



2. A Passion for Good News

(Luke 4:14-30; Is 61:1-3)

Is 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Luke 4:14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 16 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. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 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." 20 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, 21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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. 23 Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' " 24 "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Would we turn good news down? Church of the Year, Norfolk Churches Trust.
Would we keep it a secret?

We looked last week at the passion that our Father God has for us. A great love that caused Him to pour out His grace on us, a love that took His Son to the cross. A passion for wanting to know us; a passion for wanting to rescue us from ourselves. This is God's desire for the human race and it resulted in a great mission - the Father sent the Son

And now we have come to know Christ, as we have understood of His love and as we love Him we find a command to us to continue that mission: *As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.*

And that is our commission because we've got some really great news to give to people. God loves us so much that He has opened a way by which we can know Him and find forgiveness for our sins.

And right from the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was quite clear on His mission to this world - to do His father's will and complete a mission that had already been announced in the time of Isaiah and which I read at the beginning of the service.

And Jesus comes into the synagogue at Nazareth and as is customary in a synagogue, somebody reads from the scriptures and Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll.

17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 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." 20 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,

Why were all the people staring at him? Luke doesn't give us many details here. Had He come as the new Rabbi who was building up a reputation - : *Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.* (verse 14) and they discover that it is Jesus or was it just that they had not heard Him read much in the synagogue before.

However, I think Luke is also pointing us to the reason for their staring in the passage. You see, He cut the reading short. Isaiah 61 was a well known Messianic passage. People probably knew it off by heart. It was written hundreds of years before Jesus came. Let me read it again.

Is 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Now there are some minor differences between the passages because the words used in Luke are from the Greek Old Testament. What is significant and what caused them to all fix their eyes on Him was that He cut the passage short, in fact in our Bibles He read just two verses. He should have read *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God,* But he stopped, and rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

What he did was unacceptable behaviour. This was a great passage in which the Jews at that time was one of hope - that a Messiah would come and rescue them from the tyranny of Rome. And Jesus cuts it short after a few words and sits down. You can almost imagine what they might have been thinking as he sat down. Probably the same as you would. "What's going on?"

Jesus answered that one fairly swiftly: *and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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.* That was a good start. But from what Jesus then follows up with we know that actually in their hearts they were very sceptical. The reason was not that He had become a Rabbi - but what the reading of this passage implied for Him.

As Jesus speaks these words: , *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* everybody knew what He meant. He was claiming these words for Himself. They had

heard the stories about His preaching but here was Jesus was claiming the words of Isaiah 61 for Himself. As Jesus read the passage it tells us some of the role of the Messiah was to be:

- 🕯 *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 favour*

And we saw in Jesus one who did do all these things. Let's focus a little on them.

- 🕯 *He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.*

Why was it good news to the poor? Because it was prevalent at that time for people who were rich to believe that they were favoured of God - the poor weren't.

Jesus came to demonstrate that God's message and God's favour was available to all. And that remains the same today. The good news is for all, whoever they are, particularly those marginalised in society and looked down on by others.

I find it an interesting irony, that in a nation like ours which has been so blessed by wealth, so few people follow Christ, yet look at the rest of the world and we see people coming to Christ in huge numbers. Forget the idea of thinking we are a blessed or spiritual nation. Financially, we are the world's fourth richest nation, but spiritually we are bankrupt.

But Jesus brings hope not just to the poor, but the spiritually poor to.

- 🕯 *He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to release the oppressed*

Jesus was the one who comes to the rescue. In His own ministry he did all these things. We need to look at them in the same way as the people then would have looked at it. We know He literally brought sight to the blind but He also caused people to see spiritually. He did bring freedom to prisoners from the clutches of demons. He did release those who were oppressed by all sorts of situations. Again, the prisoners, sick and oppressed were all marginalized people. He has come to minister to those who are on the edge of society.

But we can look at this spiritually too - But most of all He freed those who were oppressed by the power of sin and guilt in their lives. And last year we looked at the way in which Jesus still frees people from things which hold them back and keep them from knowing God. Jesus came to change people's lives; to see them transformed by the power of God.

- 🕯 *To proclaim the year of the Lord' s favour*

But most of all He proclaimed the year of the Lord's favour. And He still does. It's exciting. It's good news. A Saviour is here who delivers people from the power of sin, one who brings hope, a future, God's favour for an eternity. He works in people's lives today, transforming them, transforming their situations. It is still they year of God's favour.

These are amazing words. It's good news - God's Chosen One has come and he brings good news, He brings liberation, freedom, healing and God's favour and to the marginal people in society. That's our message - it's Good News. That was the Son's mission - now that's our mission.

How did the people react to Jesus in that synagogue in Nazareth? After their initial favour, and their realisation of just what Jesus was claiming, Jesus draws the attention to what they were really like. He knew their skepticism.

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' " 24 *"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah' s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." 28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.*

Is this Joseph's son? Well, if He's been doing all these things in Capernaum, why hasn't He been doing it here? Joseph's son the Messiah? Why hasn't he been doing the teaching and the miracles here? It rather reminds me of Nathanael's exclamation in John 1 when he's told that the messiah is Jesus of Nazareth - "Can any good come out of Nazareth". Prophets just didn't come out of seedy towns like Nazareth.

Jesus was bringing good news; He was embarking on a ministry that was going to change lives as the passage in Isaiah suggests. But how did the people see it. Jesus knew their hearts. Good things didn't come out of Nazareth. A Messiah who was Joseph's son? No. But the worst for them is yet to come.

Jesus gives them these two pictures from the OT - Elijah and Elisha to show how God took them to gentile places and peoples. It wasn't just the Jesus had left Nazareth and going to Capernaum or to other Jewish places, the implication was that His ministry wasn't there to benefit them but to benefit the Gentiles because He had no honour there. Gentiles!??

Of course we know all this is true with the wisdom of hindsight. But as Jesus reveals the will of God for Him and mankind, the people saw the problems not the power. Gentiles?! What He was telling them did not fit into their view of Nazareth or their view of scripture. But it was true. God had taken someone from Nazareth and that Man was going to bring God's favour to the Gentiles.

The people saw the problems, not the power. They saw the man who had been brought up in their midst. But they couldn't accept who He was and what He was going to do. It was just too much of an insult. Forget about His teaching and anything else He did.

A prophet is without honour in his own land. How true that was in Nazareth and amongst the Jews as we see the way in which they had Him killed. Yet it was His passion that brought freedom for us, the Gentiles.

As we look afresh at the Good News that Jesus brought. As we look at the claims that Jesus brings hope to those without God. As we look at the promise of eternal life that God offers. As we look at the freedom that Jesus brings to every situation in our lives. as we look at the way He works in power in people's lives we find He is still the one that *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.*

When we hear the words, does they fill us with hope and enthusiasm for telling others this life-changing message - or do we see the problems instead of the power?

Because that's where the problem is. We can say "silly people of Nazareth" but sometimes we act in the same way that Jesus did. We hear all the stores about the way that people are coming to Christ in huge numbers in many parts of the world today. But for us? Jesus says "as my Father has sent me, so I send you" and we say 'why? Nothing happens in Norfolk" Jesus does the miracles somewhere else but not in Norfolk. We see the problems not the power. Nothing happens in Norfolk so we may be called as witnesses, missionaries by Jesus but we start to respond like the citizens of Nazareth - with unbelief and suspicion:

- being a witness for Jesus isn't my thing - leave it to those more eloquent
- it doesn't matter if I don't tell my friends, relations and neighbours about Jesus. I'm sure God will find another way
- It doesn't matter - the Good News isn't important anyway.
- I'm too old for all that sort of stuff.
- That's their problem if they don't have faith
- We've got to respect the faith of other people. Well, if that's your point of view, next time you see someone starting to cross a road in front of a speeding car, then respect their faith and don't cry out "Stop!"
- It's their lookout if they don't trust Jesus - it's not my problem.
- I'm a superior sort of Christian (or I'm an inferior sort of Christian), so obedience to Christ doesn't apply to me.

And we take offence when someone comes along and says the mission of the Church is mission. But where people do take this command of the Lord seriously, people come to Christ in droves. People are coming to Christ because as Paul says in Romans 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile .*

It's the power of God, it changes lives. Jesus changes lives. Jesus can change the lives of your friends and neighbours, your family, the people you work with. If we have seen how God has come into our lives, then we should have a passion for God News.

There is another good reason for desiring to see them come to Christ. Let me go back to the bit of Isaiah 61 Jesus intentionally missed *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God*

We are in a day of favour. We are at a time when God shows His passion for us in an offer of forgiveness, eternal life, hope, freedom. But there is a day coming when God will close that offer. That offer is closed on our own death and when Jesus returns. Then God is going to judge men - and right at the top of the list will be whether they accepted that gift of eternal life because it is the only criterion by which God is going to allow people to spend eternity with Him.

The offer is open now. If you haven't accepted it, then it's for you. But what about that friend, family member or neighbour who doesn't know Christ? Don't wait for someone else to do it. You have that good news - tell it to them.

I leave you with this challenge this morning. Are we citizens of Nazareth this morning; or citizens of heaven?

Dear Father

Thank you that we can give people such a great piece of news - that forgiveness and eternal life is there, ready for those who accept it and follow You. Help us to have a

passion for that message so that others may have the opportunity to hear the message before it is too late.

***In Jesus' name
Amen***



Preached by Mark Reid, Swaffham Baptist Church, 25/4/04. Scripture Quotes NIV © Mark Reid 2004