that Jesus had with his contemporaries was that they read the Bible. You know, I often told that we have this lady on Thursday morning at breakfast where you get full breakfast at 7 o'clock, and you're all welcome to come.

That's part of the advertisement in the bulletin this week, so I pass it on to you. And she's always saying, well, you know so much, Harry. And I have to say yes, I guess you're right now.

But I'm lying through my teeth. I don't know that much. But I think the idea is that there is a secret here that the professional clergyman can see and that other people can't.

[2 : 46] And that because, you know, you examine it carefully, almost like a scientist who puts a specimen under a microscope and examines it carefully, you can see things there that other people can't.

And you dissect it and work at it, and you can see things that others can't see. And it's a bit helpful to one's pride if people think you're that wise.

But they are deceived. Because the purpose of the Word of God, as you have it in front of you tonight, preferably on your lap and open at page 58, is that through the Scriptures you encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

You don't discover secret meanings or hidden things. You discover the person of Jesus Christ. That's what it's for. And you can use all the faculty of mind and imagination and emotion and everything else.

And God can use all that by the Holy Spirit to bring you face to face with Jesus Christ. Now this is an interesting passage tonight because in it Jesus is preaching a sermon.

[3 : 59] And if you want to learn from him how to preach a sermon, then look at this passage because it will tell you a great deal about how that works.

How the peculiar communication takes place which is at the heart of Christian faith. The communication where a believer by faith through the Word encounters the person of Jesus Christ. It's very important that you understand that. Because it's not like the Encyclopedia of Britannica where you don't encounter anybody.

You encounter knowledge. And that may be very edifying and very helpful. In fact, no doubt is. But this is different. Because the purpose of this Word of God is that you are to encounter the person of God.

And so the passage begins with Jesus returning to Nazareth where he had been brought up. And he went to the synagogue as his custom was on the Sabbath day.

[5 : 09] And I reminded the confirmation class this morning, which meets every Sunday morning at 9 o'clock and you'd be welcome. That's the commercial number two. I reminded them this morning that the earliest record of Jewish synagogue worship is in the New Testament.

I think that's a delightful little anomaly. But I pass it on to you for what it's worth. Here they were in the synagogue in Nazareth. And to get to Nazareth, I know because we were there two years ago, you take a bus and it winds up and up and up and it's very, very steep.

And you get right up almost as it seems on the top of a hill. And there is this city set on a hill. And it's not that big a city, but there it is.

Well, Jesus was there. He was in the synagogue. He was teaching. It was the Sabbath day. And the pattern of it all was that the scriptures were passed to him.

The first reading, we used to have a first lesson and a second lesson. We now have two or three lessons in our new book of alternative services. But the synagogues had two, one from the law and one from the prophets.

[6 : 23] And apparently the lesson from the law had been read. And so the scroll of the prophets was given to Jesus. And he opened it at Isaiah chapter 60.

And people wonder whether he was preaching according to the lectionary of the day. The lectionary is the thing that you find in the front of the prayer book which tells you what lesson is read on what Sunday.

Whether he was speaking according to the lectionary of the day or whether he chose the passage himself. But he was given the scroll. He opened it and he read.

And I'd like you to read it with me just so you get it thoroughly into your mind. Verse 18 of chapter 4. Together. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind. To set at liberty those who are oppressed. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

[7 : 27] And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. Do you know why a cathedral is called a cathedral? This is another bit of wonderful information that will edify you for the rest of your life.

It's called a cathedral because that's where the bishop sits down. It's his, the bishop's seat. And this was the seat from which the bishop was to teach.

And so that in the synagogue, the preacher sat down. And Jesus sat down. And you get the fact that there was wonderful attention paid to him.

When they, when you read in the, in the story, the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. He had their attention.

So he sat down and they all looked at him. And of course they knew who he was. That comes out later in the story. The eyes of all were fixed on him. And he said, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

[8 : 40] Well, that's the first great principle of scripture. What it says, it does.

What it says, it is. God's word is not like our words. It just flowed off into the ether, so to speak.

It's the endless number of them. God's word becomes a reality. God's word is the reality. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.

This is the substantial reality by which we live, which is the word of God. And Jesus tells them as he reads this passage, This word has substantial reality right here and right now.

This word has been fulfilled. This word which was spoken long ago is fulfilled now. And so Jesus tells them.

[9 : 49] Well, then what happens is the response to this, sort of a quick survey of the congregation, and you find that the congregation are thinking well of the preacher.

