

## Luke 4B

- The fourth chapter of Luke records the beginning of Jesus' ministry
  - In the previous chapter Jesus had received his authority to minister by the Holy Spirit
  - In the first third of today's chapter, we saw Jesus tempted but resisting in the wilderness, demonstrating His sinless nature and His obedience to the Father
  - The final third of the chapter next week we see the beginning of the record of his miracles, the means by which he demonstrated His power and authority and declared the kingdom had come
  - But before we get there, today we study the middle third of Chapter 4, the declaration of his ministry and announcement of the arrival of the Messiah
  - And as we'll see throughout the Gospel, Chap 4 also gives us the chance to see how the people of Israel reacted to Jesus' claims

[Luke 4:14](#) ¶ And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district.

[Luke 4:15](#) And He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all.

[Luke 4:16](#) ¶ 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.

[Luke 4:17](#) And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

[Luke 4:18](#) "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,

[Luke 4:19](#) TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."

[Luke 4:20](#) 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.

[Luke 4:21](#) And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

- Leaving the high desert of the Galilee and heading south to the valley west of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus began entering into the synagogues and teaching in towns throughout the region
  - We know He visited Capernaum on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, perhaps Hazor near the Jordan river
  - If you were to look at a similar account in Matthew and Mark, you would note differences in the accounts
    - In particular, the timing of Mark and Matthew seems to be later
      - Matthew & Mark have disciples – Luke not till Chapter 5
      - Matthew & Mark have Christ performing many miracles, etc.
    - Essentially, there are two possibilities
      - More than one visit to Nazareth
      - Luke placed the event early to make the point that His ministry would be rejected not accepted
      - I like the multiple visit theory
- As Jesus arrived in the synagogues, he would always teach
  - Synagogue means to bring together, to assemble together
  - Luke provides a lot of detail on how synagogues operated
    - For the Greek reader
  - Synagogues existed as a worship and teaching extension of the temple
    - It wasn't the same as the temple – not a place of sacrifice
    - It was the primary gathering place for Jews to sing praises, to study the Torah, the Word of God, and to pray together
    - The teaching could be done by any adult Jewish male, after 13
      - Study of the Word and preparation to teach were part of preparation in youth
      - Not only did it encourage knowledge of God but also literacy and scholarship

- Of course, it deteriorated into sects and men who looked to knowledge as a replacement for genuine love for God and obedience to God
- When a notable visitor arrived for the Sabbath service, they would commonly be given the honor of reading from the Word of God, which was comprised of the Torah, the Prophets and the Sayings
  - The practice in the temple was for the reading of God’s Word to be done while standing
  - Then the reader would expound the passage for the audience
- Do these patterns sound familiar?
  - The gathering of God’s people hasn’t changed much in thousands of years – because of the Spirit of God is directing the worship of His believers
  - The Word of God, the singing of praise, the praying for one another, the sharing of fellowship, the looking forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises for His faithful
- Yet the gathering do vary in adherence with this pattern and the integrity in which it’s carried out
  - In the day of Jesus, no doubt he encountered some synagogues that were more healthy than others, more strict in their observance than others, larger than others, and so on
  - We know from the Gospels that the Jewish culture already included many who were apostate and acted out their faith merely as a cultural distinction
  - Jesus ran into all kinds
- It’s interesting that Jesus nevertheless honored each city by entering their synagogue and participating in their services
  - It sounds as though He was a loyal and regular participant in worship regardless of where He found himself
  - He also played a useful and contributing role, teaching in every place, and the reaction we’re told was always positive

- He came to benefit the people of God, even when they may have been a particularly sickly group – a group without much true spirituality to offer
- He contributed what He came to give regardless of whether those in attendance were especially interested in listening
- He also didn't forsake participating in the ceremony of the synagogue, even though it was never provided in scripture
  - The ceremony itself was not the key, but nor was it reason to reject the service
  - In other words, Jesus wasn't interested in finding the perfect service before He was willing to set foot in the building
  - In other words, He came for the sick not for the healthy
- These scenes painted by Luke look so familiar to us today
  - The essential elements of the service really haven't changed much
    - There are local gatherings in towns and cities the world over
    - They are all bound by similar if not exactly the same beliefs
    - Similar patterns of worship
    - A focus on the Word, on praise, on prayer and on fellowship more or less
  - But we also have our unhealthy patterns and sects
    - We have misunderstandings of faith and doctrine
    - And we have many who call themselves Christians and live the culture to some extent but don't truly have or live the faith
- And in His example, He demonstrated the importance of making gathering with others in worship a priority
  - Those who lived in those towns who refrained from gathering in the synagogues on the days Jesus visited would have missed Him – the Messiah

