

Luke 4:14-30 - The Blueprint for Kingdom Ministry

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Turn with me this morning to Luke chapter 4. Luke 4. We have seen recently in Luke's gospel, Jesus as the promised Messiah, the beloved Son of God.

Seen Him confirmed in that identity through His faithful obedience and temptation, right? As He succeeded in the wilderness and the places that we have failed.

Ron did such a great job with that, walking us through that. This morning we look at a passage where Jesus lays out His plan for public ministry. He gives the blueprint for kingdom ministry, you could say.

This is what I'm going to do as the anointed deliverer, moving the kingdom of God forward. Here's what it's going to look like. It's a really helpful outline and list of priorities that the gospel story bears out.

[1 : 08] We're going to see themes we talk about this morning time and time again through the gospel of Luke. Luke. And Jesus sticks to His promises in His ministry as Luke 4 becomes a consistent pattern for Jesus.

And of course then for His church as well. What does kingdom ministry look like for us? If we're to be His followers, then our role is to see His kingdom advanced.

And He's the one who shows us and tells us what that's going to look like, right? What things should characterize the ministry of Southwood Presbyterian Church?

What things should characterize the lives of her members? That sounds easy and exciting, right?

What's it all going to be like? Tell us the plan. Let's go. Well, listen as we read because some of the people who first heard the plan were excited too.

By the end of the day though, they wanted to kill Jesus rather than follow His plan. Read with me this remarkable day, Luke 4 at verse 14.

[2 : 12] This is God's holy word. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee and a report about Him went through 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.

[3 : 24] 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. Thus far, God's holy word. Let's pray and ask for His help. Father, that is our heart.

That is the posture in which we come to Your word, needing Your help. We don't just need help to understand the words and to make sense of them.

[4 : 39] We need Your help, Holy Spirit. That they might have their intended impact on our hearts. That they might show us our sin.

That they might show us our Savior. That we might see and hope in Him. That we might be changed as a result of meeting with You.

Holy Spirit, speak. Would You speak even through one such as me, who wrestles and struggles with this passage, perhaps more than anyone else in the room.

Would You use me to speak? Would You speak to me by Your Spirit and also through me, that we might hear Your voice. That's our need, to hear from You.

And so we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. So Jesus begins His public ministry here, traveling around to different towns.

[5 : 39] And regularly when He gets there, He's teaching, right? Particularly His habit is going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. That's where you find Jesus. He's showing up to teach.

So many sermons, Luke doesn't record all of them, but He gives us one particular account here from Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. So this first sermon kind of sets the agenda, is the blueprint, His priorities for His ministry, how God's kingdom is going to come.

There are priorities that are to be hopeful and exciting, just as we've been promised already in the Gospel of Luke. There's good stuff coming. Jesus says, here's the message, the time has come.

What you've been waiting for, those last days you've heard promised through the Old Testament Scriptures, they're here. Salvation is coming, now, through me.

That's what He's declaring. It's really exciting, right? What they've all been waiting for. Don't forget these priorities as we go through Luke, because this is the paradigm that Jesus is setting up.

[6 : 47] Priorities for kingdom ministry. First, the ministry of His kingdom begins, and ends, with a Christ-centered focus. Look what He selects from the prophet Isaiah, verse 18.

He opens to Isaiah 61, and says, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He 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 Jesus reads that, and then He rolls up the scroll that He's been given. He gives it back to the synagogue leader, as He would every week. And then this is what happens. In these synagogues, you stand for the reading of God's Word, and then you sit down to give the sermon.

I'm not going to put that into practice this morning. You might feel a little awkward. But you sit down to preach. So that's what Jesus does. And everyone's looking to Him. What's He going to say now? And He began this way, today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

Notice what He's saying in the passage that He selected from Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me. He has sent me to do all of these things.

[8 : 06] And Jesus, having read that, says, today, this Scripture about me, fulfilled in your hearing. That's where the kingdom begins, right?

The anointed one, the promised Messiah, the King has come. And the ministry of the kingdom never goes forward apart from the King.

That sounds obvious, right? Well, that was really profound. But we can never lose sight of that. Churches can do lots of things. We can have a lot of fun doing a lot of things.