All spoke well of him, wondered at the words of grace that came from his mouth. It was great. Communication was happening.

And then they said, He's not this Joseph's son. And I suspect it means there's something wrong here.

He shouldn't be able to speak like this. Well, Jesus responds immediately to the congregation. And he said, and listen to him, it's him that says all this, according to St. Luke.

Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here, also in your own country.

[11:02] So he puts words into the mouth of the congregation. He sees them, and their eyes are fixed on him, but also what's going on in their minds is revealed to him too.

I don't think that's particularly miraculous. I just think it was that Christ knew men, and knew what was in their hearts. Luke has already told us. He knew what was in their hearts.

And he told them that that's what was in their hearts. That we want to see some of the works you did at Capernaum. We want to see them done here.

So the sermon goes on. And he says, I want to tell you the truth. Face this reality. Now in facing this reality, there were two stories by which he was going to bring them to this reality.

If you have ever been a Sunday school teacher, you'll know that these are two lovely stories, that it's lovely to tell children. The story of the widow of Zarephath, who, when Elijah came to her and said, I am the prophet, get me something to eat.

[12:17] And she was out picking up a few sticks from the ground. Because she had a little meal and a little oil, and she was going to cook it to feed her son and herself before the devastating onslaught of famine took over, and she and her son were done.

And the prophet said to her, first, give some to me. You may not think that's a very prophetic behavior, but that's what he did. And she did.

And you will know the wonderful story that while the famine lasted, her little cruise of oil and her little bit of grain never faded. And it provided for her through all the days of that famine.

They said, oh yeah, that's a lovely story. I've known that story all my life. I really love that story.

Great story. He went on, and he said, and you know the story of Naaman the Syrian, the great general in the Syrian army, powerful, loved, and respected by his master, the king of Syria.

And yet, there was on him that first telltale sign of leprosy. And the consequences of that were dreaded.

[13:43] We all now in our day look for the telltale signs of disease in which we read our faith. I find one about every week in my life. I don't know how often you find them in here.

But this is the end. I know it's over now. But this was for real with Naaman. And he had this dreaded affliction.

And it was a household girl, a servant in the house, that said, I would you were in Israel. And the commendator said, this is the lovely part of it.

I said, nobody had ever heard of this happening in Israel, but this girl who was a captive in a way in a foreign country working for some foreign people said, back home they'd be able to handle that.

And how she knew that nobody knows, but she did.

And so the king wrote letters and a kind of king's ransom was gathered and the great general with all his panoply of guards around him went down into Israel and the king of Israel was frightened out of his mind and, but by a wonderful series of things which Christ has already read to you, he was wonderfully healed.

[14:58] They said, oh yeah, we love that story. Love that story. Great story. And then Jesus put in the knife and said, there were lots of people starving in Israel and none of them were fed.

There were lots of lepers in Israel and none of them were healed. And the mood of the congregation suddenly changed. because that story which they had been familiar with all their lives was suddenly turned on them and they were terribly convicted by it.

That's why the Bible is very dangerous. I told somebody, I don't know who it was, about the wonderful picture of, I guess I told the Wednesday noon Bible study about it.

The wonderful picture of, that Soren Kierkegaard illustrates of how what we really should do is we should take the Bible and we should all go up onto the top of a high mountain and we should take the Bible and say to God, here, give it back we don't want it anymore.

We want to get rid of it. It's too hard. And I'm sure these people were ready to take this word from God and say, take it back, we don't want it anymore because of what Christ had done.

[16:32] Well, that's how the story goes and suddenly the mood of the whole congregation changed. When they heard this, those who had been saying what gracious words, where did he get this learning?

The same people it said, when they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. Now that word wrath is a wonderful word.

I mean, it's a wonderful word, not in what it is, but in, it's a wonderful New Testament word. It's a very surprising word. You know, when you read of murder and rape and violence, the New Testament says it all comes out of this one word.

It's the uncontrollable rage which takes over and forces people to do what they would never have dreamt of doing. there's an interesting article in the province today about how to detect families in which the father is liable to turn and murder members of his own family in a pit of violence.

They've figured out what the symptoms are, but it belongs to so many people you don't get them. because there are so many people have the potential for such disastrous things.

[18:04] And that's this word, wrath. They were filled with it. It took over in their lives. Do you want to know another lovely place where this word appears?

