

TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING – LUKE 4:14-21

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Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He 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. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has 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 favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. 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.”



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

It had been a year since he had been ripped away from his family, taken from the only home he ever knew, and dragged to a country he had only heard about, all because King Zedekiah of Judah thought it wise to refuse to pay his tribute to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. At first Jonathan stewed over the position he was in, he wasn’t to blame. Sure, life wasn’t so bad in Babylon, but it was no Judah. The temple was not here, and he was surrounded by more pagan influences than ever. So what was it that kept Jonathan sane? It was being able to read from the God’s holy Scriptures. He was reminded of a time when Jacob’s son Joseph was ripped away from his family and sold into slavery in Egypt. He was reminded of a faithful God who kept his promises to his people. He was even reminded by the words of the prophet Isaiah of a return to the promised land.

It was Isaiah who wrote the verses that were the consideration for Jesus’ sermon in Nazareth on that Sabbath 2,000 years ago. And it was Isaiah who was writing to the people of Judah, before they even were taken into captivity, that they would return to the promised land. What comfort this would have given those men and women like Jonathan in Babylon. When everything else was telling them that God abandoned them, Isaiah prophesied the opposite.

But God had more in mind than the Israelites coming back from captivity when he gave his prophecy to Isaiah. Bringing them back from captivity was a partial fulfillment of this prophecy, but not the entire fulfillment. Some 600 years later, there was a man who captured the hearts of Israel, a man like no other. And it was him who stepped into a synagogue in Nazareth, and read these words from Isaiah, and proclaimed, TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING.

1. The good news is preached
2. The Lord’s favor is proclaimed

For Jesus to be asked to stand up to read and explain a section of Scripture was an honor only accorded to Rabbis and teachers. And although he was brought up as a carpenter’s son right here in Nazareth, he had gained a reputation for being a spiritual teacher. He had left Nazareth to be baptized by

John, and had performed miracles and taught people all over Israel. But now Jesus was coming home. **“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.”** This wasn’t just an ordinary homecoming. The whole countryside buzzed with excitement of the return of a native son. A son who had made much of himself.

We can see especially at this time, Jesus was well received back into his hometown. Next week we will look at what changed their impression of him. But as I said, for now, Jesus was back home, on the Sabbath, and he was asked to expound on a passage of Scripture. The Jewish way of worship is not unlike the way we at Grace Lutheran Church worship today. They would sing songs, and read from different places in Scripture, and then have a sermon by one of the religious leaders, or a travelling Rabbi.

When Jesus was brought to the front, the scroll of Isaiah was handed to him, and he unrolled it to the place he had selected. The section he had chosen was a part of Isaiah’s prophecy that was clearly speaking about the Messiah. After he read the words, he handed back the scroll, and sat down, the normal teaching position. What would Jesus say? All eyes were glued to him, **“and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”**

(1)

I mentioned to you earlier how Isaiah’s words were partially fulfilled when the Israelites made their way home from the Babylonian captivity, and we can see that very clearly, **“he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives...to release the oppressed.”** But now Jesus says, “I have fulfilled them today as well.” What exactly did Jesus mean? I suppose there may have been some out there that looked for the Messiah to remove the yoke of Roman oppression, create a heaven on earth. But this wasn’t what Jesus was put on this earth for. The words of Isaiah were talking about more than the Israelites coming back from Babylon. These words talk about a Messiah who would remove an even greater oppression, release from an even worse imprisonment.

First of all this Messiah would be anointed by God, specially chosen by God for a purpose, for a mission. In fact, the name Christ means “anointed one.” So what purpose did this anointed one have on this earth? It’s right there in the words of Isaiah, **“He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed.”** What a wonderful mission he has come to do. Something that every philanthropist will give him highest marks for. But he was more than just a physical philanthropist, he came not only to save our bodies, but also our souls.

