



7. Jesus: the Man they didn't expect! (Luke 4:14-30)

Cast your minds back to November. That was the last time we did anything in my occasional series on Luke's gospel. We're revisiting it today. It's good that this comes after Christmas because the words of Luke ring strongly in the Christmas story. Luke's words are not unique just because it was to him that the nativity story as we have it came, but because Luke, as prompted by the Spirit, understood the significance of the words. Let's go back to chapter 1 where Gabriel says to Mary: *30 But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. 31 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."* Then on the night the angels appeared to the shepherds the message was: *11 For to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.* Or the words of Simeon in chapter 2: *Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.* And in just three statements Luke sums up what Jesus was all about.

- ◆ He's the Son of God.
- ◆ He's the Messiah long foretold.
- ◆ He was going to be a light to the Gentiles.

As we then look at subsequent stories, we see a picture of Jesus emerging which shows all those attributes. Firstly he goes into His Father's business - His heavenly Father's business - when He's twelve. Then at His baptism He's openly revealed as the Son and the Messiah. He sees Satan off and then starts to do miracles in Galilee. All marks of the Son and the Messiah.

Why do I say all this? Because in understanding what Luke is bringing us through the early chapters helps us understand what is going on throughout the rest of the gospel. By the time Luke wrote the gospel these things were important. There were pressures all around the church to sell short. There were Jewish Christians that either did not believe that Gentiles could be believers or reckoned that they must become Jewish first. There were Greeks who believed that in no-way God could really take on human flesh which they believed was fundamentally evil. There were disciples of John who were still looking for a Messiah. And Luke writes recognizing this, encouraging Theophilus to have certainty about what he has been taught and not be deterred by those around who were suggesting there was another way.

Today we come to another one of those early crunch points. Have you ever had that situation where you thought you knew someone and then all of a sudden, they've surprised you? I surprised my wife last week. I was quite down over Christmas because of various things going on, only to find I did an up-beat sermon last week which came as a surprise to her. Why? It was one of those strange situations where at a low point God gives you a sudden shot of faith. And that changes how you view the picture. And that happened so suddenly that it caught me by surprise as much as it did her and most people who know us. Anyway, there's no surprises for her this week!

One thing I have found in the last few years is that my perception of Jesus, has changed from what I was brought up with. When I was young, I always pictured Him as a kind of ordinary peasant bloke who worked at his father's workshop in Nazareth who rose from obscurity after His baptism into His public ministry.

But that's not how He comes across in the gospels. In fact, people as great as Jesus never appear out of nothing. His life before His ministry was preparation not wasted void. It was both the preparation of life and His own personal preparation that made Him ready for His public ministry. So what do we know? Only what the gospels quite openly show. What we discover first from the

passage this morning is that Jesus was brought up in Nazareth but had obviously not been back for some time. How do we know that?

When Jesus got up to read, they were surprised at how well He did it. *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, we do know that literacy was relatively common amongst the skilled classes in those days. But in the time away from home Jesus had developed, he'd picked up eloquence. He was more than just your Nazareth boy. Nazareth was a town of no reputation in those days. We know that because Nathaniel said in John 1 "Can anything good come out of Nazareth".

But secondly, their surprise was that Jesus was there reading in the synagogue at all. He was of the carpenter's family - he wasn't a priest or scribe. But they had heard the rumours that He's been doing miraculous stuff in Capernaum. He's become a rabbi. What was all that about? He was that carpenter's son they all remembered. They needed explanations. He was a skilled craftsman - yet we discover just in this sentence, that the carpenter's son who had left home to ply his trade in the towns on the Sea of Galilee was more than just that - they were about to find out about his real Father's business!

Of course, we still haven't much of a clue what Jesus had been up to in His years away. We can get flashes of information here and there and make speculations. He was a carpenter who seems to have spent a lot of time in towns around the Sea of Galilee, like Capernaum. He'd have made a life for Himself there, based on the skills Joseph had given Him. But it's not at all clear that He'd stayed working with Joseph. More likely He'd developed His own specialty. He was happy in and around boats. He knew fishermen. Was He a carpenter who had specialized into the then high tech of carpentry - boat building and repair? Probably. It was the pinnacle career for a carpenter.

When you start to think along those lines, then He wasn't a simple peasant who knocked things together. His skill was sought after in fishing villages. He was an important person in the community who had the resources to get things done. In other words, he wasn't obscure. Quite the reverse. He would have been well known in these close-knit communities. He was trusted because He built and fixed their boats. When invited to a wedding at Cana and the wine ran out His mother expected Him to do something about it. Why? Because she expected a miracle? - or because she knew if anyone could procure some wine at short notice it was Jesus? The other question begged is actually: was Jesus relatively prosperous? We all know that when He went into itinerant ministry, He encouraged others to give up everything and follow Him. If you think about it, that was a bit of a cheek - unless of course He'd given up much more than they ever had.

Why did people in Capernaum and the other fishing towns so easily take to Jesus? Yes He did miracles, yes the Spirit of God was on Him - but He was eloquent. Where did He pick that up? Success in business meant that He could pick up the education He needed to be articulate and well-spoken - but most of all to study the scriptures. He certainly hadn't done that in Nazareth - they were surprised when he arrived and read to them.

Let's remember that Jesus was fully human. He had to learn everything in exactly the way we do - there were no short-cuts or special "Son of God" knowledge. He grew as we do. I think we need to understand that.

