

Listening to Jesus

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- [0 : 0 0] Hello, welcome to St. Mark's. It's great to have you with us. I'm just going to preach from the Gospel of Luke, an important story in the book of Luke, Jesus' first sermon. He preached a very short sermon, but a very powerful one.
- I'm going to ask the question, if you want to make sense of your life, who do you turn to? Who do you listen to? And I want to make the case that if you want to make sense of your life, a sense of the world around you, you need to turn and listen to Jesus.
- Now I wonder, when did you last hear from God? Have you ever heard from Him? As in, really hear Him? Like an audible word. Wouldn't it be amazing if you could hear from the God of the universe, to have Him speak to you?
- Imagine, you said, hello Dylan. Yes. Humans love to hear messages from beyond the grave, don't they? That's why every culture in the world has its messengers.
- People who can communicate with the other side. Witch doctors and shamans. Sometimes we're taken on ourselves to get a message from out there and we look for signs.
- [1 : 1 3] But maybe you've dabbled in widget boards and played glassy-glassy. Or maybe you've gone to a palm reader or a fortune teller. Or ways of trying to find out a message from somewhere out there.
- Guess what people are looking for is answers to the big questions of life, the universe and everything. Sometimes they don't even know what they're looking for. Just something that will make sense of their life.
- We want to know what life is all about. And we know that we need otherworldly wisdom to get that information. It's somehow just beyond our grasp. Just when you think you've got life all worked out, it kind of throws you a curveball.
- Well, today's Bible story tells us to look to Jesus as the one messenger who has been sent by God that all people should listen to.
- Because He has the most amazing message the world has ever heard. It's also the truest message. And because of that, sadly, it also has potentially the most difficult message to hear.
- [2 : 1 4] So, jump with me into Luke chapter 4. We've read it already. And just to give some context, you know, by the time Jesus gave His message, people knew there was something special about Him.
- But they weren't quite sure what. There were certainly crowds following Him. And maybe because in our passage, Jesus had traveled to His hometown. In verse 16, He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up on the Sabbath day.
- And He went into the synagogue. You know, and maybe they had heard the stories. I'm sure they would have about Mary and Joseph and of angels and prophecies. Maybe an irregular birth.

Joseph wasn't quite married to Mary when they had Jesus. Maybe they had heard about Him as a child growing up in the temple courts and how He had challenged the teachers of His day and how He had someone, there was someone of wisdom and learning way beyond His years.

I guess they knew there was something about Jesus, but they couldn't quite put their finger on it. Certainly, people came out to listen to Him and were eager to know what He was going to say. They knew there was something special, but just how special gets revealed in our story today.

[3 : 26] So let's pick up the action from verse 16. Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went to the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed Him.

Unrolling it, He found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. And He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began to say to them, Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Now this was an absolute bombshell of a sermon. There's kind of two sermons actually. Two messages, I should say. The one sermon is Isaiah's sermon, which Jesus quotes or reads from. And then there's Jesus' own sermon.

A very short sermon, but a very powerful sermon. It's one of those moments where you could have, I think, heard a pin drop. Now to understand the magnitude and the impact of what Jesus said, we need to look at why Jesus chose that passage He did in Isaiah, and what He meant when He said, By today the scripture is fulfilled.

[4 : 48] Jesus' sermon in Luke 4 is taken from two texts in Isaiah. One line from chapter 58, and the majority of it from chapter 61. And just the briefest background sketch, we know where we are in that passage of Isaiah.

Isaiah was sent to warn the southern kingdom of Judah that unless they repented of their sins, they would face the same judgment as the northern brothers, and they'd be killed off and exiled out of the land.

And chapter 39 ends with Isaiah prophesying that they will indeed be exiled because of their sin. But from chapter 4 onwards, there's a swing, a change.

That's the key turning point in the book of Isaiah. And God spells out how their future will be different when He acts decisively to bring them back from exile.

Chapter 40 starts with, Comfort my people. And then it goes on to talk about making a pathway straight for the Lord, and that prefigures John the Baptist.

[5 : 48] But that whole section of Isaiah sort of almost culminates in chapter 61 with the message of good news, of healing and restoration.

And so God has a message for His people in exile. And the amazing thing is that after all those warnings that He's been given them, and He Himself sent them off into exile, it's a message not of continued judgment.

He could have said, Well, I've told you so. I'm done with you. I told you you were going to exile, and now you can just jolly well stay there. No. God's message to His people, even in exile, is a good message.

It's the word, we get the word gospel from it. It's good news. God's gospel message is one of hope for change and salvation.

Now, if you've got a message, you must have a messenger. And God acts like all kings. He's not going to run around and give messages Himself. He's going to send His messenger to deliver His message to His people.

[6 : 56] His messenger is a king Himself. God is a great high king, and so His messengers are highly exalted. And so He sends this anointed one, which means Messiah. And in the book of Isaiah, the Messiah figure is the one whom God sends.

To bring salvation, but to give a specific message to His people. Isaiah identifies that person who is going to carry out this ultimate plan of salvation is the coming Messiah.

