

Sunday, February 5, 2023 | Onward

Week 4 | Luke 4:14-30 | "The First Sermon of Jesus"

On January 1, Pastor Bob kicked off the first sermon series of 2023 entitled "Onward." This series will explore the so-called "firsts" of Jesus' life and how he pressed *onward* into new and unexplored territories. Like the rocket which took astronauts to the moon in 1969 had a launching point, Jesus' ministry also had a starting part. And just like the Saturn V eventually took humanity to a place it had never been before, Jesus took humanity into a more profound and closer relationship with God than it had ever experienced before. The final spiritual frontier would be conquered by none other than God's only Son, and, amazingly, he would invite us to join him on the journey.

Two weeks ago, we moved from Jesus' *first words* to the *first steps* of his earthly ministry. And we noticed that the Lord's beginning coincided with John the Baptizer's end. Their meeting not only highlighted John's ministry but it emphasized Jesus' own. Even God showed up to mark that magnanimous moment, declaring to all that Jesus was his "Son." And just so that Luke's readers do not miss the importance of that declaration, he immediately moves from the muddy waters of the Jordan to a lineage that proves that Jesus was, in fact, directly descended from not only Adam but God. Through his mother's side, Jesus identifies with the human race. But through his Father's side, Jesus identifies with the divine race. And by being the true heir of God, Jesus can transform sons and daughters of Adam into sons and daughters of God.

Last week, we talked about Jesus' first recorded run-in with temptation. He literally goes toe-to-toe with the Devil. Why? Because Jesus was presented as the "Son of God." A claim of that magnitude had to be real-world tested. As we saw, Satan didn't pull any punches. Specifically, the Tempter tempted Jesus in three ways: turn stone into bread, worship the Devil, and cast yourself down. And those three temptations illustrate three ways the world can draw our hearts away from God. First, we can be tempted to satisfy ourselves, leading to an unsatisfied life. Or, we can be tempted to ally ourselves with the world, making us enemies of God. Or lastly, we can be tempted to test God, revealing our lack of trust in God. Ultimately, whether or not we can weather such temptation is dependent upon our relationship with Christ. **When the Son of God overcame temptation, he made temptation something to be overcome.** But if we don't rely on Jesus, we shouldn't be surprised when we lose to temptation.

Today, we're going to explore Jesus' first sermon (i.e., my first sermon ever, my first sermon as pastor). In this message, the Lord will lay out his life's purpose: he is the bringer of "good

news.” He came to fulfill God’s promises and liberate God's people. And, at first, Jesus' words will be met with overwhelming approval. Nazareth, thinking they would be given preferential treatment, fully embraced Jesus’ claim. This was Jesus' hometown, after all. But the Lord will reveal that they've made a critical mistake. The "good news" wasn't only for them; it was also for their enemies. This is too much for them. And so, a congregation that had just been applauding Jesus ended up running him out of town and nearly tossing him off a cliff. They liked the "good news" so long as it was for them alone and not for their enemies too.

READ: Luke 4:14-16 (ESV)

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 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.

This passage teaches three things about Jesus’ preaching:

i. The Galileans were amazed at Jesus’ preaching (vs. 14-16).

Three things characterized Jesus’ honeymoon period for his ministry: he was **empowered** by the Spirit, gained **instant** notoriety, and was an **itinerant** teacher. In fact, teaching was such a big part of what Jesus' did; if you ever wanted to find Jesus, you'd look for him at a synagogue, especially if it was the Sabbath. Jesus never let a week go by without being in the house of God.

To fully grasp this passage, it’s vital to place it in its **historical** context.

According to excavations, Nazareth was more akin to a country hamlet than a bustling metropolis. Archeologists estimate it likely had no more than 400 residents.¹ And the **hub** of this small town was the **synagogue**. A Jew going to synagogue at this time is similar to many religious services today. And, assuming their services matched that of the second century, there would’ve been **six elements** to each service: a recitation of the Shema, Prayers (i.e., Eighteen Benedictions), a reading from the Law (i.e., something between Gen. to Deut.), a reading from the Prophets (i.e., Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc.), exposition/application, and, finally, a benediction. Interestingly, the scriptures readings would've first been in Hebrew and then translated to Aramaic, the common tongue of the people.

