

Sermon on Luke 4:14-44 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Luke 4:14-44 (read by Jacki Schwantner)

What Jesus did determines who we are and who he is determines what we do.

As a pastor I spend a lot of time thinking about how the truths we hold dear and proclaim week in and week out, meet us in the mundane and routine of life. In the faith category of life but not there only. In every sphere. In family, relationships, in our hobbies and passion, and certainly in our vocations... in our work. Thinking through what purpose the truths of Christ serve at 2:30 in the afternoon, six cups of coffee in and looking at a calendar full of zoom meetings and crises to fix.

When we see our faith injected into and shaping all of life, we might just be going against the cultural mandate of untethering identity from anything other than personal whim at any given moment...

February 2021, Tim Herrera, New York Times. "One of the best pieces of career advice I've ever gotten was to think of jobs as verbs, rather than nouns. So, for example: I do journalism, rather than I'm a journalist. Or: I do youth education, rather than I'm a teacher.

Yes, it feels like a silly, arbitrary little word swap, and you'd never actually say that at a party. (Imagine how weird you'd come off telling someone, "I cut people open," rather than, "I'm a surgeon.") But it is a mental shift that can help to disentangle who you are as a person from how you spend your days to make money for rent and groceries...

Experts say it's important to protect yourself from letting problems in one area of your life affect the other areas, especially now that the borders between every aspect of our lives are blurrier than ever. A bad week at work is a drag on your mental health, but if your work is only a part of your identity, and not defining it completely, the overall emotional impact of that bad week is less severe...

...centering your life on a job may even make you act against your own self-interest and happiness, perhaps by working long hours or accepting behavior you normally wouldn't.

Not only does that compartmentalization help protect yourself from the lows of one area of your life creating lows in another, having space can improve your performance overall..."

Now, I think there is a physiological point to this... so I am not hating on the sentiment. "You are not what you do!!" Has been a mantra for decades as a corrective for unhealthy situations and I get the impulse. To that end, when I was living in DC at the regular cocktail parties instead of asking what a person did immediately after hearing their name, I would ask "who are you?!"

Now it rarely went over as well as I thought. Makes for more difficult small talk! I wanted the deeper answer of identity and drive. But often the answer would just be what the person did for a living.

To be honest, I am starting to think it's good for what you do be who you are. To have such an integrated life that there is wholeness. Finally doing things that match and are shaped by our being.

More than just a philosophical question. The tension plays out before us in Luke 4 and in who Jesus says he is and what he does. And in that, we gain insight for our lives.

"This pericope (story), like most others in the Gospels... is designed to teach us what we should know and believe about Christ and thus how we should live."

Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. Remember he has just defeated the temptation of the devil in the wilderness. And now ministry begins in earnest. His preaching, his healing. Praised by everyone. Buzz is spreading. This dude is the real deal.

As he does his ministry, Jesus uses a visit to his hometown to proclaim the fulfillment of a text from Isaiah describing the Messianic King (promised savior). Then he proves it by what he does.

What he does determines who we are, and who he is determines what we do. We need to know this, why? We want to see the real Jesus and his kingdom and live in his way as he has called us to.

He is What He Does

Set the scene... the increasingly famous local boy comes back to the local synagogue and is asked to read the “prophets” portion of the service.

Now, from the first verses of Luke, we have been on the lookout for the King - and his Kingdom. Who exactly is this King long hoped for? And we learn the answer from a declaration of what he does.

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” -- **Luke 4:18-19** (CSB)

Jesus is handed the scroll of Isaiah and he finds this section on purpose. Taking from Isaiah’s description of the Messiah (playing to the home crowd hear - preaching to the choir!)

There is theological significance here. This is likely why Luke has it so early in the story. Everything must unfold from this declaration, and everything to come will prove it.

Jesus sits down, as a teacher would, and says “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.”