How does anyone become eloquent in the things of God? The Holy Spirit needs to empower them. By the time Jesus read the scriptures in Nazareth, he was anointed and operating in the power of the Spirit. But where did He get his knowledge of the scriptures? Who taught Him to read? He'd already acquired that in 30 years of life. He must have committed time at the synagogue to do so - as was His custom (Luke 4 says). He had to have spent time in the presence of God. I'd guess that his nights spent in prayer were not unique to His ministry, but a habit acquired already. He must have interacted with scribes and Pharisees (as He did when He was 12) - where do you think He picked up his knowledge of Judaism? He may have obeyed His parents while He was in Nazareth, but with whom did He then discuss the things of God?

It's a lesson we all need to learn. We have the Holy Spirit who can open up our understanding of God, open up our gifting, take what we are and use it to glorify God. But He can't do that if nothing's there - if we've not spent time with the Word in His presence. In His years away - and all those years before His baptism, Jesus had spent that time. How much time do we spend with God?

The Spirit did more than that. Jesus was skilled in business, skilled with communicating with people. They knew Him and trusted His integrity. And the Spirit took that and took a credible man and made Him incredible.

And Jesus stands there, not as an unreachable goal, but our model who shows us the way. He was a man who spent time in God's presence with God's word - and it showed. He had skills and personal qualities that had been shaped by His life and God took those and used them in a powerful way. And we are given the same Holy Spirit - all that is required for God to do something amazing through us is our obedience.

So back to Nazareth and Jesus reads Isaiah 61. They knew and He knew what it was about. It's Messianic. They were expecting Messiah to be the one spoken about in the passage. What was Jesus going to say? Jesus didn't disappoint. *The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* They heard the rumours - now they got the form. First of all they were amazed and approved of the way He read and spoke. Perhaps Jesus words seem harsh after that sentence. But He only really articulated what their next thought was. Which was something like "just a minute, did He say what I thought He said. If He's doing all sorts of miracles in Capernaum and he reads this - He must think He's the Messiah. Joseph's son? No" After that comes the next phrase Jesus articulates for them "come on then Jesus, give us a stunt or two to show you are the anointed of God".

No surprise I guess when Jesus doesn't do a stunt but quotes two incidents where Gentiles were blessed rather than Jews. That was an insult big-time to the Jews of Nazareth. He knew what they were about. They weren't going to honour Him as Messiah. A prophet was without honour in his own country. Jesus was the lad they had seen grow up amongst them. Nice boy, but no-one was expecting a Messiah from Nazareth, let alone someone they knew. It couldn't be possible. So He goes the hog and brings in the bit about the Gentiles. Even they would get the blessings before they did! So they ran Him out of town with the intention of killing Him. Why? He dared to claim Messiahship - but worse than that, the suggestion that God was going to pour out His blessing on the Gentiles. Which of course is precisely what Isaiah 61 actually says but the Jews have always lived in denial of that one from then until now.

Jesus doesn't get thrown off the cliff - He just walks through the crowd and leaves. They rejected Him. Why? Because they couldn't accept one of their own as being Messiah - but most of all, the sort of Messiah He was totally unacceptable to them. This was reflected as Luke well knew in the world of His readers. Jews generally rejected Jesus as Messiah. But those Jews who had become Messianic, who did accept Jesus really did have a struggle with accepting the He was the light to the Gentiles. And here was Jesus brining truth out of the OT to show that God intends and does pour out blessings on Gentiles. If you go through Isaiah 61 you see the same message.

In fact Luke picks out another detail from Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61 which is even more relevant to who Jesus is and His intent. He read this *18 "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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* and then to use the words of the AV, He rather pointedly shut the book. What did He shut the book on? He shut it on this: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God.. (ESV)*

Did you notice it. He missed a bit off. The passage so clearly shows what Messiah was going to do and what Jesus did. He brought good news - not just to the poor who followed Him in droves, but the spiritually poor, the spiritually hurting, the spiritual captives, those imprisoned in sin. He was going to announce the year of God's favour. But He shut the book before He got to the day of vengeance of our God.

Why? Because then as now, it is the day of God's favour. That was what good news was about. Jesus died and rose again so that we no longer need to be imprisoned, separated from God by our sin. We have a God who frees us from that so that He is part of our lives.

And that offer is open to you this morning if you have never accepted Jesus into your life. This is the acceptable year of the Lord. Perhaps you have but you have never achieved your potential in Him because you are in bondage to something. Locked in. Can't get out. Maybe it is an addiction. Maybe it is in forgiveness. Maybe it's something you can't come to terms with. This is the acceptable year of the Lord. Let Him deal with your hurts and what ties you up, so that by the power of His Spirit, you can live in freedom.

There is a verse in the Bible that says this 2 Cor 6: *"In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you."* I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

And Jesus shut the book. Today is the acceptable year of the Lord. But one day it will come to an end. Jesus will return and God is going to act as a judge. He is going to judge people according to their deeds. And we will all be found wanting. How can we escape? By taking up God's offer of life and freedom whilst this is the year of God's favour. The offer is open to each man and woman today – but it is not going to be there forever: the time of reckoning will come. And the Bible says: *3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?* (Heb 2:3)

It's now. don't wait. Accept Jesus into your life today. Find freedom and know God; be part of His family. It also reminds all of us believers too. Don't make others wait. God's offer is now, because there is going to be a day of vengeance of God. Tell people about Jesus. Plead with them to come to Him. Your friends, your neighbours, your family. Jesus shut the book because God's favour was now. He wasn't going to read on just yet.

But if they or we die without Christ or He returns, what then. There will be a reckoning and how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? Where will you be? Where will your friends, family, neighbours be? Jesus said: *"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, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."*



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