

Luke 4:16-30 The Presentation of Jesus Christ, Messiah at Nazareth

I have long been fascinated by the interconnections between the OT and the NT. When the NT cites a passage in the OT, as it often does, it is enlightening to investigate – for what purpose is that particular passage cited?

The passage we will look at today is one of those places where the words of the OT are quoted by Jesus, and He applies them to Himself as being a fulfilled prophecy! In Luke 4, Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2a, so let's first read Isaiah 61:1-9 to grasp some of the context of Isaiah's prophecy.

Isaiah's text describes a Person on whom the Spirit of the Lord will reside. He will be anointed by God (this word means "Christ") and will bring great blessings to Israel and the nations. Verses 1 & 2 reveal His mission . Isaiah also points to this same Person in Isa. 42:1, where he says, *"Behold my servant whom I uphold, My chosen in whom my soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring justice to the nations."* The Lord describes this Servant of His in other passages in Isaiah as well – in what are called the 4 "Servant Songs" (Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; & 52:13-53:12).

Let's look at our text in Luke 4:16-21 initially. We will also briefly examine vv. 22-30 as we go. Jesus cites only Isaiah 61:1 and 2a. He does not go past that point. We will see the important reason why that is as we look further at the passage. To ①
gather context, Luke places Jesus' temptation in the wilderness being tempted by Satan in Luke 4:1-12, where He prevailed as He was being prepared for His ministry immediately after being baptized by John. Then in LK 4:12-15 His early ministry after that is briefly described. Luke describes this early sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth; and Matthew and Mark also mention it (MT 13:54-58; MK 6:1-6), but without citing Isaiah 61. They focus on the rejection of Jesus by the congregation.

Notice that Luke says in v. 14 that *"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit."* Nazareth in Galilee was Jesus' hometown and the people point this out in v. 22c, as they say *"Is this not Joseph's son?"* They marvelled at His wisdom in v. 22 a, but He had grown up in their midst, as Joseph's carpenter apprentice, then as a carpenter on His own. Now, in the synagogue, He was reading and commenting on a passage in Isaiah and claiming to be the very One that Isaiah was prophesying about!

It was God's providence that He was here in this particular synagogue that day. The readings were typically chosen by the synagogue attendant, and anyone who had a Word to share could read the Scripture, so when Jesus stood up, the attendant handed Him the scroll that contained this passage of Isaiah. Let's read vv. 15-16.

Luke provides very little detail about Jesus' sojourn up to this point, except to say that *"He taught in their synagogues"* before He arrived here at Nazareth. (v. 15) Other gospel writers fill in some gaps for us but Luke keeps his comments about what happened between the wilderness and Nazareth very brief. One capable commentator, G. Campbell Morgan, believes a full year had passed between the wilderness and this passage, and according to the 3 other gospels, Jesus did a lot before this event in Nazareth. Capernaum was a town on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus Himself here in Luke (v. 23) as having been brought up in Nazareth. According to the other Gospels, Jesus had spent time in other areas in Galilee, especially Capernaum. John places Jesus' first miracle at Cana in Galilee, about halfway between Capernaum and Nazareth. The congregation at Nazareth had heard of some of these amazing things, and expected they might experience the same thing.

Now, with that brief background covered, let's look at **vv. 17-19**. This is pretty much a word for word account with 2 exceptions. Isaiah 6:1b is not here – *"He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted..."*, and Jesus adds, *"and recovery of sight to the blind..."*, (which is likely cited from Isa. 58:6 or 42:7).

Jesus uses this OT passage to point out to the synagogue congregation that He is the long-awaited Messiah and will fulfill the mission His Father sent Him to accomplish. (v. 21) As we go through the 4 Gospels, it is very clear that Jesus did in fact accomplish everything He was sent to do – cf. John 17: 4, on the eve of His crucifixion says – *"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that You gave Me to do."* (2)

In our Luke passage, Jesus makes it clear that He was operating under the full divine power of the Holy Spirit. Note **4:1,14, & 18**. The Holy Spirit was operative throughout Jesus' whole incarnate life. Acts 2:22 tells us that Jesus' power was accomplished in the Spirit – *"mighty wonders and works and signs that God did through Him in your midst..."*

Jesus was self-aware, having come to recognize Himself as Messiah as He grew in His knowledge of the Scriptures (per Luke 2:52).

