

Luke 4:13-31

Let's set the context. This portion of scripture takes place following what we would call spiritual victory.

Jesus has been baptized, the Holy Spirit is upon Him, He has endured the most excruciating temptation imaginable, and spent a year ministering in the surrounding area.

Jesus is successful, his ministry is doing well!

V.14 He returns in the POWER OF THE SPIRIT to the region of Galilee and news of Him spreads throughout the area.

His popularity is growing, people are excited to see Him work, they want to be a part of the ministry! What a great testament!

Here are the highlights:

He had "cleansed" the temple in Jerusalem from those who were exploiting God's people for money,

he did his first miracle - turning water into wine;

he conversed by night with Nicodemus in the famous John chapter 3 dialogue;

he visited Samaria and the woman at the well - the results of which were that many of the Samaritans came to believe in Jesus. A great number of people were benefiting greatly from Christ's ministry.

V.15 - After returning to Galilee, Jesus' ministry continues to produce strong results - He is glorified by all - magnified, praised, as he teaches in their synagogues.

We look at this and say, "God is moving - miracles are happening, the word is being taught, lives are changed, people are glorifying Jesus - God is moving!"

V.16 - So he comes to his hometown, Nazareth, where he spent around 30 years of his life.

What could be better than bringing the gospel, the good news, to your hometown? Seeing old friends, catching up on what God has been doing in our lives.

And, since God is moving, what a mighty work He will do in our hometown!

He goes to the synagogue (gathering-place) - because that's his custom. It's important to Jesus that he be at church.

This was Jesus' custom in SPITE of the likelihood for bad experience.

Everything we know about the religious system in Jesus' day points to a rigid, legalistic, works based experience. You wouldn't necessarily call going to church fun.

There are actually a lot of similarities to this type of church experience and the traditional experience found in our area of the United States.

Nevertheless, Jesus is there! He didn't rail against the establishment in that moment. In fact, he does the opposite. He decides to share in their traditions by reading to them, to share with them - as was the custom for a visiting Rabbi.

So what's Jesus going to do? Perhaps turn his sermon into a rekindling of old relationships? Talk about his old Sunday School teacher? Maybe drift into a bit of nostalgia?

Or, maybe he'll be bold! Maybe he will bang on the pulpit and condemn their traditions as too rigid and lifeless. Maybe he will flip over a table like he did at Jerusalem?

Maybe give a three point sermon on marriage and the family? Three easy steps to fix your life?

No. Here's what he does:

V.17 As Jesus is handed the scroll of Isaiah he finds a particular, special place to share with the Body.

He is intentional in this. He doesn't close his eyes, turn the pages and put his finger in it. He knows the scriptures intimately - we are certain of this from observing his teachings and behavior in the gospels.

Jesus knew God's word, because he studied God's word - not because he was a computer with a built in database of Bible knowledge. We know this because there is a world of difference between knowledge and application. Jesus had knowledge and His application of the scriptures was timely, gentle, and wise - it was without equal.

Jesus purposefully selected this portion of scripture. He could have used any number of cliches, or clever sayings to encourage the Body, but he chose to use God's word purposefully for this specific group of people.

Now, there are plenty of sections in Isaiah about woe and judgment:

[Isa 34:2-3 NKJV] 2 For the indignation of the LORD [is] against all nations, And [His] fury against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to the slaughter. 3 Also their slain shall be thrown out; Their stench shall rise from their corpses, And the mountains shall be melted with their blood.

AND Jesus CHOOSES grace.

V.18 He reads out of ISA 61 and declares his heart for his creation:

[Luk 4:18 NKJV] "The Spirit of the LORD [is] upon Me, Because He has anointed Me

To preach the gospel to [the] poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to [the] captives
And recovery of sight to [the] blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed (bruised)

[Luk 4:19 NKJV] 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."

What a great message it is! This is everything we all yearn for in our lives.

In this reading Jesus personally claims that He is the messiah, the Christ, which means the Anointed One. And then He lays out the role of the Messiah.

What better place to make this claim than right here in his hometown!?

Grace comes forth in a glorious proclamation of Christ's work. Take note, this is all about what Jesus will do.

It has been said that so much of our teaching and preaching is about what we can do for God, while so much of the Bible declares what He has done for us. We must keep this in mind. This is Jesus' work to do.

Please don't misunderstand. I am not advocating for a faith without work. But we must realize that the only way we are able to participate

authentically in any work for the kingdom is because His Spirit dwells in us and brings us into unity with the Father and the Son.

