

WITHOUT FAITH

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE

TO PLEASE GOD

“You Are the Son of God!”

by Daniel Ritchie

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Mistaking a person for someone else is easier to do than many might assume. It actually happens to me quite a bit. It happens most of the time when I am visiting a church, but I have also had it happen to me when I am at the airport or at a restaurant. People will walk right up to me and ask, “Are you Nick Vujicic?”

Let me backtrack for just a second because there are a few things that Nick and I have in common. We both preach and speak for a living. We both have beards. Lastly, we both are missing limbs. I was born without arms and Nick was born without arms and legs.

Given the fact that there are not many bearded preachers who are missing limbs, it would be easy to assume that I am Nick. I always feel bad for people when I let them down by telling them that I am not Nick and I am not mad at them at all. They made an assumption on my identity because they had never met me and they had no idea who I really am.

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY

We can fall into the same trap of mistaken identity when we allow our faith assumptions to crowd our perspective of who Jesus is. We see people’s mistaken assumptions of Jesus throughout the Gospels. The people of Nazareth could not get past the wisdom and power evident in Jesus’s life because to them, He was a simple boy who was the son of a carpenter (Mark 6:2-4). The Jewish leaders feared that Jesus would topple their position of authority with the power that He both lived with and taught with (John 11:48). The Romans saw Jesus as a threat to their governing power and mockingly labeled Jesus as “King of the Jews” on a sign at the top of His cross at Golgotha (John 19:19).

These assumptions and priorities led people to overlook the greatest news the world has ever known—the saving work of Jesus through His death and resurrection because of His grace and mercy. It is so important for all of us to see who Jesus is and what He has done for His church. In looking deep into the

truth of Scripture, any false assumption about the identity of Jesus is shoved to the side.

JESUS, OUR GOD AND MESSIAH

By peering into the Bible, we see Jesus for who He truly is—the powerful Son of God, the promised Messiah sent for our salvation. When we begin to take stock of who the triune God is and all that He has done, we must respond. Paul painted a clear and simple picture of the grandeur of God in Romans 11:36, “For from him and through him and to him are all things.” This verse reveals the picture that God makes all things, sustains all things, and that His glory is the ultimate aim of all things.

In light of this picture of who God is, we also see that Paul gave the church in Rome the only viable response to such power and grace—because of God’s mercies, we should present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to the Father—this is true worship (Rom. 12:1). When we begin to perceive the power, grace, and mercy of God, the only right response is to offer all we have as a response. When we see the Father rightly, we will worship Him rightly.

Jesus is
the Son of God,
the living prophecy,
and the fulfillment
of the promised
serpent crusher.

In coming to know who Jesus is, we begin to hear clearly His guiding voice in our lives through the Spirit and His Scriptures. Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd and the church as His sheep in John 10. In John 10:4, Jesus said that His sheep will follow Him because they know His voice. When the sheep spend time with their Shepherd, a trusting relationship is developed. In this

relationship, the sheep will respond in faith to go where the Shepherd goes and to yield to the call of the Shepherd.

NEW LIFE IN JESUS

As we see Jesus for all that He is and place our faith in Him as our Savior, Lord, and King, everything about our lives will be changed from top to bottom. Paul laid out how faith in Jesus changed his entire life as he wrote to the church at Philippi in Philippians 3. He declared that his righteousness did not come from any good work or moral choice he made—His righteousness came through faith in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:9). Paul’s identity and worth were not rooted in any accomplishment or possession. He was able to withstand all sorts of loss and trials because of what placing his faith in Christ won him (Phil. 3:8). He found his identity and worth in the person and work of Christ alone (Phil. 3:9). Paul’s life was entirely changed for the better the moment that he placed his faith in Jesus on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9), even as earthly troubles followed him from that moment forward. It was all worth it because of the gain that came from trusting in Jesus as his Savior and Lord.

Jesus was not merely a bold teacher to glean truth from. He was not simply a moral man worthy of emulating. Jesus is the Son of God, the living prophecy, and the fulfillment of the serpent crusher promised in Genesis 3:15. He is the very Word of God who came to this earth so that all who receive Him might become children of God (John 1:12).

When we see Jesus as He truly is—our Savior, our Lord, our everything—we see the only One we can fully rest our lives on.



