

Jesus' First Sermon

LUKE 4:16-30

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I've spent a lot of time thinking about preaching over the past several weeks, so as we get started this morning, I would invite you to think for just a few moments about some of the best sermons you have ever heard. Do you have a favorite sermon? Can you think of a lesson or maybe a Bible class that had a huge impact on you in some way? Several weeks ago, I referred to a lesson my dad preached when I was about nine years old, a lesson on Ananias and Sapphira. And it was that lesson that first made me realize that I had sinned. Ananias and Sapphira had lied to the Holy Spirit, there were some terrible consequences, and in listening to that lesson, I knew without a doubt that I had done what they had done, and I was guilty. And I needed to do something about it. It was truth from the word of God that I could not ignore. Perhaps you can think of a lesson from your own past that has affected you in a similar way.

So, today, I want us to think about preaching for the next few minutes, and I want us to think about the preaching of Jesus. Jesus, obviously, is the world's best preacher! And in the Bible, we have several of his sermons. The most famous, perhaps, is the Sermon on the Mount. We have others that are scattered throughout his ministry, but this morning I want us to think about the Lord's first sermon. The passage is found in the book of Luke – Luke 4 (p. 1602). We just started studying Luke this past Wednesday evening, so we will get to this passage in our Wednesday class in a few weeks, but today we are looking at Jesus' first public sermon. And it takes place in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He's born in Bethlehem, of course, but they flee to Egypt, and when they come back to Israel, they settle up north in Nazareth. This is where Jesus grows up. This is where he learns to be a carpenter. But the time comes when Jesus is baptized, he's then tempted in the wilderness, and then he travels around for close to a year, teaching privately, before we have any record of the Lord teaching publicly. And that is what we have in Luke 4.

We will get to the text in just a moment, but as we look ahead at the first few verses, I want us to notice how Luke explains that when Jesus goes to this particular synagogue, he does this, ***“as was His custom.”*** In other words, this was his habit. This is what he did. Every seventh day, Jesus would go with his family to the synagogue. They would sing the Psalms, they would pray, they would study. This was his ***“custom.”*** And on this occasion, after he had been out and around for about a year, Jesus comes home. He comes back to Nazareth. And as something of a guest, Jesus is handed a scroll. The NASB says, “book.” The ESV says, “scroll.” The word Luke uses here is the basis of our English word “Bible,” and it basically refers to the guts of the papyrus plant, the material they used to make paper. A scroll, by the way, is what we have on the wall up here. This, in fact, is the Great

Isaiah Scroll, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, originally written around the time of Christ, preserved in a clay jar in a cave near the Dead Sea, and then found by a shepherd boy back in 1947.

Today, though, we are looking at Jesus' first sermon. He uses Isaiah as a text, which is why we have the scroll of Isaiah up here. Today, I want us to make several observations. As we listen to and as we evaluate sermons we hear today, we need to know what to compare those to. And then also, as we get down to the reaction, let's also ask ourselves if we would react any differently if Jesus were preaching to us.

So, let's jump into it. Notice, please, Luke 4:16-30,

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

***¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed ME to preach the gospel to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set free those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."***

²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²² And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?" ²³ And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" ²⁴ And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. ²⁵ But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; ²⁶ and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; ²⁹ and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, He went His way.

Again, as we look back at what happens here, let's make some observations on the Lord's first public lesson.

I. And we start with what is first and perhaps the most obvious lesson, and that is: JESUS STARTS BY READING A PASSAGE FROM THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

Notice: He doesn't start by sharing whatever is on his heart that day. But when he stands up to read and is handed the scroll, he takes it and immediately finds a passage that he reads. I would just note, briefly, that this is most likely a scroll. This is not a leather-bound book, as we think of books today. This doesn't have page numbers and a table of contents. This probably doesn't even have chapter and verse divisions. But instead, this

is a huge roll of some kind – probably papyrus – but it’s large and perhaps somewhat difficult to handle. I’ve heard that a typical scroll of Isaiah could have been up to 65 feet long. This copy of Isaiah on the wall up here is roughly 24 feet long, and it’s made up of many separate pieces of animal skin, joined together to make one long piece. But I want us to picture this: Jesus stands up, he is handed this rather large scroll, and he finds the passage he is looking for. He’s able to do this, because he knows the word of God. And this is how his sermon begins. He is handed a scroll, he finds a passage, and he reads it. So, he starts with the word.

II. **As we go back to our text, we find something else here, and that is: HE EXPLAINS THE PASSAGE CLEARLY AND “GRACIOUSLY” (as text tells us), IN A WAY THAT IS RELEVANT TO THOSE WHO ARE LISTENING (verses 21-22).**

So, he reads the passage, he sits down, and at the end of verse 20, everybody is looking at Jesus. The ancient custom was that the teacher would stand up to read and sit down to teach. So, everybody is looking at Jesus. They all know him personally. This is where his family worships. These are his friends and neighbors. As a carpenter, he has built things for these people. This is his home congregation. And as they are all staring at him, wondering what he will say next, Jesus says, ***“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*** What he’s saying is, “I am the Messiah! I am the fulfillment of this passage! This Scripture is all about me!” By the way, this passage is somewhat unique in Isaiah in that Isaiah uses some first-person pronouns, doesn’t he? ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor,”*** and so on. So, as Jesus reads this, he’s reading it as it is written, but he is applying it to himself. He is the fulfillment of this passage. And these people, at first, seem to be impressed. This is a good sermon! It’s a very short sermon! This is a great sermon in that regard! But they could understand it. They ***“marveled at his gracious words.”*** These are words of grace. These are good words.