But if we're not about the worship of King Jesus, the proclamation of King Jesus, the demonstration of the impact of King Jesus on our lives and our world, then it's not kingdom ministry that we're doing.

You can't have the kingdom without the King. He sets the agenda. He provides the grace. He gets the glory. And no one else. Everything we do and say corporately must point to Him, not the preacher.

[9 : 15] Everything we do and say individually must point to Him, not the church member. We live in His strength rather than our own and for His glory rather than our own.

Secondly, the ministry of the kingdom features both word and deed. Constantly, the kingdom has a message to proclaim and an impact to make.

It sounds like something and it feels like something. Maybe the most obvious parallel is in the descriptions in verse 18.

You'll see right there Jesus has been sent to proclaim liberty and then later to provide liberty, to set at liberty.

He is both announcing it and bringing it. He's announcing that there's good news and He's actually bringing it into existence to reality.

[10 : 17] The word aspect of the kingdom, constantly present as Jesus, as He is here, preaches and teaches, calls to repentance, offers eternal hope, proclaims the good news of salvation.

And the deeds accompany the words. He actually cures sick people while promising healing. He actually feeds hungry people while proclaiming Himself as the bread of life.

He actually eats with the poor and the oppressed while teaching love for a neighbor, right? Do you see the priority of word and deed together? There's a message to proclaim here.

Good news, the King is here. Forgiveness for the worst sinner. Freedom for those in bondage.

Jubilee for the biggest debtors.

That's a strange word, right? Jubilee, where'd you get that? That's what the hearers in that Jewish synagogue would have heard when Jesus read the year of the Lord's favor at the end of verse 19.

[11 : 19] Jubilee, right? Every 50 years, debts forgiven. Slave set free. Land returned to the owner. All of those things happening because the message must be accompanied by an experience of the same thing.

A foretaste of glory. Let me say it this way. Forgiveness as the message can feel like a friend or a family member who finds you in shame and hiding and patiently accepts you and stays with you even in the midst of your struggle.

Forgiveness can feel like that. Freedom can feel like societal systems that treat you equally regardless of your race or your background.

Jubilee as the message can feel like communities who welcome a refugee or an outsider and help him find a place to fit in.

Hearing about King Jesus and experiencing the reality of King Jesus must go together. Think about the priority of word and deed together in terms of marriage reconciliation.

[12 : 33] We know that this would be true. It's a good picture of it for us. Imagine Billy and Sally are married and Billy has an affair and Sally finds out.

But they want to work things out. And so the message Billy needs to communicate is love. Right? But we know talk is cheap.

That's what we say. If Billy just begins to say 30 times a day, I love you, I love you, I love you. But nothing ever changes in the way he acts. He's doing all of the same things that he has been doing. His words, the message won't be believed, will it? It'll fall on deaf ears. But the opposite is true too.

If Billy starts washing the dishes all the time, even when they're not dirty, and he starts doing everything that Sally wants and trying to be this perfect husband, and yet he still spews hatred towards her and says hateful things all of the time, it won't work.

The deeds will fall flat. They'll seem fake. In fact, even if he's just silent and never once says, I love you, she'll start to wonder about the message all these kind deeds are communicating, won't she?

[13 : 50] If she says to him, I love you, and his response is to ignore it or just to smile and carry on, she's going to begin to wonder, what's this game? What's he up to with all these things he's doing?

He won't even tell me that he loves me. If the message is love, word and deed must go together.

You can't neglect either.

In Jesus' kingdom, it's always word and deed. We're going to see that throughout the Gospel of Luke. So one last priority of kingdom ministry here in this passage.

It runs graciously toward the needy to provide help. Whether it's words or deeds, who's the object of all of these things that Jesus is doing in his ministry here in this passage?

Look at verse 18 again. Who is it that's going to receive all of the things Jesus is doing? Proclaim good news to the poor. Proclaim liberty to the captives.

[14 : 52] Recovering of sight to the blind. Set at liberty, those who are oppressed. The poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed.

Later in the conversation, he'll use examples of a hungry widow, a desperate leper. This is the reality of the jubilee Jesus is proclaiming.

