

JESUS: ANOINTED TO PREACH
Luke 4:16-22

Intro: When we come to this point in our Lord's ministry we know that He had been baptized by John the Baptist, and He had been tempted by the Devil. Doubtless other things had taken place, probably some of those events recorded in John chapter 1. But Luke records our Lord's ministry in the synagogue in Nazareth as the next event of special significance. This was the city and the synagogue where our Lord had been raised. The people probably knew Him well, but it seems very unlikely that any of them had even been curious about our Lord's true identity.

However, their curiosity seems to have been aroused because Luke tells us in verse 14 of this chapter that "there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. The Lord had been teaching in other synagogues before He came back to Nazareth, and His ministry seems to have been well-received everywhere He had gone. But it was to be different in Nazareth.

Those who spoke in the synagogues were carefully chosen, as Edersheim tells us, for their mental and moral excellence. The Lord stood up to read, and the scroll containing the prophecy of Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found what in our Bibles is Isaiah 61:1, 2. And this is what He read to the people in the synagogue.

He had a very important reason for doing this. The prevailing idea about the ministry of the Messiah at that time in Israel was that He would come as an earthly King, deliver them from Rome, and once again give Israel a superior place among the nations. But we know that these goals were not the purpose of our Lord's first advent. It is true that He was a descendant of David, and that in the future He would return to reign over all of the earth, but He had another work to perform before His kingdom would be established on the earth. And so He read to the people in the synagogue about the nature of the ministry He had come to perform. Even though what He came to do was not going to be popular with the people, He had come to do the Father's will (as John has told us over and over again), and nothing was going to turn Him aside. He had come to preach!

Many have recognized a threefold ministry that our Lord was to have in the flesh. The brief, public ministry which He had on earth can right be called His prophetic ministry. When He went to the Cross, died, was buried, rose again, and ascended to the Father's right hand where He is today, He was and is exercising His priestly ministry. When He comes again

He will come to reign upon the earth which will be His royal ministry as King. And so we can see that the Lord's ministry on earth was to be a preaching ministry, which is the work of the prophet, and this was just in its opening phase.

But let us look especially at His reading which is recorded for us in verses 18 and 19.

I. THE LORD'S MINISTRY: TO PREACH THE GOSPEL (Luke 4:18a).

The Lord applied this passage of Scripture to Himself. He indicated that Isaiah was speaking of the Messiah when he, also a prophet, wrote these lines in his book of prophecy. And so we can say that our Lord was here claiming to be the Messiah.

More than that, the Lord humbly set the pattern for all who preach the Gospel when He said that this was the very reason for which the Spirit of God had come upon Him, and had anointed Him. The purpose of the Lord's ministry was not to plan and carry out a revolt against Rome. It was not political. This means that He was not sent to reform the government of the day. Nor was His ministry to be primarily a ministry of performing miracles—although He would perform hundreds of them, perhaps thousands, more than anyone had ever performed. That would prove to be the most attractive, and the most popular part of His ministry. But that was not primarily what He came to do. This was not the main reason that the Spirit of God had come upon Him, and had anointed Him. He came to "preach the Gospel."

This should make us realize, and it should have made the people of His day realize, that the important thing about our Lord's prophetic ministry, as with all prophets, was the message He had come to proclaim. And in these days when there are definite efforts to set aside preaching, it is good for us to see the place that preaching had in the ministry of our Lord. And whenever the preaching of the Gospel and the preaching of the Word of God takes even a second place, it is apparent that the Church is in a state of declension.

When we were discussing the ministry of John the Baptist, I hope you remember that I made a point of the fact that the Jews who came up from Jerusalem were not primarily interested in the preaching of John. They were not interested in His message. They were interested in the man. And so they asked him who he was.

Now there is no question that the messenger, his character and his life, are always important. But so often we make so much of the man that people are more interested in seeing the

man than they are in hearing his message. The Lord made it clear for every following generation that people needed to pay attention to the message. This is surely one reason that so much space is given in the four Gospels to the teaching of our Lord. Our churches would be in better condition today if people were more interested in the message that men proclaim instead of being overwhelmed by his popularity, his experience, and his successes (judged from a human standpoint). Both the Spirit of God and the Lord Jesus Christ were interested in preaching!

In the early days of the Church, as we are told in the book of Acts, when the servants of the Lord were filled with the Holy Spirit, they preached.

When God appeared first to Abraham even before Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, Paul said in Gal. 3:8 that God "preached...the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Even Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, said that God had not sent him to baptize (although he did baptize), "but to preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17).