Verses 18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." This statement is followed by the fact that The Lord has 'anointed' Him as His servant, and His Christ (def: anointed one). Although the verses that follow lay out in general what God has sent His Christ to proclaim and fulfill, it is introductory and by no means goes as far as what Jesus later proclaims about His impending capture, crucifixion, and resurrection, which are the primary goal of His presence in human form among His people.

The first thing Jesus claims He will do as Messiah is to *"proclaim good news to the poor."* This includes those who are physically poor for sure, but based on the promises of Isaiah 60 & 61, it is more likely that He is referring to spiritual poverty, which was rife in 1st Century Israel. In Isaiah 60 & 61, the promises are for *"those*

who mourn in Zion,” ... “the oil of gladness instead of mourning... a garment of praise instead of a faint spirit.”(61:3).

Furthermore, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus – in Matt. 5:3 – announces *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* The Messiah was the fulfillment of many years of hope for faithful Israelites, stirred up by numerous OT prophecies of His coming, and eschatological hope. If only they had recognized Him and responded to His message, *“Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”* And, *“Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”* Isaiah 66:2 b says, *“But this is the one to whom I will look; he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at My Word.”*

But they by and large expected a Messiah who would provide corporate salvation, not One who saved individuals., and they assumed as “God’s people” they did not need personal salvation.

The second thing Jesus proclaims is, *“He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives...”* (v. 18c). This could have two meanings for this generation of Jews, 1) They were captive to sin, and He is the only remedy for sin; and/or 2) They were under Roman domination, without their own king (Herod was an Idumean, appointed as a Roman puppet), and although they could still practice their religion, they were not free from following Roman law too. But Christ did not free them from Rome during His first advent.

In Matthew 11:2-6, note Jesus’ response to the imprisoned John the Baptist’s disciples who wondered if he had followed the wrong person. Here, Jesus cites Isaiah 35:5-6 in this passage.

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And a final point in LK 4:18 – *“to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”*

Of course, His first advent did not result in physical or political relief from Roman oppression or the oppression from their corrupt priests and leaders – that was to be marginal, but eschatologically, their freedom was to be from the forgiveness of sin and despair over it. Note JN 8:34-36.

In v. 19, Jesus cites Isaiah 61:2a – *“to proclaim the year of God’s favor.”* This is not just an eschatological statement. It refers to that point in time when Jesus walked among them and offered them His Kingdom (which they rejected). We know that in part because here is where Jesus stops quoting the passage – in the middle of Isaiah’s sentence at Isaiah 61:2b! I will comment on that momentarily.

When the Godhead sent the Son to live among His people sinlessly and to proclaim salvation in His name alone, *“the fulness of time”* had arrived, after all the prophecies and types of the OT had been written and the people were prepared for their Messiah, and Malachi had announced (3:1; 4:5) that He would be coming, his message preceding 400 years of God’s judgmental silence – no prophets, no Word from Him! Imagine the anticipation of waiting to see what God would provide for them in His Messiah! The prevailing mood was one of expecting a conquering Messiah who would save them corporately from the Romans, never expecting it

would be personal salvation He would bring, because they did not feel like they needed personal salvation – they were Jews!

But here, at this point, Jesus stops citing Isaiah 61:2. Why? Because what He had read up to that point was about His first advent – He was here! But what follows in Isaiah 61:2b is this: *“and the day of the vengeance of our God.”* From that point on, Isaiah’s prophecy is about Christ’s return – the Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom period specifically. It is often announced by phrases such as *“That day,”* or *“the day is coming,”* and other similar phrases which appear throughout the prophetic books. Those prophecies often talk about a time of judgment and destruction followed by a millennial peace.

Isaiah’s next phrase is *“to comfort those who mourn.”* This speaks of that Millennial Kingdom.

In the Luke 4 text, let’s read **v. 20**.

He hands back the scroll to the attendant and sits down. But He has one more very important comment to add in **v. 21**. It’s an announcement of Who He is!

What an amazing verse! It can mean nothing less than that He is announcing to them that He is their Messiah! So how do these people respond to such a clear and joyous announcement? You’d hope they would be joyful and celebrating His arrival!

But read **vv. 22-24** now.

It seems that, at first, they were happy to hear what He said, and *“marveled at His gracious words,”* but then, someone, maybe more than one, said, *“Is not this Joseph’s son?”* (4)

There are two ways to interpret this.

