January 23, 2022

**The Big Reveal**

Last week I celebrated my entrance into a new decade—my 6th decade of life on planet earth. Not surprisingly, it has been a time of reflection for me.

I am immensely grateful for my ongoing relationship with the triune God—the loving, patient heavenly Father, my Savior and friend Jesus and the Holy Spirit that lives and moves even in me. \*\*I am grateful for my loving husband, my children, my parents, and family near and far. And I am very, very thankful for friends like you.

My life journey thus far has probably been like yours—with mountaintop experiences of great joy as well as times of despair and suffering. \*\*Through it all I cling to Jesus. He is my solid rock, my living hope. As the days ahead of me are now less than the number I’ve lived in this physical realm, I feel an increasing gratitude for faith, an increasingly urgent longing for Christ’s return. No doubt many of you feel the same.

In today’s reading from Luke 4, Jesus delivers a powerful, shocking, and hopeful sermon to his hometown crowd. It was a message for them. It’s a message for you and me, as we all “count our days.” It’s what I call, \*\*“The Big Reveal”

Before we get into the passage, let’s take a few moments to consider the context. In the beginning of Luke 4, the good doctor has shared the account of the Temptation of Jesus, which followed his baptism. Jesus now begins his ministry. He returns to Galilee in the power of the Holy Spirit, teaching in the synagogues, and everyone praised him. Then Jesus visits Nazareth, and the hometown crowd is curious about their famous boy and his message.

\*\*Try to imagine this scene as it first happened. This is probably a relatively small, humble setting. The synagogue would have been crowded and well-used, perhaps not unlike a lively rural church that smells like old coffee and Pine-Sol. The congregants are the oppressed, occupied people of Israel. They live in relative peace with their Roman conquerors much of the time, but their lives are restricted, and their culture disrespected. Revolts against Rome are crushed mercilessly.

The synagogue was one place where they could be themselves, reading about the promises of their God to deliver them one day, feeling comforted and encouraged. I feel the same way about our church. It’s the one place where I can truly be myself, worshipping wholeheartedly with friends and being inspired and encouraged by messages of God’s faithfulness and his promises for the future.

\*\*Over the grind of years, especially under the thumb of a decidedly pagan oppressor, some tribalism and animosity toward outsiders had developed in the Jewish people. The Jews believed Israel was God’s chosen people, and that Rome—with her disgusting gods and terrifying power plays—would eventually be destroyed on the day of God’s deliverance. Israel would be exalted again, and their enemies would be demolished.

Small Israelite terrorist groups would stage riots and assassinate officials in hopes of bringing about God’s great military deliverance. They believed that God’s salvation would be for them as a people, and the rest of the world would pay for their arrogance.

\*\*On this day described in Luke 4, Jesus stands up to read where these promises are written. But he reads a different section for the day, and that’s where the story takes a turn.

Luke 4:14-21, ESV

\*\*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. **15**He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

\*\*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17**and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

**18**“\*\*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

**20 \*\***Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. **21**He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

\*\*Talk about a “big reveal” delivered in his hometown that day.

Have you heard about “big reveal” parties? \*\*These days couples expecting a baby might have a party around revealing the gender of their child. They gather with friends and families, and at the right moment, \*\*open a box or something that reveals if they’re having a boy or girl. It’s called the big reveal.

But what’s happening here in Luke 4 is so much bigger and better! It’s the BIG REVEAL of all time, and I would like to break it down into 3 parts.

\*\*[BIG REVEAL PART #1 – WHO IS THE DELIVERER?]

The Big Reveal part one answers the question, WHO is the deliverer? Let’s take a closer look at the passage

**\*\*[14**Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ]

What had Jesus returned from? What had he just been through? He’d just been through 40 days in the wilderness, fasting and praying and spending time with God, and having the harrowing experience of Satan bugging him like a pesky horsefly. We don’t see him coming out of university with a fresh degree or coming off a nice long sabbatical, a long vacation, refreshed and ready. He has been recently tried and tested, emptied, and encouraged, so that he can be filled with the Spirit and fully prepared for his ministry.