REJECTION OF THE MESSIAH

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus is the Messiah bringing good news to Israel (Luke 4:16-21).
2. Jesus is the Prophet bringing grace to the world (Luke 4:22-27).
3. Jesus is the Son experiencing rejection by His own (Luke 4:28-30).

Background Passage: Luke 4

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah who came to bring good news to all people.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

God's plan of salvation involved the nation of Israel, but it was not restricted to them. Jesus would be rejected by His own, ultimately resulting in the cross, the means by which Jesus fulfilled God's plan. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven and accepted by the Father.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we are no longer estranged from God but are now accepted by Him through Christ, we seek to live in peace with all, forgiving greatly as we have been forgiven.

GROUP TIME



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

SETTING: With a view toward presenting proof of messiahship, Luke presented an orderly account of the life of Jesus through his Gospel. Filled with connections to the Old Testament, the Gospel of Luke recounts the power of Jesus, the Christ, and affirms the prophecies fulfilled in the events that unfolded throughout His life. Jesus began His public ministry in the insignificant village of Nazareth, His hometown. Here an incredible moment occurred. Jesus attended a local synagogue service, as He had many times before. But in this particular service, Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, would claim to be the long-awaited Savior and turn this small town on its head.

INSTRUCT: Waiting is hard for everyone. Reflect on a moment, achievement, or new season of life for which you had to wait a long time before it arrived.

DISCUSS: **How long did you have to wait, and did you at any point begin to think that it may never happen?** (wait for a group member to respond first; only share your response as a conclusion to the discussion)

TRANSITION: The waiting seasons of life can be difficult ones. Oftentimes we can become so hyper-focused on a specific thing we want that we can miss the answers to prayer right in front of us. Unfortunately, many people in Jesus's day, including those most close to Him, missed the message and Messiah for whom they had been watching and waiting. For over four hundred years, the Jews longed for God to break His silence. But when He did, it was not what they expected.



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POINT 1

JESUS IS THE MESSIAH BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO ISRAEL (LUKE 4:16-21).

16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. **17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, **18** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” **20** And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:16-21** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 16-19** commentary to highlight the following point (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus was **anointed** by God with the Holy Spirit to bring restoration, freedom, and the Lord’s favor to those who receive Him by **faith**.

DISCUSS: What characteristics of our triune God are reflected in this passage? (He is powerful, merciful, trustworthy, faithful, loving, sovereign)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 20-21** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s **promise** to His people—He is the **Messiah**, the Anointed One.

DISCUSS: If Jesus fulfills God’s ultimate promise and purpose, how should we view our salvation through Christ? (with gratefulness and praise; with a humility that treasures that salvation; with a desire to tell others of that good news; with a purpose to live out our salvation with grace and truth)

TRANSITION: The coming of Jesus Christ is good news! Here at the beginning of His earthly ministry, Jesus brought the gospel to the Jews of His hometown. But they would soon struggle to accept this good news with Jesus at its center.

NOTES

THE YEAR OF THE LORD’S FAVOR

In Isaiah 61, from which Jesus read, the prophet Isaiah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was speaking of deliverance from bondage for God’s people, who would be under Babylonian captivity. But he also was foreshadowing a deliverance through a Savior from bondage to sin. God’s people would find hope and comfort knowing a time was coming (and for us, has come) for God’s favor to be poured out.

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“The tragedy of the world is sin. The one obtruding fact in the world today is the fact of sin. The one galling yoke on human necks and hearts in the world today is the yoke of sin. Jesus came to remove that yoke. Jesus came to break those shackles. Jesus came to set men free, and to put their feet on the solid Rock, Himself, the Divine Saviour. Whoever comes to Him receives deliverance, forgiveness, redemption, salvation.”¹

—George W. Truett
(1867-1944)

COMMENTARY

VERSES 16-19 / Here in the Gospel of Luke, though it is evident that Jesus had already begun to minister in the larger area of Galilee, we can see Luke kick-started his collection of Jesus stories at the origin of it all: Nazareth—a small, predominantly Jewish village and Jesus’s hometown. At the time, God’s Word, especially the larger books of the Old Testament, would be written on scrolls. So Jesus received the scroll of Isaiah to read a select passage aloud in the synagogue service. Whether Jesus selected the passage before He took the stage or someone assigned it to Him, it was no accident that Jesus read these prophetic words from Isaiah.