This is a different Savior than we might expect. Certainly that Israel often neglected to see. A Savior that comes of the poor, captives, the disabled, the oppressed. Bringing the year of jubilee, the Lord’s favor to those in need.

We might expect the Savior to come for the cream of the crop. The elite, the religious, the pure, the hometown crowd. Those entitled to be “saved.”

This makes me think of a common refrain in school ministries - ‘get the quarterback to follow Jesus and you will win the school.’ The cool kids will make

Jesus cool! I am all for quarterbacks following Jesus, even second and third string, but He comes for the needy. Those without social capital. Those bound by systems, sin, and the devil.

These are certainly spiritual conditions. You get that, right? Spiritual poverty, emotional blindness, captivity to the things of the world...

But we miss something when we leave these descriptors in the realm of spiritual alone.

They are also physical. Because these are the people he ministers to.

Good news to the poor. Freedom to the enslaved. Recovery of sight to the blind. Liberty for the oppressed. This is the Lord's favor. Renewal. Restoration. This is what he does. And it is tied exclusively to who he is as the King, as the redeemer.

Jesus proves it. He leaves his hometown and drives out unclean spirits (freeing people under oppression). He heals the sick (physical sickness, fever and various diseases).

“The tasks Jesus claims for himself benefit people in need. Unlike the rulers of the fallen world, he rules on behalf of the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, and those who have fallen into debt (whose lands are returned to them during the year of the Lord's favor; see Lev. 25:8–13). His concern is not only for people in desperate need. He cares for people in every station and condition, as we will see. But his concern for the poor, the suffering, and the powerless distinguishes him starkly from the rulers he has come to displace.”

Theology of Work

And this is good news.

“In these verses we have yet another way in which the message of the gospel is explained. It is good news for those afflicted and in need (the “poor”); it is new freedom and liberty for those in bondage and the oppressed; it is a restoration of sight to the blind; it is, in short, the time and place of God's favor upon those incapable of gaining it by their status or abilities... When we recognize our brokenness and bondage and blindness, the gospel meets us fully and restores us. The gospel applies to our lives at the level of our whole person, not only our need

for sin-forgiveness. We apply this full gospel to ourselves by looking to Jesus for restoration in every area of our lives, not just in the “spiritual” realm, recognizing that full restoration may await heavenly fulfillment.” GTB on 18-19

And who he is, is for everyone in need.

“When it was day, he went out and made his way to a deserted place. But the crowds were searching for him. They came to him and tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said to them, “It is necessary for me to proclaim the good news about the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because I was sent for this purpose.” -- **Luke 4:42-43** (CSB)

This is what the Kingdom looks like. The poor brought in. Liberation experienced. Healing. Favor with God. This is the way of Jesus we are invited into.

How will we respond?

What He Does and Who We Are

You have a choice.

Here we have hometown rejection. Fascinating. There is amazement at Jesus’ claim over these verses from Isaiah. But the crowd begins to question because he isn’t who they thought he would be and he certainly is not going to do what they expected either.

He is too lowly. Isn’t this Joseph’s son? Isn’t he just a dude from down the street? I have a chair he made in my house...

Jesus responds saying no prophet is accepted in his hometown. And he tells stories about the grace of God and who it reaches unsettles the crowd.

In Elijah’s day, there were certainly widows in Israel... but he was sent to the Gentile widow and she is blessed with flour and oil to get through the famine.

Nazareth can't take it! In their own eyes they were not poor. They were the good, respectable, synagogue-attending, family-oriented, solid citizens of Nazareth. The comparison with the Gentile woman in Elijah's day was a massive insult.

In Elisha's time there were many in Israel who had leprosy yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian - the foreigner. When they heard it they were enraged.

Jesus is in the company of Prophets hated by Israel. But the people's pedigree is not what was supposed to save them. It is their need and they can't stand for it. The way of Jesus is the end of entitlement. It is the end of presuming on privilege. It is the end of refusing to see outsiders as part of the Kingdom.