\*\*Verse 16 tells us that Jesus walked into the synagogue, as was his custom. He was there doing what faithful Israelites of the day were always doing. They would open the scroll and read a section and then sit down and offer a teaching based on the reading.

But the scene here is different. As the previous verse indicated, the hometown folks are aware of Jesus and what he has been up to. Word has spread about his teaching and his presence, maybe even his miracles. They were waiting for him to say something profound. He reads the section from Isaiah that says,

**\*\*18**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, **19**to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”]

Then Jesus drops a bomb by saying,\*\*

“**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing**.”

What??? He shocked their socks off, so to speak. Jesus is saying “I’m the guy, I’m the one, your Deliverer, your Savior”.

Imagine the reaction of the hometown crowd. “What??” You? Fulfilling over 300 Old Testament promises of deliverance? Who do you think you are? We know your parents. We watched you as a tiny baby taking your first steps. We saw you playing with the neighborhood kids, skinning your knees and hitting your thumb with the hammer when your dad was teaching you his trade. You’re our Savior, our deliverer? How can you be saying this?” Jesus’ statement brought them to their feet. This was

\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 1 – JESUS IS THE DELIVERER

Big reveal part 2 answers the question,

\*\*BIG REVEAL #2 – WHO ARE THE DELIVERED?

The Jews believed that God would come and deliver his special people and destroy their enemies. Based on their reading of the Old Testament, they believed that God’s deliverance would be physical and political, and that the barbarian hordes, Rome especially, would be broken by God’s strength. Israel would be exalted.

We need to view this sympathetically, although it seems foreign to most of us. \*\*A few generations before Jesus came, people were tortured and killed for keeping Jewish practices and beliefs. Their grandparents had been killed for things like keeping the sabbath, which is why it was so important when Jesus confronted these realities. The people of Israel were a displaced minority, so their identity was extremely important to them. Within the story of that identity was the exclusive deliverance of Israel, hand-picked by God to be his people and the rest of the world could, quite literally, be damned.

Jesus is coming up against this exclusivity, against the idea that they knew what God’s “chosen” looked like.

**18**“\*\*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the **poor**.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the **blind**, to set the **oppressed** free…
The poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed weren’t only amongst the Israelites, the Jews of Jesus’ day. As today, they were found in every corner of the world. Jesus didn’t come just for the Jews, the chosen nation of Israel. He didn’t come to rain fire down on the Romans, but to show the Jews AND the Romans and everyone else that we ALL need a Savior.

Jesus didn’t come to save the righteous, but sinners. Jesus is talking about rescuing the undesirable, those who are the broken and on the margins: the blind, the poor, the prisoners, the oppressed. \*\*He’s talking about those who are of low social status in their society—women, children, disabled people, blind people. The vision of God’s kingdom starts with and always includes these people. Indeed, the gospel—the good news—is not received by those who think they’re together, but those who know they’re broken.

This is easy to forget in a changing world. Christianity was the dominant religion for a very long time in the west—several centuries. \*\*Many of us remember a time when almost everyone you knew went to church and the world stopped on Sunday. Most stores were closed, and nobody worked. This next generation isn’t growing up in that world. There is a wide diversity of different worldviews now, different perspectives, and the traditional Christian worldview is quickly becoming a minority.

Can we learn from this that we are not to view the rest of the world with fear and bitterness like the Jews of Nazareth? \*\*Can we learn to be thankful that we know Christ as we do rather than be judgmental to the rest of the world that may not know him? It’s not “us and them”, those who are in and those who are out. It’s God’s desire that ALL people might know him and be saved. Let’s continue to tell truth in love and be known for our welcoming and hospitality towards all who bear God’s image, instead of being known for judgment.

\*\*Our two Canadian “Michaels” were recently released from prison in China after 1020 days of confinement. I’m sure these saved hostages don’t judge the 115 Canadians who are still imprisoned—they ache for them, they likely pray fervently for them, and our “Michaels” are likely grateful every moment that they have been rescued. Let’s let this be our attitude.

