

Sunday School Lesson January 3, 2021

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for January 3, 2021, "Called To Proclaim"

From the lesson section, Stepping into the Word, when we talk about Jesus' call to proclaim the gospel and our call to model ourselves after Jesus, we need to affirm that the Gospel can be proclaimed in many different ways: in word and action, through kindness and care, in listening and supporting. Those of us called to preach and teach need to study the model of Jesus, an amazingly effective preacher and teacher. Those of us called to show forth God's love in other ways will find ample models in the four Gospels.

Luke is one of the synoptic Gospels, along with Matthew and Mark. Synoptic means the three seem to write as if all of them are looking through the same eye (syn- same; optic-eye). Luke employs approximately 70 percent of Mark. Mark is used as a framework by Matthew and Luke. Matthew adds more Jewish material and Luke adds more Greek.

Luke was a Gentile and close companion to the Apostle Paul. Luke and Acts are two volumes of one work written by Luke. Though he was not an eye-witness to the resurrected Christ, he was so near to Paul that he was accepted as one inspired by God, whose writing was consistent with other Scripture and received the blessing of the early church. He was a physician, and therefore includes more healing miracles in his Gospel than the other two. Luke gave us the nativity through the eyes of Mary.

In chapter 4 Luke reveals to us Jesus' profound teaching on Isaiah 61:1-2. It is important to remember that the authors in all four Gospels did not record everything Jesus did or taught. As John would write, "There are not enough books to hold it all (John 21: 25)." The passages passed to us are specifically chosen for a specific reason. Each reveal something about Jesus and us. Our task is to discover what exactly is being said through the text.

In our text, Jesus has returned to Galilee. The people of Galilee had great affection for Jesus. He performed miracles. Miracles served God's purpose in the life of the one suffering. Secondly, they revealed the Holy Spirit's power in Jesus. Thirdly, they drew a crowd that Jesus might teach and preach. All three were important but especially the third. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus healed the sick and people continued to come. Jesus left for a time of prayer. The disciples expected Jesus to return to the crowd but he didn't. He informed

them he was going to another place to preach and teach. Jesus said: "For that is why I came" (Mark 1:38). Jesus became so popular that according to Mark's Gospel he could not enter a town or house without a huge crowd coming. The performing of miracles thrilled the crowds. Near the latter half of Jesus' years of ministry he performed fewer miracles. His teaching and preaching were prominent, with some miracles still being performed. When Jesus began to preach that those who follow him "must take up their cross and follow me" (Luke 9: 23), the crowd dwindled. His popularity began to wane until he was crucified alone, with only his mother, John, and some of the women followers at the cross.

The synagogues sprang up wherever there was a gathering of Jewish people. The word synagogue, means a place of gathering. They existed out of great necessity. The temple was destroyed during Nebuchadnezzar's military campaign. The entire Southern Kingdom fell to Babylon. The people needed a place of worship, for learning Mosaic Law, and practicing certain rites and rituals of their faith. Due to the exile the Jews were scattered throughout Babylon, Mesopotamia, and Israel. The important observances of Passover, Pentecost, and Feast of Booths were observed at the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Not everyone could make the journey to the temple. The spiritual education for the Jews mostly occurred in the synagogue.

The synagogue crowd was perfect for Jesus. The audience consisted of people serious about their faith. They were seekers of God and God's truth. The leader of the synagogue recognized important visitors and asked them if they would like to teach. In the text, Jesus has entered and is going to teach. Jesus himself was a regular attender of synagogue. The synagogue service involved a reading from the Mosaic Law, a reading from the Prophets, and a lesson. Jesus will be asked to give the lesson. Jesus was seated and handed a scroll from which to teach. It was a scroll of Isaiah. Scrolls most often were written on animal skins for durability, and some were written on the much more fragile papyrus. The animal skin could be as long as 20 ft. long. Jesus unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and began to preach.

The first verse Jesus reads focuses on liberation and healing for four groups of people: the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed. Everyone listening would have identified with at least one of these descriptors. Jesus also read the first few words of Isaiah 61:2. An additional role of the anointed one is to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. To find favor means to find support, assistance and aid. The people of Israel were desperate for help to remove their oppressors.

Proverbs 28:6 states, "Better to be poor and walk in integrity than to be crooked in one's ways even though rich." It is a mistake to believe the poor

in the Old and New Testaments are just, poor in spirit. Jesus was concerned about those deprived of basic human needs. It is extremely important to remember what is known as the Retribution Principle. This principle simply means that the Jewish people believed if one was obedient and earned the favor of God, they would be healthy and wealthy. Health and wealth were viewed as signs of God's favor. The Retribution Principle also addressed the opposite. The poor were those who, according to the principle, had offended God. Either the person offended God or their parents. They were considered sinners and the upper class wanted little to do with them. In John 9:24, a blind man stands before the Pharisees who say, "We know this man is a sinner."