Luke emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the beginnings of Jesus’s life, and that emphasis remains significant here as Jesus started reading from Isaiah 61:1-2: **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”** Through the reading of these prophetic words of old—and especially through His declaration of their fulfillment—Christ made several stunning claims. First, Jesus claimed the anointing of God through the presence of His Spirit. Throughout the Old Testament, the anointing of a person was indicative of God’s commissioning and empowerment through the gifting of the Holy Spirit.² Second, God’s anointing came with a purpose: to proclaim good news. Thus, Jesus claimed to be a messenger of God. Third, Jesus was not just the proclaimer of the good news, He is the One bringing the substance of this good news, bringing release, recovery, and abundance.

Throughout the life and ministry of Christ, there were, and are, physical manifestations and miracles of rescue and recovery, yet each of these benefits Christ brings to **“the poor”** are primarily spiritual (see Matt. 5:3). The original hearers of Christ’s pledge of deliverance assumed a physical salvation, however. Many assumed the Messiah was coming to rule as a physical king who would bring justice and tangible aid through the removal of Roman oppression. But the spiritual deliverance

Christ provides leads to a freedom, healing, and blessedness that surpasses any earthly, temporal aid.

In the Old Testament, the **“year of the Lord’s favor”** is a reference to a future day when God will bring salvation to His people. In the context of Isaiah 61, these words were spoken for a disobedient people in exile experiencing affliction and deep despair. The exiles would have looked forward to this promise of rescue and the return of God’s favor. By the time Jesus read these words aloud, they were widely understood as a messianic promise. Both audiences would have looked forward with hope to the year of the Lord’s favor as a time when God would inaugurate a new kingdom—one where their suffering would cease.³

The original text in Isaiah 61:1-2 continued on with a mention of “the day of vengeance of our God.” The souls sitting in the synagogue that day likely would have recognized this omission. By stopping where Jesus did, He emphasized the immediate, present fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus ushered in the next step of God’s unfolding plan: the time of the Lord’s favor. The day of vengeance was yet to come.⁴

VERSES 20-21 / Once a teacher read Scripture in the temple, it was customary for him to sit down to give the sermon. It is likely that Jesus taught a more expansive sermon than what we have recorded here, but the Gospel writers often provided a summary of sermons instead of word-for-word accounts. But the claim Jesus made was clear and breathtaking: *I am the fulfillment of these seven-hundred-year-old words.*

This was a definitive turning point in the trajectory of Jesus’s life and ministry. With precision (**“today”**) and clarity (**“has been”**), Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah’s foretelling. He is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the One they were waiting for. Thus, Jesus initiated a greater awareness and revelation of God’s kingdom coming—right in His hometown.

POINT 2

JESUS IS THE PROPHET BRINGING GRACE TO THE WORLD (LUKE 4:22-27).

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22 And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” **23** And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” **24** And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. **25** But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, **26** and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. **27** And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:22-27** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 22-24** commentary to highlight the following point (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

The Jews marveled at Jesus at first but wanted to see a **sign** because of their **unbelief**, like those before them when God gave them His prophets.

DISCUSS: What are some reasons why people might refuse to listen to God’s mouthpieces? (we are prideful and think we know it all; we are untrusting and doubt another person’s genuineness; we want to live in our sin; we don’t know God enough to know His words and recognize truth)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 25-27** commentary to emphasize the following idea (the **bold** words fill in blanks in the DDG):

Jesus warned the Jews with the stories of the widow and Naaman who, though **Gentiles**, received the offer of God’s **grace** because their saving faith led to faith-filled actions.

DISCUSS: How would you describe the relationship between saving faith and works? (works cannot save us, but faith without works is dead; a Christian, saved by faith, will naturally be active in works of obedience; Christians should be known for their good deeds, but in no way do good deeds save them)

TRANSITION: Jesus knew the hearts and minds of the Jews were not ready to receive Him as Messiah, yet He still gave them an opportunity to accept this good news. Unfortunately, they did not respond in the way they should have.

PROVERB

A general proverb is a short saying of wisdom, advice, or commentary that is repeated among the culture that the people would be familiar with. There are secular proverbs, rabbinic proverbs, and everyday proverbs, and then there are biblical proverbs, such as those found in the book of Proverbs, which hold a distinction of divine authority for us today.

COMMENTARY

VERSE 22-24 / At first, the response of the audience in the synagogue was one of astonishment. The crowd began to marvel at this neighborhood boy who had grown into a dynamic teacher. But the favorable reception didn't last long. The synagogue members began to question the veracity of Jesus's claims. Jesus anticipated their doubt-filled questions and began to answer their objections before they had a chance to express them.

The proverb Jesus mentioned in verse 23, **"Physician, heal yourself,"** and the statement He made in verse 24, **"No prophet is acceptable in his hometown,"** were two common sayings of the time. These expressions called attention to the historic ways Israel rejected those who carried God's prophetic messages.⁵

In essence, the first proverb was a saying used to demand proof of any prophetic claims. Jesus called out their desire to see signs and wonders before they could believe the words of **"Joseph's son."** In the second statement, **"No prophet is acceptable in his hometown,"** Jesus directed them to recall a theme throughout the sad history of Israel—God's prophets, whom He sent from among His people, were again and again ignored, rejected, mistreated, and even killed. The recipients of these divine messages did not give the respect or credibility due to Jesus and the prophets of old, whom God used as His chosen mouthpieces. Thus, the hearers shunned the messages of grace God sent them.⁶

VERSES 25-27 / Continuing with His prophetic warning—that the faithless Jews would reject Jesus as the Messiah—He recalled two Old Testament stories to illustrate their lack of faith and God's willingness to save those who exhibit faith in Him, even if they are not ethnically Jewish.

First was the story found in 1 Kings 17:8-16. Many Israelites were suffering through a great famine brought about by the sin of King Ahab and the people, yet God sent

Elijah the prophet to help a poor Gentile widow in Zarephath. God commanded Elijah to ask this woman (on the verge of death) to prepare and serve him a meal. The widow only had enough flour and oil to make one last meal for herself and her starving son. But Elijah brought with him a promise from God that if she prepared her last meal for Elijah, God would provide for her throughout the rest of the famine. In contrast to the faithless Jewish Nazarenes who wanted Jesus to prove His claims, the widow in Zarephath obeyed God without waiting for a sign that He had the power to do what He promised.

Next was a story found in 2 Kings 5:1-14, where God used Elisha to heal Naaman, a Syrian army commander—an enemy who was suffering from leprosy. At first, the Gentile was angry at and resistant to Elisha's simple instructions because they required Naaman to humble himself. But Naaman eventually did as he was commanded, dipping himself in the Jordan River seven times, and he received the healing of God.

Both Old Testament stories depict great poverty and suffering, which could only be alleviated by the power and provision of God. The widow and Naaman, even in the midst of their hopelessness, latched onto the grace of God, which had been offered to them. They understood the Lord's unmerited favor as their only hope. Saving faith always leads to faith-filled actions. In both stories, there was a deliberate show of God's grace to Gentiles during a time when God's people were repeatedly disobedient and unfaithful. God passed over many faithless Jews to heal these faith-filled Gentiles.

Jesus's use of these narratives was meant to rebuke His hometown's doubt. Additionally, the specific areas of Zarephath and Syria were loathed and looked down upon by the Jews. The retelling of these two Old Testament vignettes by Jesus, then, was extremely inflammatory to those who should have listened and believed.

POINT 3

JESUS IS THE SON EXPERIENCING REJECTION BY HIS OWN (LUKE 4:28-30).

NOTES

28 When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. **29** And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. **30** But passing through their midst, he went away.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Luke 4:28-30** from his or her own Bible.

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSES 28-29** commentary to highlight how the Jews chose to sin by casting aside Jesus and His message (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

KEY DOCTRINE #36: Sin as Missing the Mark: One aspect of sin is missing the mark of God's **standards** set for humanity. This missing of the mark is not a simple mistake but a falling short of God's glory through conscious **choosing** of sin. We may refer to sin as a failure on the part of humans to live according to God's standards, but we must recognize this failure is **intentional**. We miss the mark when we deliberately choose to cast aside God's intention for us.