The playing field is leveled, right? It's reset. It's another evidence of what we've been talking about as the theme of Luke. Good news of great joy for whom?

For all people. And that's exciting, right? Hopefully you feel a little bit of what Jesus' audience apparently felt when they heard it.

Awesome! The Messiah is here. Good things are happening. Needs are being met. This sounds great. Good news for all sorts of people. I'm so excited, Jesus.

[15 : 48] They all responded that way. But apparently, this is also the tipping point for the Jews in the synagogue. They're riding high, right?

Excitement is palpable in the pews. I'm sure they had pews in the synagogue. In fact, the guy behind all of this is Joseph's son, right? This is our guy. We know him.

He grew up here. All of a sudden, here's our hometown hero. We're gonna be on the inside. You used to say, what good could possibly come from Nazareth?

You won't say that anymore. The guy we've all been waiting for, he's our guy. We're gonna be connected. This is our big chance.

They're so excited. He's got them right there. He could say anything he wanted. They'd do anything he asks. And all I can think is, Jesus must have passed the magical 30-minute mark in his sermon, and they all just turned against him.

[16 : 47] Like, that's not what happened. It's actually something much more intentional in Jesus' words, because he senses this opportunistic desire from the crowd.

He can tell they're thinking, yes, good news of great joy for all of us. All of us who've been waiting. We've been promised that there was something exciting coming.

That's what we've been waiting for, Jesus. And he says, you need to understand, I mean all people. Gentile dogs, as you call them.

Outsiders. I'm not here to fulfill Scripture only in Nazareth, but all over, and you won't like me for it, he says. Let me make sure you're hearing me.

Like the prophet Elijah bringing the kingdom to the Gentile widow. Like the prophet Elisha bringing the kingdom to the Gentile leper. I'm here to run toward those kind of needy outsiders.

[17 : 52] And it sends them over the edge, doesn't it? They can't take it. When Jesus runs graciously toward needy outsiders, some who want to be insiders feel left out.

They're so outraged, in fact, at this priority of Jesus' kingdom that they go from cheering him to chasing him out of town in order to kill him. You see, these Jews lived in a culture of a hierarchical social order.

Some people were in, others were out. Even in the synagogue where they're sitting listening to Jesus, where you sat in the synagogue was determined based on your gender, your birth, the qualifications that you had achieved in your life.

This structure of society and your social rank determined where you sat to eat, to whom you spoke or didn't speak, what kind of work you did or didn't do.

This is the world in which they lived. And they, those listening to Jesus, they were the religious insiders, weren't they? They were there in the synagogue and that religious insider status must be maintained.

[19 : 09] So they'd been rejoicing, right? After all these years, I'm finally getting what has been coming to me. And they are finally getting what has been coming to them.

And then they realized it was all social outsiders that Jesus mentioned coming to bless. And it wasn't just an accident, He really meant it.

It was no accident that Jesus left out that verse at the end in Isaiah 61 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and they know what was next and the day of vengeance of our God.

The Jews were ready for all the outsiders to get what was coming to them that day of vengeance. And Jesus says, that day is coming, but not yet. First, I'm running with grace towards them.

And the Jews can't stand it. They're outraged. They run Him towards a cliff in order to kill Him. When I first read this passage, I thought to myself, oh, that's good because I don't struggle with that.

[20 : 17] And neither does Southwood. We love God's grace. We love to see Him work. We love needy people to hear and feel the reality of the kingdom.

Of course, we would never begrudge the kingdom moving somewhere over there, would we? But I love to be an insider. I love to get special treatment, even if it's free food at a football game.

It makes me feel special and important. And most of us are like the people in the synagogue, religious insiders. We were either born that way or we've become that way.

How do we as insiders struggle with the priorities of kingdom ministry when Jesus runs graciously toward needy outsiders and we feel left out?

How does that happen in our hearts? Does it? Often in my heart, it's comparison. Here's one example from your pastor that I struggled with this week.

[21 : 20] I noticed kingdom ministry happening somewhere else. Even at another church in town, people flocking there and baptisms all over the place and the spirit seems to be moving and I say, man, I don't feel excited about that.