The poor he came to save here not those with no money. They were poor in spirit, they had no spiritual currency. The prisoners he came to free were not in jail for breaking man’s laws, but for breaking God’s laws. The blind he came to heal could not see God’s love. The oppressed he came to release were those who are burdened by their consciences saying they aren’t good enough. These are the people he has come to save. But do we consider ourselves in that category?

If these are the people that Jesus came to save, then what does that make us? I think we like to make ourselves out to be good people when we say it’s a good idea to help the poor, the blind and the oppressed. But what happens when the shoe is on the other foot? When we are the ones who are poor, we are the ones who are blind, we are the ones who are oppressed. Now, I’m not sure how each of these lines up with you physically. But one place we are the same is how we were like this spiritually.

For we all came into this world poor. Not only did we enter this world from our mother's wombs with nothing, but we were poor spiritually. Ever since our first father Adam, every human being has entered the world lacking the image of God, lacking a relationship with God which is the only thing that can make us rich. We were born as prisoners, we were born oppressed. We were not just enslaved to our parent's rules as children, the grind of the workplace or the shackles of marriage, we were enslaved by sin. In the land where we prize freedom so much, there is so much we cannot do. As hard as we try – sicknesses still come, disasters (both natural and manmade) still happen, death still knocks at our door. We were born blind, we couldn't see. Even if light is shining around a blind person, they cannot see. So too with us, God's love was shining around us, but we couldn't see.

The way we were is not up for debate, the Bible makes it very clear. We may think that we can get out of this mess by ourselves, that we could somehow forge a relationship with God. But that would be as foolish as thinking a prisoner could ask his guard to let him go, or that a blind man one day decides he doesn't want to be blind anymore. And that is part of our anguish – that we see the hopelessness of our situation. For it is only when we see the hopelessness of our situation that the good news that is preached tastes so good. A glass of cold water doesn't taste as good during a Midwestern snowstorm as it does after walking through the Sonoran desert on a summer day. It is the same way with the gospel. And TODAY, THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING. The good news is still preached.

The words that Christ spoke in the Nazarene synagogue still hold true for us today. The life he lived 2,000 years ago still is applied to us today. The death he died on the cross, when he was suspended between earth and sky, between God and man, still is credited to us today. We once were poor in spirit, but now we are rich in faith, we once were imprisoned and oppressed by sin, but now we have been released from that bondage. We once were blind, but now we can see! The good news is still preached. TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING.

(2)

And the Messiah did not just come to release you from the curse of sin. He has come **“to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”** Now what does this mean? Why is it any different than what we have been talking about? The Jews would have recognized a difference, because that phrase did not associate itself with coming back from captivity, but with a special Jewish festival called the Year of Jubilee.

The year of Jubilee was set up by God in order to level the playing surface again. Slaves would be freed, plots of land would be returned to their original owners. This was a reminder that God was ultimately in control, but also helped to preserve families and their properties, which was very important to them. How does this relate to us? What purpose does this serve for us? Jesus is talking about a “do-over,” “a mulligan,” “a fresh start.” Christ has given us this level playing surface, but not so that we have to go about earning heaven. Heaven is ours. We can use our clean slate to give glory to God. To quote Dave Ramsey, we can “live like no one else.”

How do we do this? How are we to live? We are to live as Christians, live as you are. You can live as a Christian by more than coming to church. You can live as a Christian in more ways than by telling everyone you know about him. We can live as a Christian in our everyday lives. Be a good father, mother, parent, child. Be a good employer, be a good employee. Be a Christian on the road by showing patience when someone cuts you off. Be a Christian on the court or the field by letting go of your anger and being

a good sport. Be a Christian at the dinner table or bedside when you remember to give thanks to God for what he has done.

In a way, it's kind of like we are in an airport waiting to board our flight. We have our ticket in hand, our ticket to heaven. But what are we to do while we're waiting for the flight to take off? We can live as a Christian, because the Lord's favor is still proclaimed, we can live this way because the good news is still preached. Our desire is for God, because he first loved us. TODAY THIS SCRIPTURE IS FULFILLED IN YOUR HEARING. Just as it was true when Jesus said it, it is true for us today. Amen!