It appears in the Ten Commandments when it says, Thou shalt not cover. Be filled with this surging, powerful violence that takes over your life.

and they were filled with this rock. That's what the sermon did for them. And the sermon was now over.

It's thought that this was Jesus' first sermon in Nazareth, and undoubtedly it was his last. They only wanted to hear one. And I guess most people only want to hear one sermon, unless they're prepared to do something.

They rose up and put him out of the city and led him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built. And as you drive up in the bus up to Nazareth, they point out to you on the right hand side as you're going up towards it from Jerusalem area.

[19:26] They point out to you this very sort of, it gives you the same sense of awe that the big mountain that the Chieftain, isn't that it?

The one up at Squamish. Only this one has great sort of pinnacles of rock. And it's just a dreadful looking place.

And that's pointed out to you as the place to which Jesus was led in order that they could throw him down headlong. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built that they might throw him down headlong.

But passing through the midst of them, he went away. And you see, the wonderful thing about this is that it comes to the point, because this action of the congregation is simply a foreshadowing of the cross.

It was, that they wanted to put him to death. This was a foreshadowing of the screaming crowd in Jerusalem that cried, crucify, him, crucify him.

[20:45] That same word, rock, which had taken hold, and it's the word for mob violence, which took hold of them and took them outside the city and took them to the edge of the hill where they might throw him down to his death.

And it was a foreshadowing of the cross. And a terribly profound way of saying to us in very simple terms.

At the end of our encounter with Jesus Christ, somebody has to be crucified. It's you or him. That's the way it is.

And that's what Christ, that's how Christ preached to him, and that's how the sermon was conveyed to him. And on the basis of that encounter, that's got to happen.

And it's not fun, really. It's deadly serious. And it's, you see, the difficulty is that Jesus wanted, undoubtedly, to do something for this congregation at Nazareth, as undoubtedly he wants to do something for all of us here tonight, individually or corporately.

[22:20] He wants to do something for us. But they couldn't hear him. And their expectations of him were for something dramatic, something interesting.

Do for us what you did in Capernaum. He says, I can't. Because a prophet is not without honor, except in his own house. And this terrible familiarity, which we come into, you know, it's dangerous coming here to church on Sunday evenings like this.

You can just get inoculated against the gospel. You can become familiar with the story. And never be brought to the place where you recognize the consequences of it.

Perhaps we're not hearing as we are meant to hear. And perhaps Jesus is not able to do for us what it is his purpose to do.

And on those grounds, there's not much point coming back next week. I mean, there is that. There is that reality. That Jesus has things he wants to do in your life and mine.

[23 : 39] We must be open to that. We must allow him. Remember how difficult it was for Nahum and the Syrian man. When Elisha said, go and dip seven times in the river Jordan, he said, me?

In that river? You must be out of your mind. And in high indignation, he drove up and spun his wheels as he went. No, that would come. until somebody was wise enough to put his arm around him and say, Nahum, if you had been asked to do some great thing, would you not have done it? how much more when you're asked to do this little thing should you do it? And it may be some very little thing that Christ is asking you to do, humbling and beneath your pride and dignity and the intellectual stature of you are unable to do it.

And the widow of Zarephath, who when Elisha came to him and said, give it to me. My son is dying. I am dying.

This is all we have. I cannot give this to you. This is all there is between us and starvation.

Nevertheless, Elisha said, give it to me first.

[25 : 09] And she was given grace to do that. And as we all take part in the communion tonight, it's our business. to know what things Jesus, as Lord, is asking us to do in response to him.

And I don't think it's going to turn out to be a cosmic event. I don't think it's probably going to hit the headlines of the process.

us. But it can be something of far greater significance since today's headlines are tomorrow's garbage.

things. But in our willingness to hear and to allow Jesus to speak to us, we can find some way ahead in our life of obedience to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Amen. Now if you could turn please to page 234 in the Book of Alternative Services.

[26 : 36] Please stand so that together we confess our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed. I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, light of life, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made, who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven, incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin, and was made man, was crucified also, for us and a conscious pile, he suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father, and he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end, and I believe in will you kneel, peace.

While I'm getting myself organized, if you would be quiet a moment and try and recall what the sermon has, what God has said to you through the sermon, just take about a minute, think about what you're going to do with that word that you've heard.

host, good vorsûk, honk, leave a hand ann v yours k■■ Pittsburgh kor Will cross work modeling physics paintings cutting canopy phenomena Farm offic■■hus Thank you.

This is a prayer written by St. Augustine.