DISCUSS: Why is admitting our sin so hard to do? (pride makes us resist admitting we are wrong; the inability to recognize our sin stems from our small, inaccurate view of God; we don't see that we are "missing the mark" because the picture of God's perfection is fuzzy in our minds)

EXPLAIN: Use the **VERSE 30** commentary to emphasize the following idea (*the bold words fill in blanks in the DDG*):

Though the crowd had the end of Jesus in mind, **God** had other plans. It was not yet time for Jesus to die, so no matter the plans of human beings, the will of God **reigns**.

TRANSITION: Sin is a big deal. It is our biggest problem. Gloriously and graciously, Christ has dealt completely with our sin dilemma. We must have faith in the work of Christ as our only rescue.

COMMENTARY

VERSES 28-29 / The Nazarene Jews did not receive the Christ-claim by Joseph's son. Beyond declaring that He is the Messiah who has come to save the world, Jesus also exposed their hard hearts and the reality that God will pass over unbelieving Jews like them to save even Gentile sinners who do believe. The crowd went from "all spoke well of him" (v. 22) to a furious flock. The citizens in the synagogue, presumably there to know and worship God, allowed the anger of their hearts to rule them. They quickly transformed from a religious family to a riotous, murderous mob.

This tragic tale is one of many to come throughout the books of Luke and Acts. Through these works, Luke painted a brutally honest portrait of how many who should have been close to God through their knowledge, tradition, and ancestry still repeatedly rejected His Son, Jesus, as the Messiah. Not only did they reject His claims, they actively sought to stamp out His message, often by drastic means.

The outrage toward Jesus quickly morphed into an attempt to end His life. Luke and the original audience would have understood the significance of the detail "**so that they could throw him down the cliff,**" especially since Nazareth did not contain such a drastic edge. At the time, throwing a person down was the first step to an execution by stoning, which was frequently initiated with throwing a person down from some sort of height. Whether it was just a few feet from his standing position or truly down a steep cliff, the motivation of the mob's actions here were clear: this "traitorous" Jesus must die.⁷

These Nazarenes completely forgot the point of Jesus's original message in verses 18-21: He had come to save them. Yet in verse 29, they understood the next point Jesus made: because of their rejection of the Messiah, the message of good news would spread to a new people, namely, the Gentiles. Sin fueled their responses to both messages. They jilted Jesus by refusing to

believe that He is who He claimed to be. Then they responded with vile vitriol to the notion that God would save the Gentiles.

VERSE 30 / There is much movement in the text of verse 29: they got up, drove him, brought him, intending to hurl him. The tension of the narrative has been building since verse 21 with the mixed responses of the people and Jesus's bold rebuke. With every word read, the suspense grows, and the narrative seems to be pointing to a tragic ending until we reach verse 30: "**But passing through their midst, he went away.**" This shocking and unexpected turn of events is not the anticipated outcome for the reader, much less for the mob!

So what happened? Did the anger of the mob simply dissipate? Did the people suddenly have a change of heart? Was there an intervention through people who are not mentioned in the text? Did Jesus shake off His assailants and sneak away? Or did the Father bring about a supernatural change that allowed Jesus to escape what seemed to be certain doom?

Luke did not explain this resolution in detail, but it is clear that though the crowd had the end of Jesus in mind, God had other plans. It was not yet time for Jesus to die. This cycle was repeated several times throughout the life of Jesus: people rejected the message of the Messiah and then sought to silence the Son of God through any means necessary, only to fail in their efforts.

Eventually, another mob would deliver Jesus up to His death on a cross, but only because God planned it so. God sent His Son to earth at the exact period in history when His glorious and saving purpose would be fulfilled. Every terrestrial moment lived by Jesus was filled with divine purpose and perfect timing. No matter the plans of human beings, the will of God reigns.

MY RESPONSE

Because we are no longer estranged from God but are now accepted by Him through Christ, we seek to live in peace with all, forgiving greatly as we have been forgiven.

NOTES

HEAD:

Jesus of Nazareth, though rejected by His own, would continue His messianic ministry to bring the good news of spiritual freedom, healing, and abundance to those who would place their faith in Him. This early rejection of Jesus would be repeated, ultimately leading to His crucifixion. Yet the repudiation and pain Christ would experience did not deter Him from His ultimate purpose to seek and save the lost, which includes you and me and people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

How do the truths of God's sovereignty and grace change how you see and relate to God?