Instead of rejoicing, I'm resentful because you see, they have bad theology and I have good theology. God, why are you blessing them with all their bad theology when I've got better training and better understanding of your word?

All of a sudden, I'm not happy Jesus is being praised over there because I'm not. And God says, oh, by the way, did you want to talk about theology?

Because your idea that my spirit works only in places with more accurate theology, there's maybe the first bit of bad theology you have. Maybe your theology is not so good as you thought it was.

I think in comparison to someone else, I deserve more from God and I don't. And I resent Him for that. So did the Jews with the Gentiles.

[22 : 33] Imagine, ladies, that girl you competed with all through high school. Academically, athletically, socially, you know who I'm talking about. Y'all were always rivals and competing for things.

But she was a mean girl and you were the moral girl. You always had that on her. She did things you never would have spoken of and you stayed clean. In fact, she edged you out for valedictorian because she did some bonus work while you were on a mission trip.

It's terrible. You've always kind of held that against her. But then someone at your church took the idea seriously of going and sharing Jesus with everyone, especially outsiders.

And they talked to her and she met Jesus. And she came to your church and everybody got so excited about her. Like it was such a big deal. In fact, when she came to Jesus, part of that process was watching God heal her mom of cancer.

And you lost your mom to cancer. Even though you prayed. Way more. Not fair, God. If you're not frustrated yet, she has a fourth grade daughter just like you do.

[23 : 46] And when she and all of her other unchurched friends came to heyday, they took all the candy so your kid didn't get to go home with any. But you were actually okay with that because not a big deal.

Their health, you know, kids are going to be healthy so they didn't really need the candy. But what's worse is she came to their Sunday school class and now your daughter's coming home from church complaining because she's lonely. And the other girl has taken all her friends.

And you're outraged. God, this was my church. I prayed more. I've served longer. I deserve. I ought. It's there in our hearts too, isn't it?

When we see ourselves compared to others and we think we deserve something more than they do. It shows up not only in comparison but in my consumerism.

It's what the Jews say when they're saying, physician, heal yourself. Jesus, do miracles. Heal people here. We want our issues handled. Defeat the Gentiles ruling over us.

[24 : 49] Don't rescue them. You're supposed to be conquering them. It's about us. And we today are so trained to be consumers, right?

Constantly evaluating what I'm getting out of wherever I spend my time and my energy and my resources. And so naturally, I do that at church. Church becomes about getting my desires fulfilled, my needs met, and becomes about complaining or leaving when I don't.

And we've already violated the first priority of the kingdom. That it has a Christ-centered focus. That it's about Jesus, not about me. My questions need to change.

It's no longer, do I like how this sounds or how that is organized? But rather, does it glorify Jesus? Does it exalt His name? Does it advance His kingdom in someone's life? And if so, I rejoice because it's about Him. One more way I have this struggle is in regards to community. There's a reality about community and the family of God that Peter has actually helped me learn a lot about in the past few weeks and understand better.

[26 : 03] And the reality of that community is that when someone comes into a community, when an outsider comes in, that existing family changes its shape.

Right? It's no longer the same. The Jews wanted no part of these uncircumcised lower class Gentiles getting worked into their community.

Think of the analogy with adopting a new child into your family. Some family principles and practices may stay the same, right? But you may now have bunk beds in your room and you may not get your own room.

The family may not be able to do some things or go some places in the same way because it's grown and the shape of the family has changed. You may have to share the remote. You may have to do some things that are important to your new brother and are part of his background and his experiences.

And that can be hard. And it can be beautiful. I can hear the words coming out of my own mouth. Oh, small group is just so much harder now that they come.

[27 : 13] You may have said, my church just doesn't look or smell or sound the same anymore. It's too big. It's too small.

It's too young. It's too old. Think back to the mean girl who met Jesus. Imagine that she was living out of town, nowhere near you and you read on Facebook that she'd met Jesus.

You might genuinely rejoice, right? You love that God works that way. That He runs graciously towards needy outsiders. That He loves them until she shows up in your church.

That's where the rub is, isn't it? Until she shows up there and the shape of your family changes. It can be hard. And it can be beautiful.