¹ Garland, David E., *Luke*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2011), p. 195.

But while there are similarities, today's religious services differ from the first-century synagogue in **two** ways. First, and less interestingly, a passage was explained from a seated rather than a standing position.² We will see Jesus do just that after he reads Isaiah and before he explains the passage. Second, instead of a specific teacher, synagogues would allow any male from the community to present what we might call "the message." So long as they were well-learned and trusted, they would be given the floor. There might've even been a rotation. And, possibly, such is the case here with Jesus. Considering that no one took issue with him standing up to read and expound the Scriptures, we can safely assume that his fame and trustworthiness as a teacher had been firmly established by this time. What's more, this was his hometown synagogue. He'd likely spoken there before, and it would've been perfectly natural for him to speak that day.

But, unlike the many Sabbaths that had come and gone, this one was special. As we'll now read, this was a Sabbath that had been prophesied 800 years before.

READ: Luke 4:17-22 (ESV)

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." 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?"

ii. Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus' preaching (vs. 17-22).

Jesus' quotation is a mixture of two passages: Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2. And in both passages, the writer is talking about the messianic age. When Jesus said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," he meant that the Messiah had come, and he was it. And through his declaration, Jesus explains the three-fold characteristic of the Messiah.

1. First, as his baptism proved, Jesus is a bearer of the Holy Spirit.

² Morris, Leon, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, (Downers Grove, IL; IVP Academic, 1988), p. 125-126.

2. Second, he's also the regal ("anointed") messenger of "good news." He is the coming King, the ruler they had been anticipating all along.
3. And, lastly, the Lord has come to bring "liberty" to the captive, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed."³ Spiritual debts will be forgiven, not unlike the Year of Jubilee, where monetary debts were forgiven.

The Jews would've thought of themselves as the ones to whom the bearer of the Holy Spirit was coming. These Israelites would've assumed that God's anointed messenger would bring the "good news" to them. They were, after all, the oppressed. They were the ones whose liberties had been taken by their Roman overlords. In other words, before Jesus spoke about Elijah and Elisha, the people at the synagogue would've really liked his message.

In fact, that is what Luke tells us: "[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?"](#)" In other words, "That's Joe's boy! That's our Jesus!"⁴ They loved hearing that *their* local boy Jesus was ringing in the Messianic kingdom.⁵ Because if one of their own was indeed the Messiah, the whole town could ride to prominence on his coattails.

But there was a problem. The Nazarenes seem to be ignorant of what occurred in Bethlehem. Joseph was Jesus' adoptive father. But he was more than that. They would not be the first to be tripped up by this faulty assumption (cf. Mat. 13:55-56; Mar. 6:3; Jhn. 1:46; 7:41; 8:41).⁶ As Luke has made it painfully evident by this point in his writing, Jesus is not Joseph's son. He is God's Son (cf. 2:49; 3:22, 23-38; 4:3, 9). And as God's Son, he did not hail from Nazareth. He's hometown was heaven. And, as such, he did not come only for them; the Messiah came for all, even their enemies. Their Jesus, whom they had known for years, will not show any partiality (cf. Lu. 8:19-20). "There will be no nepotism in the reign of God."⁷

READ: Luke 4:23-30 (ESV)

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

³ Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 1:1-9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 1994), p. 405.

⁴ Contra., Bock (1994), p. 415, who says that they meant it as a derogative.

⁵ Garland (2011), p. 203.

⁶ Bock (1994), p. 414.

⁷ Garland (2011), p. 203.

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.”

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.

iii. The Nazarenes were enraged by Jesus' preaching (vs. 23-30).

In response to their overwhelming acceptance of his preaching, Jesus forecasts what they'll say to him: “Physician, heal yourself. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” They expected preferential treatment.

Often when someone gets famous, their friends and family think they'll be the primary beneficiaries of that person's fame. And when it comes to someone who makes it big because of sports or music, that isn't necessarily wrong. A ballplayer buying their parents a house is a sweet gesture. But the Messiah is a special case. Though Jesus had been raised as a Nazarene, his mission was to all people. He would not be partial or prejudiced. He could not give Nazareth preferential treatment. And precisely because they thought he should, Jesus could not do any significant work in his hometown (cf. Mar. 6:5-6).