So, Jesus takes a passage from Isaiah and he applies it to what is happening right at that moment. He takes a passage from 750 years in the past, and he makes it relevant. He applies it. What Isaiah wrote so long ago means something right now, to all of us in this room. And looking back on it, we see it so clearly. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2! Over the previous year, Jesus has been moving around proclaiming good news to the poor, he’s been proclaiming freedom to the captives, he’s been restoring sight to the blind, he’s been releasing the oppressed – literally, but especially in a spiritual sense. The spiritually poor are those who know that they basically have nothing to offer to God – they are broken down in sin, and they know it. And the same goes for the captives – these are those who are enslaved to sin, and they know it. And the same goes for the blind and the oppressed. They all know that they owe God a debt that they could never pay.

Jesus comes, and he brings good news to these people. He brings freedom, and sight, and relief from the overwhelming burden and weight of sin. He came to save those who knew they are lost (the ***“poor in spirit”***). As he will go on to explain later, he comes to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The good news comes to those who need it. I’m thinking of the first step in most 12-step programs. We are powerless. Our lives have become unmanageable. That’s where Jesus steps in. That’s where good preaching steps in, by the way. Thinking back to that sermon on Ananias and Sapphira I mentioned earlier. Jesus couldn’t save me until I knew I was lost. I have to be lost before I can be found. And that’s what the Lord is saying here. He is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61. He comes to offer freedom and forgiveness and relief to anybody who needs it.

And the message Jesus preaches here is simple. These words are ***“gracious.”*** Their first impression is positive. They see some value in these words. It’s good to be free. It’s good to see. It’s good to have relief, and so on. Obviously, Jesus could have left it here. He could have ended on a high note. He could have walked out to, “Nice

sermon, Jesus! Come back soon!” or whatever. However, it seems that Jesus knows what these people are thinking. And it starts with the question, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” Right here, we have the first clue! Is he really Joseph’s son? Not really. Mary is his mother. God is his father. Joseph is something of a step-father, as we might say today. So, this is perhaps something of an insult. Who is this local kid to say that we need him in some way? Who does he think he is? These people are having a hard time. Yes, these are gracious words, but then it sinks in a bit.

III. So, at this point Jesus turns it back on them, and he goes on and he USES THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE TO CONFRONT A SINFUL ATTITUDE.

He says that without a doubt, these people will quote this secular proverb, “*Physician, heal yourself.*” And they will. That’s coming a few years later, on the cross. He then exposes their hearts with the accusation that they don’t really believe the reports of the miracles he’s done. Jesus knows that these people basically just want a show. They want him to do the cool stuff in Nazareth that he been doing in other places. They want the circus (we can say this, since the circus is here in Madison this weekend). They want the show. In other words, they don’t really see themselves as poor, and captive, and blind, and oppressed. They don’t really see themselves as needing the gospel quite yet. They aren’t sinners! They want the entertainment. And so, he quotes another common proverb, that “*no prophet is welcome in his hometown.*” That’s pretty harsh, but to prove his point, he brings in basically two of the most respected prophets in the history of God’s people: Elijah and Elisha. And he makes the point that as these two men did their work as prophets, they basically had to leave Israel before they could find anybody to listen! They had to take the message to outsiders. Everybody’s starving in this famine under Elijah, but the only person he helps is this faithful widow up in pagan Sidon. And the same is true for Elisha – many people had leprosy back then, but only Naaman the Syrian, only the commander of an enemy army had enough faith to actually listen to and obey a prophet sent from God.

Everybody knows these stories, and by using these two examples, Jesus is making the point that these people, although coming to the synagogue every Sabbath to read these scriptures, are actually more like the villains than the heroes in these stories. And the message is: Pagan widows and unclean lepers have a better chance than you people! And this is why the people in Nazareth were so angry. This is why they rejected Jesus. He was a great preacher, but the more they thought about it, this guy is saying that we need him. This guy is saying that we are poor, and captive, and blind, and oppressed. And that’s not us. And Jesus calls them out on it.

IV. And that leads us to the last characteristic of the Lord’s preaching, and that is: JESUS REFUSES TO GIVE UP OR GIVE IN, EVEN THE FACE OF INTENSE PERSECUTION.

Starting in verse 28, when they hear these things, they are filled with rage. They hear the world’s most perfect preacher, preaching the word of God, and they chase him out to the edge of town, intending to throw him off a cliff. Jesus escapes, though, and moves on to the next village, where he continues teaching. He stops teaching in Nazareth, but he doesn’t stop teaching. He leaves, and he moves along.

Conclusion:

When we started a bit ago, I said we’d be asking ourselves whether we would have responded any differently if we had been in that synagogue in Nazareth that day. So, the question is: What is our response? Would we listen and obey, or would we try to throw him off a cliff? It seems that our response really depends on how we see ourselves. When Jesus says that he comes to proclaim good news to the poor, do we see ourselves as being

spiritually poor? When he says that he comes to proclaim freedom to captives, do we see ourselves as being captive? When he says that he comes to give sight to the blind, do we see ourselves as being blind? When he says that he comes to give relief to the oppressed, do we see ourselves as being oppressed? Or do we get offended? In other words, do we need God, or don't we? If we're in need, Jesus has the answer! But if we're not even asking the question, his answer really doesn't make much sense at all.

This morning, if you're offended at the suggestion that you might be lost in sin, Jesus isn't really for you at this point. But if you know that you've failed to live up to God's ideal, we want to invite you to hear and obey what is truly good news. Turn away from sin and obey the Lord's command to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. If we can help in any way, pull me aside after worship this morning. Talk to Aaron or John. Give us a call. Send a text. But if you are ready to obey the gospel immediately, we hope you'll let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com