Don't you love older people? That God has graciously run toward crazy young people in the next generation who don't think like you do or look like you do and He's brought them into your family here at Southwood?

[28 : 18] Don't you love that? I know that you do. Even though it's disruptive to you sometimes, I know you love it because you tell me you love it. You love seeing God do that. Even if things change and the shape of your family looks different, you rejoice.

You see the beauty in that. because y'all have learned what we struggle to learn. Wouldn't it be beautiful, Southwood, if God brought so many new members here that we had a budget crisis because the new members coming were those who needed financial assistance rather than those giving financial assistance?

Wouldn't it be beautiful if we started singing different songs because they kept being suggested by all the new members who'd come from different ethnic backgrounds? Wouldn't that be beautiful? Southwood Kingdom Ministry that focuses on Jesus constantly follows Him in sharing and showing the kingdom to those who are outside and different from us.

It must be absolutely and exclusively focused on Jesus and so it must be intentionally inclusive of the outsiders for whom King Jesus has come.

who else needs to be in here? In your home? In your life?

[29 : 43] And then maybe even later in these pews? Think this morning of a person or group of people. How will you welcome them in?

How will they experience the welcome of King Jesus in relationship with you? All of that. All these outsiders being welcomed in would be beautiful but perhaps hard for our hearts.

That's the scary reality of this passage. We can't avoid it. How quickly they seek to get rid of Jesus. Verse 28. They heard all these things.

All in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 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 they could throw him down the cliff but passing through their midst he went away.

They had him there. Jesus do all these amazing things. We're so excited. Here's the big moment and they chase him out to kill him and he walks away. We are tempted to get rid of Jesus to maintain our preferred status quo.

[30 : 56] That's scary, isn't it? We're capable of that just as they were. And we may not throw him off a cliff and stone him as a false prophet but we might ignore his commands for my life.

We might rationalize away his agenda for his church when it doesn't suit ours or doesn't seem comfortable to us. We may do whatever it takes to stay comfortable on the inside.

Even keeping Jesus at arm's length. Oh, I would never do that. Even keeping Jesus at arm's length possibly because we so want to be comfortable on the inside.

God, may it never be here that we would pursue our agenda and our glory and practically get rid of Jesus. Might we more and more share the heart of Jesus?

You see, the beauty of Jesus' kingdom is its inclusive exclusivism. It's a phrase I'm borrowing from my friend Dane Ortlund. Let me explain briefly as we close.

[32 : 04] Our world, the culture in which we live is inclusive. Living under an ethic of tolerance where everyone and everything is in. Unless, of course, you believe that there's right and wrong or things that should or shouldn't happen and then there might be an outsider.

So the inclusion is actually rather empty, isn't it? Religion, on the other hand, is exclusive. Because only the initiated or those who measure up or meet all the requirements and perform well enough are in and everyone else is out.

Jesus is entirely different from either of those. It's an inclusive exclusivism. He as always unites word and deed.

He doesn't merely talk about salvation. He actually achieves it. He meets all the requirements to be in and then He's treated as one who doesn't and is left out.

When He goes to the cross in our place where we deserve ultimate rejection, He is left out away from the Father so that we can be welcomed in with all our debts paid, all our sins forgiven.

[33 : 18] That's what He does for us, right? That's inclusive exclusivism. We are in only through Jesus. And Jesus graciously invites all to come in through Him.

You don't have to measure up. He's done that. You don't have to get it right. He has done that. All can come in because of Him.

Lifelong outsiders, those who long to be insiders, all are welcomed into His family because of Him. May we rejoice in that gracious welcome.

May we extend it to many others. Pray with me to that end. Father, that's Your heart.

So often it's not ours. Thank You for being a God who consistently and in book after book and page after page and story after story chases graciously after those who are far away, who don't deserve His love.

[34 : 30] Because if You weren't like that, none of us would know You. Thank You. Father, may it not stop there. May Your grace that You have poured out on us overflow to many.

May we never begrudge Your generosity, but may we rejoice in getting to share with others what You have shared with us. Do it in our hearts this morning.

Make it change the way we approach this afternoon and every day for the rest of our lives. We ask that You would do that work for Your glory. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.