"Salvation is, in other words, not restricted to the sons of Abraham, let alone the villagers of Nazareth; it is for every son of Adam, for Jesus came to save not just Jews, but humanity. As this Gospel has already indicated and will stress increasingly, he is to be the Savior of the world." Michael Wilcock

And they try to kill him! Some reception back home!

Do not be those people.

"There are many lepers in the church today—and many starving widows. But they do not know they are spiritually poor, spiritually captive, spiritually blind, spiritually oppressed. Upright, religious, family-focused, they become furious at the thought that they need God's grace. Their enviable heritages and fine church traditions insulate them from their spiritual poverty. In effect, they cast Jesus out. Those most in need of mercy and grace often know it the least." Kent Hughes

When entitlement is washed away there is a recognition of our need. Our poverty. Oppression. Blindness. Those that own these things come to Jesus are redeemed and made his.

"He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born, not of natural descent,

or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God.” -- **John 1:10-13**
(CSB)

This then is who we are. This is the deepest truth of our identity. Children of God. Redeemed by Jesus. Kept for his glory. Citizens of his Kingdom. And now that we have been brought in, we live accordingly.

Who He Is and What We Do

The way of Jesus then for us is Christlikeness, being about the same things that define our King.

I love the throw away line in verse 40 that is really the definition of ministry for all of us that follow Jesus.

“When the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought them to him. As he laid his hands on each one of them, he healed them.”
-- **Luke 4:40** (CSB)

All those who had anyone sick... this is us as witnesses of Jesus. Implying people to come to him. To find freedom, healing, new life, purpose, and a place to belong.

“Wherever Christ went, the kingdom went. When men and women come to him in faith, the kingdom enters their hearts. All true believers are part of the kingdom to come.”

This is the best place to be. Identified in Christ. Kept by Him and living for his fame, in all things. In the pulpit on Sundays and around the coffee pot on Tuesdays. In the small group on Wednesdays and on the sidelines on Saturday.

The worst of us receive grace and that’s the point. What is good news for me, whoever I may be, is good news equally for me to pass on to my neighbor, whoever she may be.

But it’s not just an evangelistic appeal. Who He is should shape our lives. We are not meant for a segmented life but an integrated one. Transformation ignites in

our souls and spreads to our extremities and all of life. Church, relationships, civics, work, play. Everything.

“Indeed, Jesus had come to set captives free, open blind eyes, and proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (4:18-19). “The year of the Lord’s favor” is another name for the Year of Jubilee (every fifty years; see Lev 25:8-12) when Israel was instructed to set slaves free and release people from their debts, as well as allowing them to return to their family property. Jubilee is a symbol of the social and economic liberation of God’s people. The key, however, to understanding the Year of Jubilee is that it was inaugurated by the Day of Atonement, when the issue of sin was addressed. Thus spiritual transformation is the foundation for the legitimate social, political, and economic restructuring of society.” Tony Evans

The renewal of others and all things begins in our hearts by the atoning work of Jesus for us. And it spreads from us to our neighbors, to strangers. As we live for this renewal to see the radical transformation of our world.

This will mean different things for each of us. Thankfully we have a community to help refine that vision with. In all we endeavor to do, as followers of Jesus, we must see those he came for. We see them because he came for us - in our need and we have been made part of His Kingdom.

This is what the world needs to see.

“There is in this challenge to the churches of the western world, where the great majority of people have in some way or other heard ‘ reports of him’. The folk-religion which survives from past generations more Christian than our own may be little more than superstition; the image of Christ purveyed by the mass media of the present may sometimes be highly unsatisfactory; but the churches can at least try to correct such knowledge, by ensuring that the Jesus known through them, at any rate, is the genuine Jesus of the New Testament. The way they live and preach and worship must be, as far as they can make it so, an embodiment of his word.” Michael Wilcock (1979)

To preach good news to the poor. To proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

This is the real Jesus. What he does (saves) and who He is (our King). In light of this, let's live.