The teaching and preaching of the Word is the primary work of the Church today, and the Gospel is always to remain at the heart of that message.

But now let us look at:

II. THE LORD'S OBJECTIVES IN HIS MINISTRY (Luke 4:18b).

The Lord mentioned five special objectives:

A. "To preach the Gospel to the poor."

I don't see any reason to spiritualize this term. It is true that people without Christ are spiritually poor. This would apply if used in this way to everybody. The richest person in the world is spiritually poor if he is without Christ.

Neither was the Lord saying that only poor people needed the Gospel. He certainly found more reception among the common people than He did among the prominent people of His day. No, it seems that the Lord was saying that no one must be overlooked in the preaching of the Gospel. It was characteristic of the ministry of the synagogue that rich people were more welcome than the poor were. Do you remember the example that James gave in the first part of James 2? (Read.)

The poor need the Gospel as much as anyone else, and they

must not be overlooked.

B. "To heal the brokenhearted."

This describes a person who has been shattered by some experience in life--and there are many experiences that can shatter us. Our Lord was quite evidently talking about shattered people who did not know the Gospel.

What do we do today with people who have gone through some shattering experience? You can answer this from what you hear on TV or read in the newspapers all of the time. Counsellors are called in to help them deal with their grief. Now I have no objection to counsellors. Our Lord Himself is called "a Wonderful Counsellor." But the important thing is what the counsellor says. Do they give the Gospel? Do they point the brokenhearted to God and to Christ and to the Word of God? This is what is needed. And there are many among the people of God who first had their hearts open to the Gospel because of some shattering experience that they went through.

Evidently the rabbis and the scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's day were not dealing with the brokenhearted by giving them the Gospel. The Gospel is the only real cure.

C. "To preach deliverance to the captives."

Our Lord's preliminary statements from Isaiah 61 indicated that He did not come to lead a political revolt, and so He could not have been talking about those who were captive to Rome. He Himself was under the heel of Rome. No, this is not what He meant. What did He mean?

He was talking about the effect of sin upon a human being. It makes a person a slave to His sin. And we are not able to set ourselves free from sin. We may get away from one only to get held captive by another. Our Lord said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34). And we have been learning on Sunday mornings from the book of Romans that there is only One Who can set us free from sin, and that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other hope of deliverance, but the deliverance that the Lord gives is complete and lasting. But it comes about through the preaching of the Gospel.

The word that was used for them was "heal." The Lord came to "heal the brokenhearted."

D. "Recovering of sight to the blind."

The Lord gave sight back to many blind people while He was here on earth, but here He was speaking of sight which comes through the preaching of the Gospel. And so this has to be the recovering of spiritual sight.

People without Christ are "blind" to their true need, and "blind" as to the solution to their needs. Our government has all kinds of programs, and so do our schools, by which they think that they can make people see. But all are a false hope.

Cf. 2 Cor. 4:3, 4. See also 2 Cor. 3:13, 14.

This is a common description in Scripture for people who do not know the Lord. It doesn't mean that a Christian knows everything, but he at least knows what his problem is, and how God has seen fit to meet his need. Only the Lord can make us see, and He does it through the preaching of the Gospel.

E. "To set at liberty them that are bruised."

This may be very similar to the third statement which our Lord read, but there is the idea here of a person who is indebted to someone, under an obligation which he cannot pay, and therefore the Lord must have been speaking of people who are under conviction because of their sins, realizing that they have offended a holy God, and they have been bruised by their sin, but they do not know the answer. How can they find peace with God? The Lord said, "I have come to preach the Gospel to them, to let them know that deliverance from guilty and judgment is possible through the Gospel."

But then we come to:

III. THE TIMING OF THE LORD'S MINISTRY: "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:19).

He came "to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

If you look at Isa. 61:1, 2 you will find that this was not really the end of the reading. The next line which the Lord did not read was this: "And the day of vengeance of our God."

This is in line with what Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 6:1, 2. (Read.) It is not too late. The offer of salvation can still be made. But the time will come when the Lord will return for judgment. And the time comes in every person's life when there is no longer any possibility of being saved. There are no second chances after death.

Concl: What a gracious message came from the lips of our Lord, especially when He told them that those words were being fulfilled that very day.

But notice that the people listened for the moment with admiration, but if you continue to read through the chapter you will see that it was not long before they were ready to kill Him--and tried to do it!

What is our response? There are not many answers to man's need before God--only one! And that one is Christ! Let us make sure that He is our Savior, and then let us spread the message of salvation wherever we are.