- God was there everyday in His Word, but what a shame to miss the physical appearance of the Messiah
- I believe if Jesus were to return again and repeat his first ministry, but this time walking from church to church instead of synagogues
  - He would visit every church that gave opportunity
  - Remembering He came to heal the sick, not the healthy
- But it's also worth noting that reading and expounding the Word was his focus in every place he stopped
  - Ultimately, if church is to be church, the worship must be in Spirit and in Truth
    - And Truth is the Word of God and nothing else
    - When we remove the Word of God from the service, we have removed its power and purpose
    - The church today is so unhealthy in so many corners because the Word of God has been removed from so many pulpits
  - While preparing the Word of God is my contribution to this service, don't ever underestimate your own contribution
    - Jesus choose to approach people in the meeting places of his day, because the gathering is important to God
    - He could have said He didn't need to be there because the system was corrupt or because He didn't need instruction – but took every opportunity to be there
    - When you are absent from the gathering you are withholding your gifting and contribution from the Body of Christ
- And so Jesus is the distinguished visitor, Jesus is asked to read the Word from Isaiah, and he stands and reads Isaiah 61
  - The verses in Isaiah were Messianic, and even in Jesus' day they had always been seen this way

- They begin with a reference to the Holy Spirit anointing His ministry, a prophecy Christ had just fulfilled with John the Baptist
- Then the verse begins to describe the ministry of the Messiah
  - It's important to note what the verses Jesus read say and what He leaves out
    - He will bring good news to the afflicted
    - He will bind up the broken hearted
    - He will proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners
  - In other words, Jesus' ministry was to be a ministry of reconciliation, of redemption, of healing both physical and spiritual – of freeing men from the bondage of sin
  - Finally, Jesus says He is declaring the favorable year of the Lord
    - To His Jewish audience this was an obvious reference to the Jewish Year of Jubilee
    - This custom came from the Law in Lev 25
    - It provided for a rest for the farm land one year out of every seven
      - God would provide enough yield in the seventh year to last past the Jubilee
    - After 49 years (7 x 7), the Jubilee arrived when all indentured servants and slaves were set free, land reverted back to its original owners
      - In fact, the price of land was reduced proportionally according to how many years left until Jubilee
- The Jubilee provided for a rest for the land, which every farmer will tell you is good and necessary for the soil
  - But it's spiritual significance was its primary purpose, as all the Law points to Christ

- Christ we already studied in Genesis is the Lord of the Sabbath – He is our rest from our work of salvation – so that the Sabbath itself is a picture of Christ
  - Now the Jubilee year is a reinforcement of that picture
  - The seventh year is a year when we do no work but yet God has provided all we need – the rest is ours since God did the work
- And the 50<sup>th</sup> year jubilees demonstrates the other have of Jesus' ministry
  - It pictures the freedom we all have in Him, a freedom from slavery, slavery to sin
  - And it pictures our inheritance being restored – our eternal inheritance
- So Christ reads the first verse and part of the second verse of Isaiah 61
  - But it's also notable that Christ stopped where he did
    - The second verse of Isaiah reads in full

[Is. 61:2](#) To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD  
And the day of vengeance of our God;  
To comfort all who mourn,

- The next line of Isaiah also describes Christ's role as judge of the world
- It makes mention of his day of vengeance in Tribulation
- Jesus does not read this verse, because as He says in John:

[John 3:17](#) "For God did not send the Son into the world to **judge** the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

- Jesus is focused on the purpose of his first coming alone for now
- Having read the scripture, Jesus sits down for the exposition, as was customary, and he announces that these verses were fulfilled – they described this very moment

[Luke 4:22](#) 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?"

[Luke 4:23](#) 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.'"

[Luke 4:24](#) And He said, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.

[Luke 4:25](#) "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;

[Luke 4:26](#) 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.

[Luke 4:27](#) "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."

[Luke 4:28](#) And all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things;

[Luke 4:29](#) 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.

[Luke 4:30](#) But passing through their midst, He went His way.

- The crowd had two reactions almost at once
  - First, they were edified by Jesus' teaching
    - His commentary seemed appropriate and was pleasing
    - It reaffirmed their faith in God's word
    - It marveled at God's grace toward them in the prophecy of the Messiah
  - But they also couldn't accept that Jesus was that person
    - There reason for not accepting Him was rather pitiful - He was too well known – Joseph's son
      - They had grown up around Him
      - In a small community in ancient times, without transportation, air conditioned homes, television, people were outside and knew one another
      - He would have been a well known child of the town
    - He was too ordinary, too much like them to be the Messiah

- The irony is that strangers in another city were prepared to see Him as the promised Messiah but not those who knew him best
- But it also reminds us that the test of faith in Christ is more than a belief in the concept of a Messiah or the idea of God forgiving our sins because of His mercy rather than our works
  - Ultimately, salvation awaits those who believe in Jesus the person as the Messiah
  - We must come to the Gospel story as it is written in this book and accept these eye witness accounts as truth – as a testimony that a man named Jesus was born, lived and was crucified nearly 2,000 years ago
  - That was all man yet also God in perfection
  - If the concepts sound good but we never personalize the Messiah as Jesus Himself, then salvation never comes

[Acts 4:12](#) “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men **by which** we must be saved.”