Jesus explains why he could not do what he would do in Capernaum in Nazareth by saying, “No prophet is acceptable in his hometown.” And then the Lord illustrates this point by referencing two prophets: Elijah (cf. 1 Ki. 17-18) and Elisha (cf. 2 Ki. 5:1-14). Generally speaking, prophets were hated in their time because they came with news of God's judgment. Such was the case for Elijah and Elisha. Rather than doing great miracles for their own countryman, these two prophets did amazing things for foreigners.

Elijah famously prophesied against Ahab and Jezebel, a low point in Israel's history. Though there were many widows in Israel, Elijah helped none save for a widow from Zarephath, a country outside the borders of Israel.

Elisha prophesied during the reign of Ahab's son, Jehoram. And though there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha helped none save for the Syrian, Naaman, again, another foreigner. But not just any foreigner. Naaman he was the commanded the Syrian army, Israel's enemies.

So, in response to the Nazarene's enthusiasm, Jesus checks their blatant nepotism. Using Elijah and Elisha as examples, the Lord was telling the people that he had come not only for Israel but for foreigners like the widow of Zarephath and the commander of the Syrian army. And this comparison would make the Nazarenes like the rebellious Israelites during Elijah and Elisha's day.

And while that took some explaining because we aren't well-versed in the O.T., the Nazarenes knew their history. They would've understood Jesus' implication that they were like Ahab and Jehoram. And they did not like the comparison. Even worse, his claim that he would go to outsiders like Naaman and the widow of Zarephath while leaving behind insiders—i.e., them—really ticked them off. In this light, their 180 turn from glowing acceptance to murderous rage makes sense. They thought Jesus was saying one thing when he was saying something else. When they realized that, they didn't like what they were hearing.

So, what's the takeaway?

Prejudice keeps us from **experiencing** the wonders of God.

Jesus made Capernaum his home of operations rather than Nazareth his hometown. Why? Because the Nazarenes wanted Jesus to prioritize them over everyone else. But Jesus, like God, is no respecter of persons.

READ: Romans 2:1-11 (ESV)

¹ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. ² We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. ³ Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? ⁴ Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? ⁵ But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

⁶ He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. ⁹ There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, ¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. ¹¹ For God shows no partiality.

Too often, we want God to be on "our" side. But there is no such thing as "our" side. There's God's side, and then there's everyone else (cf. Josh. 5:13-15). Yes, we can come to God's side, but this does not make it "our" side as if we possess any authority. It is still God's side.

We'd like it if the Lord was a Ravens fan. But he's also a Steelers fan. History rightly condemns Hitler and his Nazi regime. But during that time, God loved the Germans as much as the Jews. Today, did you know God loves the socialist just as much as he loves the capitalist. Jesus died not only for the Republicans but for the Democrats too. The liberal has the same access to God that the conservative has.

Why? Because if God is no respecter of persons then neither should we. Before God, all of humanity is on the other side. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. All of us need God's mercy. Remembering that you are as fallen and flawed as your enemy will keep you from becoming prejudiced when God shows mercy to your enemy. It's the kindness of God that is trying to lead them to repentance, just as it led you to repent.

Yes, our enemies may be doing deplorable and ungodly things. And, rest assured, their sin is an affront to God. And, yes, we have a duty to condemn what God condemns. But never forget it is by God's grace that you are no longer God's enemy. We are no better than those who are actively working against God. Israel would've loved it if Jesus had stepped in and wiped out the Romans. But he didn't. He came to save the Romans as much as the Israelites. He came to save the foreigner as much as the national.

If we're not careful, we can start to think that God is for "our" camp and against "their" camp. But because of the Cross, there is no such thing as an "us-vs-them" fight. It's only God vs. sin. This is why we do not consider our neighbors a country to be destroyed but a mission field to be discipled. The Cross breaks down the political, ethnic, and social barriers.

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Video Description

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TEXT: Luke 4:14-30

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: