

The Messiah Announces His Mission, Part 1

Luke 4:16-22

We'll start there in Luke chapter 4, and we'll start reading in verse 14. "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout 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, 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.’ 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. 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.”

And so, it begins. Seemed to have started well enough, but then it ends with this murderous anger. It started with

Messiah's announcement, which is gracious, expansive, profound, but it ends with the people's rejection of him. Rejection of those words. It's as sad as it is startling. It just seems odd, doesn't it, that these gracious words of the Messiah, the anticipation of his mission, this is a mission, after all, of a restoration promise prophesied by Isaiah and then here at this moment being fulfilled in the hearing of Jesus' hometown friends, neighbors, relatives. So, it's really shocking that what seems to have been so well received in verse 22, it says, "All spoke well of him," they turned on him in the end. They wanted to throw him off a cliff.

Jesus is preaching the Gospel. It was provocative. It was a Gospel of gracious words, but it was one that didn't leave people alone. It pressed people to a verdict. It didn't allow people to remain neutral. It pushed them, triggered a reaction. So Jesus came back to Nazareth here, where he was raised. He came back to tell them, to explain his mission to them, the purpose for which he had been sent.

And you see that there in verse 18, this beginning of the quotation from Isaiah 61:1, which says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because," that word, because, that word answers the why question, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to

Galilee" verse 14, and why was the Spirit of the Lord upon him? This quotation from Isaiah is the passage that he read publicly. It answers the question. And to put it simply, notice again verse 18, the Spirit was upon Christ to anoint him for a specific purpose. What was that purpose? To proclaim good news to the poor. That, that word translated, proclaim good news, you've all heard this word before. In fact, we take our name as evangelicals from this word. It's the word *euangelizo*. We get the word evangelize from that word. The Spirit was upon Jesus to evangelize, to preach the Gospel.

It all started here, a very typical setting, a typical synagogue in Israel. One of many, many synagogues in Israel, and this one in Nazareth. Let's get right into the text, set the scene. I'm going to give you three brief points if you're taking notes. The Setting, the Scripture, and the Statement. The Setting, the Scripture, and the Statement.

First point: The setting. Look back again and let's get a running start in verse 14. Verse 14, "And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out throughout 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.”

Stop right there for a moment. As Luke sets the scene, he points to several elements here in the setting, in the scene, that predict that Jesus is going to be well received. We expect that by how this is set up. As we read these verses, it appears that Jesus’ ministry is going to get off to a very, very positive start. Coming home to the synagogue in Nazareth, you can almost feel the nostalgia. It should be a time of warm welcome for Jesus. A time of hearty reception, finding joyful acceptance among friends and neighbors.

Jesus’ Judean ministry was behind him. About a year or year and a half of ministry he’d already done, and his reputation had preceded him into Galilee and into Nazareth as well into this little town. When it says, “Report about him went out throughout all the surrounding country” in verse 14, the word, report, there is the word, *phémé*, which is the Greek origin of our word fame. In our vernacular, Jesus was, by this time, already famous. He was a celebrated figure. There’s not just the hometown feel and atmosphere, but there’s also the, the reputation that had preceded him.

The spread of his reputation, it was boosted by the positive promotion of his ministry throughout Judea and all the way up into Galilee. Before he ever returned to Nazareth, people had heard the news about him; they had heard what he'd done. He'd turned water into wine, a miracle of amazing proportions. He went into the Temple complex where there was buying, selling, trading, money-changing and all that going on and he cleaned out the entire Temple complex. One man with power and authority, driving out the buyers and the sellers and the profiteers.

Word had gotten around. He performed a number of miracles in Jerusalem. They are not recorded in Scripture but they are acknowledged in John's Gospel. Those miracles had attracted the attention of the Jewish ruling body, the Sanhedrin, and they had come to the conclusion as a body that he was, at the very least, a teacher come from God. Jesus even spent an evening with one of the Sanhedrin's most respected members, a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He spent time with him, even teaching him about the necessity of a new birth, calling that man to faith in himself.

Jesus, eventually he became so well known in Judea and so popular that he was attracting the wrong kind of attention from the Pharisees. Their jealousy, their envy had been stirred, so he departed from Judea, he went into Galilee. He passed through

Samaria. And as he is passing through Samaria, he evangelized the Samaritans, starting with a woman, an immoral woman. Came to a Samaritan village, evangelized them, stayed with them a couple of days. He came to Capernaum, not far from Nazareth. There he healed a nobleman's son.

Sounds like a pretty full calendar, doesn't it? The entire region of Galilee was eagerly anticipating his arrival to see his ministry first-hand. And it wasn't just his miracles, though they were very eager to see his miracles, but they wanted to hear his teaching as well. Jesus was renowned as an amazing teacher. Word had gotten around as it says in verse 15, He taught in all their synagogues and he was being glorified by all. He is being praised; he is being heralded.

And that's where you would find Jesus on a Sabbath is in the synagogue. Always in the synagogue. That was his custom. And Jesus had attended synagogue all his life, ever since a child. He's there, raised with his parents, and now that he has come back, he's gone through all the stages of life. He's come back, he's a respected rabbi, a popular teacher and yet nothing changes. He still keeps this regular habit, regular Sabbath day attendance.

We should just note at this point that if our Lord did that, shouldn't we? Right? Be in church, folks, every week. Synagogue, Jesus was there it was the very heart and soul of the Jewish community. That started, that tradition started in the days of the Babylonian exile. The synagogue was the place of instruction. It was the place where the Torah was read, the law, the first five books of the Bible. It was the place where the prophets were read and then explained. It was the place where the traditions of the elders were passed down from generation to generation to generation to generation.

That's what kept Jewish tradition and law and culture, sensitivity to God's instruction. It's what kept that passed down throughout the generations and people attended the synagogue on the Sabbath. They also attended special days of prayer and fasting, came together for those. The sabbath was a place like our churches are. The place for public worship, biblical instruction. There were even meetings during the week for community events.

There was a synagogue ruler; he enforced order, he maintained procedure, but it's interesting that he didn't teach. Teachers came from the laity, the learned men in the congregation. Some of the Pharisees were teachers in their



synagogues. But they weren't formal clergy. When visiting teachers and rabbis came to town, they were vetted first. But the people were always eager to hear from people visiting from outside. They brought news, they brought some amount of culture, some amount of diversity.

The typical synagogue service began with singing and a prayer. The congregation then together recited the shema, Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Following from that there was a reading from the Torah, no teaching from the Torah, mind you, just the reading. The Torah instruction was sufficient to stand on its own without any elaboration or explanation, just reading.

After that a reading from the Prophets. Those who read from the text of Scripture, they stood while they were reading, as I do, in honor of God's Word. The reader then would be seated and, after the sacred scrolls were carefully tucked into a chest or an ark, small ark, the teacher would address the congregation, teaching from a seated position. So the teacher would go to the passage that was read from the Prophets, translate that passage for the sake of the congregation, it'd allow them to hear it in their own language. And then he would proceed to explain the text.

So that's the background for this particular Sabbath day as Jesus returns to Nazareth. The scene here seems to be set up for him for a good reception. The report of his miracles had built anticipation, heightened a sense of excitement among the people. They're ready for him. He entered synagogue, this center of Jewish instruction established for centuries. This is the perfect place to introduce himself as their Messiah and to explain the purpose of his coming. What is his mission to his people?

A couple of other ways that Luke has set the scene for a favorable homecoming for Jesus, verse 16 says, "he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up." Where he had been raised. Nazareth is home base to Jesus, right? This is his people. Why wouldn't he be well received, right? This is his home. They know him; he knows them. They tell young preachers, you know, Preach, preach to our own people. Try to cut your teeth on people that know you, who will be gracious to you, favorable to you.

Jesus is coming back here to very familiar territory for him, all the sights and the sounds, the smells at home. It's interesting to consider his homecoming from his perspective, how he entered into town and as he entered the synagogue that day.

As he entered into the town, no doubt he came with some mixed emotions. His emotions, his thinking, when were probably informed by his memories of his upbringing but also mixed in with the foresight of the future. He knew what was going to happen and it just seemed incongruous with the pleasant feelings he had of his upbringing in Nazareth mixing it in with what he knew was about to transpire.

Alfred Edersheim has described the scene in this way, I love this quotation here. He says this, "As we follow Jesus to the city of his childhood, the home of his humility, we can scarcely repress thoughts of what must have stirred his soul as he once more entered the well-known valley and beheld the scenes to each of which some early memory must have attached. As the lengthening shadows of Friday's sun closed around the quiet valley, he would hear the well-remembered double blast of the trumpet from the roof of the synagogue minister's house, proclaiming the advent of the holy day.

"Once more it sounded through the still summer air to tell all that work must be laid aside. And yet a third time it was heard ere the minister put it aside, close by where he stood, not to profane the Sabbath Day by carrying it. For now, the Sabbath had really commenced, and the festive Sabbath lamp was

lit. The Sabbath morn dawned and early, Jesus repaired to that synagogue where, as a child, a youth, a young man, he had so often worshipped in the humble retirement of his rank. Sitting not up there among the elders and the honored, but far back.

“The old, well-known faces were around him; the old well-remembered words and services fell on his ear. How different they had always been to him than to them with whom he had thus mingled in common worship. And now, he was, again, among them. Truly a stranger among his own countrymen. This time to be looked at, listened to, tested, tried, used, or cast aside as the case might be.” End Quote.

It says in verse 16 there, that “As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.” This time, as he entered the synagogue, he’s no longer the little kid sitting in back, straining and craning to look over the tall heads and the broad shoulders of the men sitting in front of him. Now that he has returned, he enters with the reputation, the stature, of an up-and-coming rabbi. Now he’s sitting at the front in the seat of honor. He’s ready to stand, to read and to take his seat and teach.

Let’s get into the second point of our outline, simply put: The Scripture, The Scripture. Jesus, as the visiting rabbi, he

has the honor of reading from the scroll and then giving an exposition to the congregation. Take a look at verses 16 to 20 again. "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.' He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him."

There is, in this section here, a chiastic structure. Chiastic structure takes its name from the Greek letter, Chi. Chi looks like an X. And there are thoughts that they're parallel at either end of the X. So, they proceed toward the middle, toward a culminating point in the middle which receives the emphasis of the text. You can look down and see in verses 16 to 20. I'm just going to read through the, the verses for you, and then I'll show you the parallels.

You've got in verse 16 the synagogue setting then Jesus stands up, then he receives the scroll, he unrolls the scroll,

and then reads the Scripture. That's the center. Then he rolls up the scroll that he unrolled, he returns the scroll that he received, and he sits down where he had stood up. We are back into the synagogue setting, right? So you see the sets of parallels there? The synagogue setting in verses 16 and 20. Jesus standing up and then sitting down verses 16 and 20.

Then you have Jesus receiving and unrolling the scroll in verse 17 and then Jesus rolling up the scroll and giving it back in verse 20. There in the middle, verses 18 and 19, there's Jesus reading the Scripture. That's the center of the chiastic structure, and that tells us that that's where the emphasis is. That's where the focus is. That's why the focus of this sermon is going to be on that verse, that section.

Luke has hurried us in the narrative, he's hurried us to this point, right? As we said verses 14 and 15 they summarized a whole, an entire year and a half of ministry in just two verses. But now that Luke has hurried us here to this point, he's now backing off the throttle. He's causing us to slow down, look carefully. And that's because this is important. This is key. Jesus is about ready to announce the driving aims of his Messianic mission. This text of Scripture explains everything

that drives him, all his decisions, everything that makes him tick. Luke wants us to stop and to watch.

Jesus received the scroll of Isaiah from the synagogue attendant. That had been pre-arranged to receive Isaiah, that scroll, whether by the synagogue ruler as he and Jesus talked, or perhaps by the wise providence of God. Just on this particular day Isaiah is given to him. But in any case, Jesus needed the scroll of Isaiah for his sermon, and that's what Jesus received. He then unrolled the scroll, called a biblion. Biblion is a long strip of parchment. It's held on a roller with a knob fixed at each end.

You've seen in the movies all that in the old settings where they unroll scrolls. It's probably the very scroll that had been unscrolled and scrolled up, read from time to time and time and again during his childhood. He went back to that old scroll. He found the place in that scroll from which he intended to read. There are actually two places, Isaiah 61:1 and 2 and Isaiah 58:6. But it would all be contained in one reading, as the Hebrew was very compacted. And there in the Prophet Isaiah was the exact Scripture that explained the nature of his ministry.

That first line, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," that was not the question. There was no question that the Spirit of God was upon Jesus. Jesus had returned in the power of the Spirit, verse 14. Everybody knew that. That's what the report was about. In fact, everybody was talking about that, talking about, he's doing things that mere human beings cannot do. The fact of the Spirit's power in Jesus' life, it was never under dispute. It was obvious but the question that no one was asking, but what Jesus felt compelled to explain was the purpose of the Spirit's power and presence. Why is the Spirit upon me? Because, verse 18, "He has anointed me" and "He has sent me." He anointed me, and he sent me, two reasons that the Spirit rested upon Jesus. To anoint him, to send him.

First, let's talk about that issue of anointing. What is the significance of that? We've talked about that here before. And, simply put, anointing means divine commission. Prophets were anointed, priests were anointed, kings were anointed. And that's to show that this is not man's doing, but it's God's doing. God had set him apart and rather than anointing him with physical oil, he'd anointed him with the very Spirit of God. That's the exclamation of John the Baptist, right?



John 1:32 and following, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him." That's an anointing. "I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on' he, 'whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." Anointing: The significance of that may have been lost on this congregation in Nazareth. But John was saying it. And word had gotten around. As I said, there was about a year for the word to spread from that event to Galilee to reach Nazareth, that Jesus is the anointed Son of God. Commissioned by God. Set apart for God's purpose.

So, what he says he does not say on his own. What he says, when he speaks, is the very Word of God. When Jesus speaks, God speaks. So what's the purpose, what is the divine commission for the Messiah? He's anointed me. Very specifically, it says there an infinitive of purpose, "to proclaim good news to the poor." As we said, that's the word *euangelizo*, to evangelize, to preach the Gospel. He anointed me to preach the Gospel.

Let that sink in for a moment. God commissioned Jesus the Christ, the Messiah. He empowered him with the Holy Spirit, giving mighty acts of power for what purpose? To evangelize. Is

that striking home for any of you? If God commissioned Jesus to evangelize, and then Jesus said in Matthew 28:18-20, a passage we refer to as what? The Great Commission, right? If God commissioned Jesus to evangelize, and then Jesus said this, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Listen, if our Lord, his commission to us, it's an extension of God's commission to him, right? When we evangelize, we are participating in this commission that God, by the Spirit, had given to the Messiah, had prophesied about back in Isaiah 61. That's pretty exciting, isn't it? Listen, when you and I have these simple conversations with unbelievers, and we tell them about this great Gospel, these are Gospel-centered conversations calling people to repent and believe. You're a part of this. We're all a part of this. We become his delegates, right? Bringing the Gospel. That's significant, right? That's worth living for.