- Now Jesus of course sensed the doubt and unbelief among those in Nazareth
  - He had traveled recently through Capernaum and had done many miracles there to a great response
  - That response had reached Nazareth even before Jesus Himself did
  - So now Jesus says what their thinking
    - He says they were expecting him to do the miracles at home He did in Capernaum
      - Matt and Mark and Luke all record some of the miracles Jesus did in that city including some of the most dramatic healings
    - It’s likely that His unwillingness to perform miracles further increased their skepticism
  - Then His famous quote that a prophet can’t be successful in his hometown

- The word for welcomed can also be translated accepted – prophets are never accepted in their own towns
- Natural but regrettable quality of our nature that we are only impressed by the new and different, never by the familiar
- The essential problem here was not their desire in seeing miracles, as it was their purpose in seeing them
  - In Capernaum, Jesus declared who he was and He delighted in performing miracles for them, which cemented their belief in His words
  - In Nazareth, Jesus knew their hearts would be skeptical no matter what He did, so He performed few miracles realizing that they would do no good
    - Throughout His ministry Jesus never indulged the hard hearted who were merely testing him
    - He remained silent before those who demanded that he defend Himself
- Then to prove His statement concerning prophets and hometowns, Jesus makes mention of two famous incidents involving prophets from Israel's past
  - The story of Elisha is in 1 Kings 17
    - God has brought a severe drought and famine for 3.5 years upon Israel for their sin
      - That period is always a period of judgment
      - And Elisha was sent by God to a Gentile city and to a widow and her son
      - The woman showed him mercy and kindness
      - She also acknowledged he was a messenger of God
      - God sent Elisha to those who would receive him without question while ignoring the citizens of Israel who rejected Elisha's words
    - Likewise, the story of Elisha demonstrates Jesus' point about faith without questioning and without demanding convincing proofs

[2Kings 5:1](#) ¶ Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, *but he was* a leper.

[2Kings 5:2](#) Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife.

[2Kings 5:3](#) She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy."

[2Kings 5:4](#) Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel."

[2Kings 5:5](#) Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand *shekels* of gold and ten changes of clothes.

[2Kings 5:6](#) ¶ He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

[2Kings 5:7](#) When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending *word* to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me."

[2Kings 5:8](#) ¶ It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent *word* to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

[2Kings 5:9](#) So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the doorway of the house of Elisha.

[2Kings 5:10](#) Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and *you will* be clean."

[2Kings 5:11](#) But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.'

[2Kings 5:12](#) "Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

[2Kings 5:13](#) Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you *to do some* great thing, would you not have done *it*? How much more *then*, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

[2Kings 5:14](#) So he went down and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

- Naaman was the captain of the forces of the Aramean nation

- When Naaman travels to Israel, he takes great risk to travel to the camp of his enemy to request healing
- But it's a testimony of his faith in the girl's testimony of the prophet
- He does take gifts to appease the King of Israel, an amount of 750 lbs of silver and 150 lbs of gold
- The King of Israel is distraught over receiving the letter because he can't understand how the King of Armeans expected him to heal a man of leprosy
  - But Elisha steps in to the rescue and offers to see the man
  - He suggests that the man wash in the Jordon seven times
  - The repetition of 7 ensures that anyone hearing of the miracle would know to credit God for the healing
- The captain is upset because the suggestion seems powerless to help him
  - And he storms off indignant
  - This is like the people of Nazareth
    - They aren't willing to even consider that Jesus could be the Messiah because of his familiarity to them
    - This is also why Jesus' own brothers rejected him at least until after his resurrection
  - But then the servants say something very insightful
    - They remind him that he would have been willing to do something very difficult, very painful, very sacrificing if Elisha had asked it
    - So why not do the simple thing?
- So Naaman relents and agrees to do it
  - And sure enough he is cleansed according to the prophets words
  - And in that his obedience is rewarded
- Jesus has admonished the citizens of Nazareth for their unwillingness to believe something as simple and unimpressive as their own local boy returning declaring the gospel

- And Jesus reminds the crowd that Elisha healed this Gentile, an enemy of Israel even as many lepers existed in Elisha's own country
- And the fact that God left so many of Israel in their state of suffering was a consequence of their rejection of His Word through the prophet Elisha
- Now the same fate was befalling the city of Nazareth for their hardness
  - Yet their neighbor Capernaum was receiving healing because they were willing to consider the message
  - And of course his suggestion angered them for they hated being compared to Gentiles
- The world we live in has much the same expectation as the people in Nazareth
  - When the Gospel message is presented, many will react as if the answer is too easy, not difficult enough, not dramatic enough
  - Where is the work? Where is the sacrifice? When you say salvation is the free gift of God because we can't earn it, the answer won't satisfy those looking for a different answer
  - But demands for spectacular proof or for difficult effort will always go unanswered
    - Faith is always the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen
    - When we present the gospel to others we will often receive the same reaction from the world – skepticism and demands for proof
      - But once in a while we will find that one who accepts the truth in the way Christ said it would happen – as the innocence of a child without doubt and without skepticism
  - And that is the faith that pleases the Father because it honors His son and His Word