HEART:

It's tempting to point fingers at these Nazarene Jews while shaking our heads at their shameful behavior, thinking that under no circumstances would we reject Christ in such a violent and absolute way. But for the grace of God, every one of us would have been part of this outraged clan, ready to stamp out this "blasphemous" threat. Every soul's sinful default is to reject Christ. This reveals how great is the love and grace of God to take enemies with murderous intent in their hearts and make a way for them—for us—to be saved, forgiven, redeemed, and welcomed with open arms by our Creator and Savior.

How does the reality that, if not for God's grace, you would be a part of this murderous mob stir your heart toward worship?

HANDS:

Sin is not an intangible, subjective social construct. It is a matter of fact, and it is a problem. The sinfulness of every soul is an important, objective spiritual truth. The reality of our sin should lead us to personal repentance and utter dependence on the work of Christ for salvation. Then having been loved and humbled and saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we should be propelled by God's gift of the Holy Spirit to embrace the Great Commission as the most essential work of our lifetime. Because we have been saved from sin by Christ, let us recognize the presence and punishment of sin in others and proclaim the gospel of Jesus far and wide.

What steps will you take today to make the Great Commission a more integral part of your life, knowing God has saved you from sin?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"We may note in passing that [Jesus] was never regarded as a mere moral teacher. He did not produce that effect on any of the people who actually met Him. He produced mainly three effects—Hatred—Terror—Adoration. There was no trace of people expressing mild approval."⁸

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

POINT 1: JESUS IS THE MESSIAH BRINGING GOOD NEWS TO ISRAEL (LUKE 4:16-21).

+ COMMENTARY

“According to his custom, Jesus is in the synagogue on the Sabbath, a presence that reflects his respect for the worship of God. To appreciate what happens here, one must understand the synagogue service order. Our knowledge of such a service comes from ancient Jewish sources such as the Mishnah, the Jewish codification of their oral law. To have a service, ten men must be present. The congregation recites the Shema, the confession recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Then they share in prayer—some of them set prayers, such as the Tephillah (also called the Shemoneh Esreh and the Eighteen Benedictions). Then comes a reading from God’s Law, the Torah, followed by a reading of the Prophets. These texts are read in Hebrew and translated into Aramaic, the dominant language of the region. Then follows an exposition that usually ties the readings together, and the service closes with a benediction. Presumably Jesus speaks during the exposition section of this service. This may explain a peculiarity in his citation, for he not only cites Isaiah 61:1–2, but mixes into it an allusion to Isaiah 58:6. The mixture may well represent a summary of a larger reading or set of remarks.”⁹

+ ILLUSTRATION

“Give me liberty or give me death.” –Patrick Henry
“I have a dream . . .” –Martin Luther King Jr.

Over the course of history, there are words that have initiated new eras. Some statements have proven to be sparks of revolution, seeds of cultural change, and even the origin of an outbreak of new evils. These messages, whether good or evil, have proven to be pivotal. And perhaps no statement has been more momentous than that of Jesus recorded in Luke 4:21: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” These words were the first of many He would voice to proclaim the purpose of God to save the world through His Son, Jesus.

Yet with each pivotal comment in history, the response is often just as critical. Reactions to paramount proclamations tend to divide as individuals decide what they will do with the message sent. The words of Jesus are no exception. Throughout the life of Christ, as He brought forth the good news, individuals personally had to respond to the revelation that God sent His Son to rescue sinners. So too must we personally respond to His claim that He is the Son of God

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sent with the divine invitation to repent and believe in the gospel. And once accepted, the good news of Jesus must not stop with us. The message is meant to be proclaimed to all people so many will have the opportunity to respond to His call and be saved.

POINT 2: JESUS IS THE PROPHET BRINGING GRACE TO THE WORLD (LUKE 4:22-27).