Why did they make such a statement? Because he was blind. In John 9:2, Jesus is walking with the disciples. They ask him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" We can see poverty and sickness attached to personal sin. If everyone who sinned was so punished by God would there be anyone in God's favor? We live because God loves us and gave himself for us in Christ, not because we have earned God's favor. Those who suffered poverty were receptive to the love and grace of God. The poor easily recognized their need for God, and for grace. Many knew they could not rely on social mobility to elevate them.

When Jesus appears, he does so with open arms and an open heart. He has a message especially relevant to the poor. Jesus was not promising that they would become wealthy and that all of their illnesses would be healed. He promised that they could be rich in faith, in meaning, and purpose. The religious leaders were rarely poor. They used the Retribution Principle to keep the poor masses in their place. They wanted the poor dependent on them for hope. The offering of the religious leaders was in fact a heavy yoke around the necks of the poor. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest in your souls" (Matthew 11: 29). Listening to Jesus say they did not have to be perfect and that they were already loved by God was a breath of sweet liberation.

Food for thought: How do we identify the poor in our communities without embarrassing them? Do we as individual Christians and the church judge others based on the Retribution Principle? Is the way we perceive the poor and act toward the poor consistent to what we believe about Jesus' caring for the poor?

Prisoners most often were captives as a result of war. The prisoner could agree to serve their captor or die. To be a prisoner, you were subservient. There were boundaries you could not exceed, places you could not go. For

those who served as slaves it often was only slightly better. Many were not treated as men and women of worth. They were useful things to make their masters contented.

Jesus now sits in the synagogue and proclaims he has come to set them free. Jesus is not speaking of removing them from behind the man-made bars. Jesus was speaking of the freedom of the soul. Many prisoners of war claimed they survived by rising above their circumstance. Paul well understood this type of freedom and employed it for himself. He was thrown into some terrible jails. Paul finally reached a place where he could write, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (II Corinthians 4:9).

This what Paul means by hope. Hope is the belief that no matter what occurs in our life, God is with us. It was hope that allowed Paul to ascend his circumstances. Jesus came to give hope to all of us. All of us are prisoners to something that controls our life. Christ never abandons us. Through our utter trust in God (faith), and believing God is love, we can rise above the destructive and experience an unfettered way of life (hope).

Jesus came to bring sight to the blind. For instance, healing the deaf can also mean opening the ears of those who cannot hear the Gospel. John would not, and never did use the term miracles. Instead, John used the terms signs and wonders. John believed the miracles always pointed to a greater reality. There are more miracles regarding the eyes and sight than any other. These miracles point toward our ability to see the eternal in this desperately fleeting world. Jesus used the phrase, "Do you have eyes but do not see" (Mark 8:18). God is present in all of life, yet we can choose to walk through life alone. We see the destructive, the dangers, and yes, the good. However, the ability to see God's love, light, and truth in our life is vital to living the abundant life Jesus offers. Jesus is God's light, love, and truth personified. He is the gift of divine presence.

The year of Jubilee was a significant observance for the Jewish people. Every seventh year the land was to be placed in Sabbath. That is, no crop could be grown that year. The land would rest. Agricultural experts tell us this is a good practice for many crops. The land remains productive when rested. Every seventh Jubilee (49 years) there would be the great year of Jubilee. Debts were forgiven, slaves were freed, and there would be great rejoicing. Jesus was the spiritual Jubilee. He was the spirit of Jubilee sitting before them in the synagogue. He would remove the spiritual debt of sin from which people suffered. He would free those in spiritual bondage. He was and is our joy!

The year of favor could also be related to the arrival of God's Kingdom in Jesus. The Kingdom had been in human history all along. Jesus is that Kingdom in flesh and blood. We could see him, touch him and experience him. The Kingdom is indeed here and is still yet to come in all its glory.

There were always people who rejected him and his message. They were spiritually deaf and blind. Jesus said he was a prophet without honor in his hometown. His hometown saw him through the blinders of his childhood. They were rejecting Jesus as he spoke. It takes faith to open our hearts to Jesus as he is, as he claims to be. The fact that people turn away doesn't say anything negative about Jesus; instead, it reveals the destructive blinders that people wear.

From the text section, stepping into the world. It may seem as if Jesus' model in Luke 4, the verbal proclaimer of good news, applies only to those who are called to preach. Some of us are called to proclaim God's good news in spoken, verbal form like Jesus did. Others, are called to proclaim this good news in actions, touch, gifts, prayers, and many other forms of caring and healing. All followers of Jesus are called to proclaim the good news in word and deed in a manner consistent with our gifts. Sometimes we will also be guided by the Holy Spirit to step outside of our comfort zone and proclaim God's healing and freedom in ways that are new and may feel uncomfortable.

**Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.**

Next week's lesson January 10, 2021, "Called To Significance"

Background Scripture Luke 5:1-11.

*Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Sunday School Lesson from Dr. Craig Rikard, a South Georgia Pastor and The Present Word*