V.20-21 Jesus teaches on these verses. It's not a very long sermon at all. Nothing compared to the sermon on the mount.

He says: What you just heard, that is happening right now. You have all become participants in God's great redemptive campaign.

Jesus' message is true on a grand scale AND right then in the moment, locally - These ARE the poor, brokenhearted, captive, blind, and bruised. But, do they see themselves that way? Probably not.

Having heard the message the hearer has an option on how to respond - the hearer always has an option.

They can - analyze; Internalize; Ignore; Criticize; Deflect the message to somebody else.

How will they receive the message?

V.22 They marveled at his GRACIOUS words. This message was a curiosity to them, it inspired wonder.

Having been raised under a rigid, dogmatic religion - maybe they were caught off guard by Christ's gracious demeanor and words.

Before they may have been bullied and oppressed in their faith. Perhaps their faith was accompanied by tremendous guilt.

Now they are told that God's kingdom is something different and that they are free. They are told that God desires to make them whole and to bind up their broken hearts.

So, for a brief moment they marveled. After all, grace is a marvelous thing.

They move from marvel to questioning as if they just remembered, isn't this Joseph's son? This question, while sounding pretty simple, has so many layers.

The implication is. Who do you think you are Jesus? We know you. We've known you since you were a boy.

The fact that he taught powerfully with grace and wisdom and knowledge challenged them greatly.

Their familiarity with Jesus blinded them to the gravity of his message.

They moved on from the wonder of grace, as many of us do in our discipleship.

Where we once found grace to be entirely captivating, we move on to other things - we have questions, just like these Nazarenes.

In the extreme form this culminates in a crisis of faith. "Did I ever believe at all!?"

V.23-24 Jesus' words are prophetic, they indicate that Jesus knew how this group of people would respond.

Jesus sees through their doubt. He is very plain in characterizing their reaction. He knew they were looking for a miracle, a fantastic sign, something supernatural, to stimulate their interests. They were looking for a show.

Remember he had spent the previous year working in Cana, Capernaum and Judea.

But here in his own hometown he is met with unbelief and criticism. This must have wounded him.

V.25-27 Having just delivered a supremely gracious message from Isaiah - Jesus now directly challenges their doubt with a hard teaching.

The point He makes is that God goes to whom He wills. While some may believe themselves to be uniquely qualified to receive God's favor, that is not how grace works.

There is no partiality with God.

Jesus uses two examples to illustrate his point and to challenge their notion of what right looks like.

Zarephath & Namaan - both gentiles, both from vastly different lifestyles.

Zarephath was deeply impoverished.

Namaan was a Syrian Army general with tremendous pride and arrogance and had an incurable disease.

This is incredibly upsetting to the congregation because they had a sense of entitlement.

What are you trying to say Jesus - we don't deserve God's favor, God is going to go to somebody else?

What Jesus was illustrating was that Zarephath and Namaan did not deserve God's favor, they were outside the covenant - and yet God worked in their lives still.

This was incredibly offensive to them. But how could it be that these people with such a strong religious background, and such respect for God's word, could be offended by God's word? That's exactly what happens.

V.28-29 Their reaction is militant, they have forgotten the message of grace because they have been challenged.

They refuse to believe the Lord's words, in favor of their own traditions.

They become a murderous mob, filled with wrath with every intent to kill Jesus - who was raised among them, who they thought they knew.

So, after all of the success, the spiritual victory, the work that had happened in his life up until his trip home - this is where Jesus finds himself...at the edge of a cliff, surrounded by hate, because He taught grace.

We could assume that's not exactly the homecoming He imagined.

V.30-31 So what's his next move? Let's burn this place down Jesus. Fight back! Stand up for yourself! Do not let them disrespect you like that!

That would be contrary to the message of grace. The beautiful thing about God's grace is that it extends to His enemies.

"When I was your foe, still your love fought for me." -Cory Asbury

He passes through them, to continue the work that the Father gave him. Their objections and doubt did not invalidate Jesus' calling.

So what's the whole point?

Christ's faithfulness and the grace he extends to his adversaries is often beyond my understanding - it is certainly beyond my ability to put into action.

Even with so many spiritual victories in our past - we become discouraged at the slightest suggestion of struggle, we forget grace.

We consider quitting at the first bad experience.

We become jaded and skeptical after enduring criticism.

We seek validation for our faith and calling from other people.

We ask "is God working in this?" when things don't work out the way we had hoped

Or, when things don't work out the way we have seen them work before.

Take heart loved one. God is working even in all of that - God is working. Remain steadfast, and may His message of grace be always on our lips.