- 1) I am amazed that He is such a speaker, and He is here! Our Messiah! Something like the officers sent by the Pharisees to take him prisoner in JN 7:46, but they refused to do it, saying, *“No one ever spoke like this man!”* Or the Samaritan woman at the well, who ran to her town crying out happily in JN 4:29 – *“Come see a man who told me all that I ever did! Can this be the Christ?”*
Or it could be taken a second way, and Jesus perceives this 2nd way was their intention.
- 2) Very condescending and snarky. *“is not this Joseph’s son?”* Much like **JN 6:41-42**.

Judging by Jesus next words, they said it this second way. Note **LK 4: 23-24**.

Their excuse for disbelief in His claim was that they knew Him as Joseph’s son. But He was the Son of Him who had sent Him! He had grown up among them, even though technically, Joseph was not His biological father. They did not know that. They were not ready to accept His claim that *“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”* They sink to a despicable level of rejecting His claim – He was a local boy, and could in no way could He be their Messiah! This of course, does

not mean they knew Him to be anything other than a good person. The Bible tells us He was sinless, and although we are not told much about His experiences as a youth, (except in Luke chapter 2), it is doubtless, that His sinlessness included his years from birth to His ministry beginning.

So, in vv. 23-24, He rebukes them with *“No prophet is accepted in his hometown.”* In another passage – John 9:29 – after He had healed a man born blind, the Pharisees, arguing that He was not the Messiah, *“We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He comes from.”* Maybe the congregation at Nazareth would be more inclined to accept Jesus if He were from another town? Familiarity does tend to breed contempt. Even Nathaniel, as he was being called to follow Jesus, said in JN 1:46 – *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”*

Jesus, then, using His ample ability and flawless knowledge of Scripture, gives them 2 well known OT stories. Let's read **vv. 25-27**. These true 'stories' are designed here to incite and flare up their simmering anger. They are taken from, in order, I Kings 17:1-6; and 2 Kings 5:1-15. Rather than opening their eyes to the truth, He judicially blinds them since the people helped by God in both stories are Gentiles. This exposes their racism and feelings of superiority. He closes their eyes and ears.

His point was that God is sovereign. In their way of thinking, God was compelled to only extend grace to Israelites – but here Jesus tells them of God's gracious actions of healing extended to Gentiles! IOW, “The benefits and blessings of the divine kingdom (5) were coming in answer to faith, not as an answer to racial relationships.” [G. Campbell Morgan; The God Who Cares; Fleming-Revell 1931; p. 95] These were 2 models of authentic faith and God's gracious response to it. But these people of Nazareth exhibited a severe lack of faith and had *“no ears to hear or eyes to see.”*

They fully exhibit this in **vv. 28-29**.

They form a mindless hateful mob, and drive Him out of the synagogue to the edge of town at a cliff where they intend to throw Him off and kill Him! This was a real event, and foreshadowed the rejections He would suffer the many attempts to kill Him before He went to the Cross. But God had other plans. God had foreordained that He would die by crucifixion outside of Jerusalem on a specific date with specific evil people involved - cf **Acts 4:27-28**.

Hence, somehow, in Luke 4:30, we are told, *“But passing through them, He went away.”* It was not yet God's time for Him to die, and certainly it was not in this way.

So, how do we apply this important passage to ourselves in 2026?

In our congregation at EBC, we hear about Jesus and His critical importance to us in a very personal as well as a corporate way. But don't let your familiarity with Him and His Word create negative thoughts about Him or God in general or allow that comforting feeling last only through Sundays and Wednesdays or during

fellowships. We know so much more than the people of Nazareth in our text – we have the NT to guide us to more information about God, Christ and His purposes for us.

Have open eyes and ears, and a heart set on worshipping our Great Lord and Saviour! The Nazarenes missed their chance for eternal life, joy and a true relationship with Christ, by rejecting their Messiah who would have led them to God, just because they knew Him as a former citizen of their town.

So, don't listen to or read God's Word, then just walk away without letting it affect you deeply. It is unlikely that anyone of us would ever kill Jesus, even if He were physically present – that is extreme! But He saved us while we are His enemies (Romans 5:10), but He places the demand on us to accept the Gospel, and to worship Him as the only Saviour and Lord and He knows who are His and who will be His! Obey the Gospel and be saved! You want Him as your Saviour, not your judge!

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