The one who will be anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring this message of salvation, this gospel news that is going to bring freedom and healing for His people. Now, He's going to be anointed by the Holy Spirit, and that's a key marker for the messenger of God.

That's why it's written, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me. Now, I don't know if you've noticed, but in the book of Luke, Luke goes out of His way almost to make the point that Jesus has received the Holy Spirit.

He receives it in His baptism. In chapter 4, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert. That's when He was tempted and overcame Satan.

[8 : 04] And then in our text, He returns into Galilee full of the power, in the power of the Holy Spirit. He's thus identifying Jesus, the gospel of Luke, is identifying Jesus as the one on whom rests the Spirit of God.

And that's important because you can't just call on the Spirit of God by yourself. It's under the control of God. And only God gives His Spirit to whom He wants, and that person then becomes commissioned in a sense.

It's God's commissioning of an individual to carry out a task or to give a message to His people. When Jesus says that today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, part of what He's saying is that He, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, is actually Jesus the Messiah, the one in whom the text of Isaiah 61 is talking about.

He identifies Himself as the Messiah, the Anointed One, who is officially sanctioned by God to speak on His behalf. Now this is not lost on the crowd who's listening.

That's why they're so rapt when they hear this. But they don't quite know what to make of it. Let's take a closer look at the message from Isaiah that Jesus uses in His sermon to see what this message is all about then.

[9 : 20] It's obviously an important one. And you'll see that it's made up of kind of five separate but interrelated themes. There's good news to the poor. There's freedom for the prisoners. There's sight for the blind.

Release of the oppressed. And then this all kind of is summed up in the proclamation of the year of the Lord's favor. So, we've got poor, we've got prisoners, we've got blind, we've got oppressed.

What's he talking about? In the first case, what Isaiah would have been talking about is he would have been describing those whom God had promised to bring back from exile and restore to back in the land.

They literally were the poor. They were refugees. They literally were being released from slavery and from imprisonment in the foreign lands. But that's way back in 600 BC.

Why is Jesus talking about it as if it was still true in his day? It should have made his heroes a little bit uncomfortable. Well, that's because many of the problems that existed back in the time of the exile to Babylon were still, those problems were still affecting the Jews of Jesus' day.

[10 : 30] They were still waiting for the year of the Lord's favor. The year of the Lord's favor is called the year of Jubilee. It's where all their debts were canceled and anyone sold into slavery was released.

Jubilee is all about freedom and the Jews knew that they weren't quite free yet at that time. They were still under Roman oppression. But Jesus is going to show them that there's a much deeper slavery and a much more profound freedom that they need.

By using this text, Jesus is telling his audience that they are in some sense still in slavery, still in the dark, still under oppression and they need release.

Jesus knows that it is their sin that still holds them tight. The image of slavery and freedom is perhaps one of the most vivid metaphors that Jesus uses to describe the state of those sort of held tight in the chains of sin.

Not in the book of Luke, but quoting Jesus from John chapter 8. He says this, He said to the Jews who believed in Him, If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples.

[11 : 34] Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. We are Abram's descendants, they answered. We have never been slaves to anyone, forgetting of course that they were. How can you say that we will be set free?

And Jesus replied, Truly, truly, I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. A slave is not a permanent member of a family, but a son belongs to it forever.

So if the son sets you free, you will be free indeed. And so Jesus is using Isaiah 61 as a vivid sort of picture language to describe both the real and the spiritual state of His listeners.

In the covenant of God, if you're oppressed and held captive, it's because of your sin. It's not an either-or situation of physical versus spiritual. It's a conglomerate of both. Being poor, imprisoned, or blind, or oppressed speaks of the same thing, all kind of from slightly different angles.

It is someone who's completely unable to free themselves, who's caught up in something that they can't release themselves from. What they need is someone to come and set them free. What they need is a Savior.

[12 : 44] The good news that Jesus is proclaiming here in Luke 4 is that He is that person and that that offer stands for all who come to Him to receive favor from God.

It is, in fact, the most amazing message the world has ever heard. The same thing that God is saying to His people in Isaiah and what Jesus is saying to His people in Luke, Luke is telling the rest of the world we are all living in a kind of exile, in a world that's gone wrong, where oppression and poverty and sickness hold sway and we long to be free from it all.

The message of Luke 4 is that you can have that and more if you come to Christ. Instead of living under God's judgment, you can begin to enjoy His favor.

There's one more thing to note in this passage and there's a glaring difference between what Jesus quotes from Isaiah 61 and what is written in Isaiah 61. You may have noticed it when we did our readings earlier.

In case you didn't, Isaiah 61, verse 2, doesn't end with to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. It goes on to finish that sentence and says, and the day of vengeance of our God.

[13 : 58] Jesus completely leaves that out. This really is the time of God's favor. This is not the time for God's vengeance. Jesus has come to bring good news indeed.

In a quick look at Jesus' sermon, it shouldn't take long, it's so short, but it's very important for us to understand what He's saying. Pulling all this together, we can now understand better what Jesus means when He says, today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

Today is now, means fulfilled. It's not just today on the Sabbath that they were there. It's an epoch, age-dawning, history-shaking, world-changing today.

The time of salvation has finally arrived. Everything the Jews had been waiting for and hoping for to happen, was going to happen now, was happening now.

As they listened, the end, in one sense, has begun. A new age has dawned. It's started. It's happening. What is promised is now beginning. That's what Jesus means by today.

[15 : 02] Now, the time has been fulfilled. What, as I said, would happen in the Old Testament is now happening. The waiting is over. The Scriptures are fulfilled.

Jesus is saying that He is the Anointed One. He is the Messiah because He is the Herald. He is the messenger sent from God with the power of the Holy Spirit. It marks Him out as God's messenger, as the Anointed One that brings this message of good news.

He therefore carries supreme authority as the spokesperson of God and of the one who will actually make these things happen. And He says that this has been fulfilled in your hearing and He looks at His audience.

Jesus throws the ball over into their court to His listeners. You have now heard who I am. What is your response going to be? And so we see an immediate response and it's initially okay but then it sort of veers off and takes a sharp turn left.

They begin to question who Jesus is. Isn't He just the carpenter's son? How can He possibly be the Messiah? He grew up with us. We know who His parents are.

[16 : 12] What can He possibly do to do bringing about the Jubilee? This great salvation. How can He be the messenger from God? And Jesus replies to point them to two Old Testament stories where God overlooks the problems of His own people but goes instead to heal and help the outsiders.

Those who are truly poor because they're completely excluded from the promises of God. And that message instead of creating humility and immediately sorrow and going oops the auditor said oh we shouldn't have said that Lord forgive us it actually incenses them to the point where they want to kill Jesus.

And notice what they do verse 28 all the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up drove Him out of the town took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built His own town in order to throw Him down the cliff.

That's to kill Him obviously. And Jesus we don't know how He did it but He walked right through the crowd and went on His way. And so tragically they missed this one great opportunity that they had to respond to God's gracious call to join Him and to be free and to receive His favor.

to join Him in the great reversal of sin and follow Him into freedom and security. By not recognizing who Jesus is they miss out on that opportunity.

[17 : 51] Don't let that be you if you're listening to this message. You may not fully understand who Jesus is but take the time and ask Him and pray to Him and say Jesus I may not know you but I'd like to know who you are and what this message is that you're bringing to us.

You never know when you'll get another chance to do that. In conclusion then I asked at the start who should we listen to to make sense of our world and we need to listen to Jesus because here is life.

There's freedom. There's security. There's health. There's healing in the words of Christ and because He's got the Holy Spirit He can send the Holy Spirit to be an anointing oil for us in a sense.

We hear God by listening to Jesus. Jesus is the person who tells us what God says. He's the one that has literally crossed over to the other side but we don't need to go chasing after trinkets palm readers and nonsense like that.

We've got the words of someone sent by God to tell us what God wants to say to the world. God is not going to speak any other word than He's spoken through Christ. We have His words recorded now.

[19 : 03] So we can listen to Him any day any time we choose and yet you know somehow we seem so busy and we just never quite get to it do we?

Don't let that become a pattern in your life where you miss out on hearing from Jesus Himself and through Him from God. I think secondly let's take joy in our freedom if we are Christians if we've accepted Christ we know who He is and He's spoken to us in a way that makes us belong to Him let's take joy in that.

The year of Jubilee has started. Jesus has purchased our salvation. Healing and freedom are ours now in Christ. If the Son has set you free you are free indeed.

Enjoy that freedom live in it. Be thankful for it. We have a great captain of salvation who gave us freedom from sin freedom from our past freedom from shame remind yourself of that when life doesn't make sense it sometimes doesn't help sort it out straight away but it does give us the strength to continue through it and knowing that we've got someone who cares and loves for us and has taken us through deep waters already and how will He not take us all the way to eternal salvation.

Thirdly let's help others to enjoy that freedom that we've got in Christ. Welcome them into the community of believers. You know if you've been set free from prison and had your sentence commuted you want to get others out of there as well.

[20 : 36] You don't hold it to yourself. Let them know too let others know too that they can experience the same joy and release and healing from sin. And we must do this in spite of opposition to our message as Jesus did in His ministry and as the apostles did and as Christians throughout the ages have.

We must go on proclaiming because we know that God is not going to abandon this world. God does bring change. The jubilee has begun. In Christ there is hope for freedom from all kinds of oppression.

There's healing and restoration and forgiveness and the receiving of God's favor. And then lastly if you haven't asked Jesus yet into your life I don't know who you are listening to this who knows it's on the internet it might be there for years before Google decides to take it down they probably won't.

But take time to investigate the words of Jesus read through the Gospels pray to Him and ask Him to help to reveal Himself to you.

Join us in receiving the freedom and release and healing that can be found in Christ and have your life changed and have everything make sense and to know what to do in the world.

[21 : 53] Well let's pray to Jesus now and ask Him to help us do these things. Dear Lord Jesus we can only begin to imagine the importance of those words that today the Jubilee has begun the good news has started of freedom from sin and redemption and release and healing.

Dear Lord Jesus keep us with you always be a continual source of light be a continual source of freedom for us and help us to spread that joy wherever we go through our whole lives for your glory Amen