+ COMMENTARY

“The story of Naaman provides a second example of God’s grace to Gentiles. Luke 4:25–27 supplies the key for understanding this account. For Jesus these examples demonstrated that Nazareth could not make exclusivistic claims on him; and since Nazareth had in fact rejected him, he would go elsewhere. Nazareth may have rejected him, but others would receive him gladly. For Luke these examples showed that the Jewish people had no exclusivistic claims on Jesus, and since they rejected him, the gospel of 4:18–21 has been offered to the Gentiles. And just as Elijah and Elisha were better received outside of Israel, so the gospel message would receive a better hearing among the Gentiles.”¹⁰

+ COMMENTARY

“If someone has a message from God to give, the natural place to deliver that message is the place where people come together to worship or to hear the word of God. That is precisely what Jesus did when he began his campaign in a synagogue. He has described the nature of his ministry, saying that its content is preaching ‘good news to the poor’ and setting at liberty those that are oppressed (4:18-19). Its basis is the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit (4:18). But Jesus is also clear about the results of his ministry (4:23-30). He will be rejected by his own people and he hints that there will be a wider mission to all kinds of people (4:23-27).”¹¹

+ ILLUSTRATION

There are countless stories of congregations who (seemingly) happily coexist until a dividing issue emerges that may cause a church split. Occasionally it’s a serious issue like what is being taught from the pulpit. Sometimes it’s as silly as what substance and style that physical pulpit should be. Whatever the problem, there is typically a “before” and “after” the conflict. And the aftermath is full of pain, rejection, and brokenness.

It’s tempting to see certain issues as the main concern. So some churches attempt to keep the peace at all costs by squashing any potentially problematic discussion before it can happen. But eventually, a hill to die on will emerge, and when it does, members of the church learn much about one another. Through the battle, some will emerge that you didn’t realize had such depth of character and devotion to Christ, while others who seemed to be solid followers of God will show that their first allegiance is not actually to Jesus and His bride.

Church conflicts often prove the reality that you don’t actually know someone well until you disagree with them. Thousands of years ago, the Nazarene response to Jesus illustrated this truth. Though they had “worshipped” God together for decades, suddenly that supposed fellowship was broken.

POINT 3: JESUS IS THE SON EXPERIENCING REJECTION BY HIS OWN (LUKE 4:28-30).

+ COMMENTARY

“Before Jesus finishes speaking, the townspeople have cast their vote against him. Their wrath in v. 28 anticipates—and repeats in virtually the same Greek phraseology—the wrath of the Ephesians at Paul’s preaching of the gospel (Acts 19:28). The townspeople ‘drove [Jesus] out of town’ (v. 29). The Greek expression behind this phrase . . . is used in the LXX for ridding a (Jewish) city of defilement, such as plague (Lev 14:40–41, 45), foreign gods (2 Chr 33:15), or a (supposed) evil person (1 Kgs 21:13). The phrase is a ritual anathema and a gauge of the outrage against Jesus. Jesus has become like a Gentile pollutant . . . We should not be surprised if Jesus was rejected by outsiders and enemies. The unsettling truth of this story is that the greatest danger to the way of God in this world is posed by those who are closest to it. Jesus is rejected not in Sodom and Gomorrah, but in Nazareth. He is betrayed not by the devil, but by one of the Twelve whom he chose. He is crucified not in pagan Rome, but in the heart of Israel at Jerusalem. The rejection of Jesus repeats the rejection of God in the history of Israel, whose ultimate adversary was not Baal worship or foreign nations, but ‘my own people who are bent on turning from me, declares the Lord’ (Hos 11:7). ‘Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him’ (John 1:11).”¹²

+ ILLUSTRATION

In recent years, more and more people are trying out the idea of a staycation. There are many benefits of a staycation. They are often cheaper, easier to plan, and much less stressful than a week away at a new-to-you destination. Another purpose and benefit of a staycation is to see the sights that are typically overlooked by locals. When stuck in the rut of the day-to-day, people often miss out on the beauty, history, and wonder that is in their own local backyard. Staycations can help us stop and smell the roses we rush past, when it comes to the physical features that surround us. Yet we can also frequently miss out on the value and significance of the people right around us. It may be an elderly neighbor who has incredible stories to share that bring the info of history books to life. It can be taking for granted the presence of a loved one right under our roof. Unfortunately, it may not be until these treasured souls have left us that we realize their true value.

The Bible tells us that if we are in Christ, then we have the very presence of God within us. Let us not be like the Nazarenes, who didn’t recognize the miracle right in front of them. Let us not miss out on all that Jesus promises us. Let us not neglect and grieve the person of the Holy Spirit, who is ever present and able to help us in our every moment.

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