We are all broken, imprisoned by our sins before our deliverer showed up.

[\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 2 – JESUS IS INCLUSIVE]

So BIG REVEAL PART 2 is that JESUS IS INCLUSIVE --ALL HUMANITY IS OFFERED DELIVERANCE

Big reveal part 3 answers the question,

\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 3 – WHAT DOES BEING DELIVERED LOOK LIKE?

[\*\*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the **poor**. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the **prisoners** and recovery of sight for the **blind**, to set the **oppressed** free. Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. **21**He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”]

Jesus only fulfilled in a very limited **physical** sense the expectations of the deliverer. He did in his ministry reach out to the economically poor and oppressed, he did heal some from literal blindness and freed people from the prisons of disease, but anyone who expected him to rescue all the poor, release all the prisoners, heal all the blind and set the oppressed free was sorely disappointed.

Being delivered is a SPIRITUAL matter. Jesus came for the **spiritually** poor, imprisoned, blind and oppressed. \*\*He came for the broken, and that includes every person who has ever lived. He came to save us, deliver us from our sins, and the consequences of sin in our lives. He came to deliver us from the multiple layers of sin consequences in our society that cause people to be spiritually depraved.

Those who are physically poor are often more receptive to the offer of salvation. \*\*Here in North America, we’re in the most prosperous time of all history, and people don’t need God. They’ve got everything they need, and if they don’t, they can get it quickly. Fiber-optic speed on our devices, Amazon at our door within hours, even kettles that boil in seconds. We get things quickly and we get it all. Most North Americans don’t feel any great physical need, let alone spiritual poverty.

\*\*There’s another important historical piece to consider in this passage in Luke 4. Jesus says here that he has come to “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (v. 19) Let’s look at this phrase, which is heavy with meaning, and consider what it would have sounded like to the original hearers. Let’s read Leviticus 15:10-12:

\*\*Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. ([Leviticus 15:10-12 ESV](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/Lev%2015.10-12))

This is what was called the Jubilee year. In the Jubilee year, all property was returned to its original owners and the land rested from being cultivated. Those who had become indentured servants because of poverty were to be freed in that year.

\*\*It was a year of liberation, of return of property, and of simplicity. They were to live on what naturally grew off the land, not to work the land and destroy it trying to get what they wanted out of it. This would have been a simpler time; wealth and competition would have been at a lull because everyone was living under the same restrictions of production.

The year of Jubilee—the time when everything restarted, and those who were imprisoned were released. That’s what Jesus is talking about here. This was a very strict and serious part of being God’s people. The sabbath day and the sabbath years pointed to the great Jubilee of God delivering Israel one day. It was an integral part of what it meant to be God’s people.

\*\*Jesus declares that he has come to bring Jubilee. He has come to bring a time of release, of starting over again from ground zero. The over-complicated, sin-infested ways of “who owes what to whom” and “who offended whom” and “who’s winning and losing” need to be demolished. Jesus has redeemed all of that and enables us to start over. But this time we start over with him.

The BIG REVEAL part 3 is that JESUS DELIVERS JUBILEE

It’s the year of Jubilee, and Jesus is offering salvation and reconciliation. He’s offering complete forgiveness and freedom from the debt of sin, a NEW START, and new LIFE overflowing with all the goodness that is in the triune God for ALL ETERNITY. That’s an offer I can’t refuse—in fact, the older I get, the more it means to me. Yes, suffering will be a part of your story and mine, but the best is yet to come.

Let’s quickly review the 3 parts of the BIG REVEAL that Jesus shared in his hometown of Nazareth all those years ago:

\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 1 – JESUS IS OUR DELIVERER

\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 2 - JESUS IS INCLUSIVE (ALL HUMANITY IS OFFERED DELIVERANCE)

\*\*BIG REVEAL PART 3 – JESUS DELIVERS JUBILEE

… salvation, reconciliation, and a new life in him. This is awesome good news. This is the gospel!