

Luke 4:14-21

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Most of you, I think, know that I am always saying that if we really want to connect to Scripture, we must adopt a three step process. Maybe four steps, if you want to include that we actually have to read it in the first place. But let's assume that we are reading Scripture on a regular basis. From that point there are three steps to follow in order to engage any particular passage in order to apply it to our lives today.

First, we must hear the words through 1st century ears. You know what I mean, right? We must hear it as they heard it. For example, how many people here live and work on a farm? None? Ok, how many of you raise sheep or tend vineyards? Really? No one? You know, many of the people who Jesus spoke to did. And if they didn't, they were in constant contact with people who did. That is why Jesus teaches using examples and analogies containing seeds, and soil, and grapes, and wine presses, and wandering sheep. He uses these analogies because those who heard them would understand. So, our first step is to try to put on 1st century ear so that we can receive the message in the context that it was delivered, so that we would be able to find the truth that they were able to receive and understand.

The second is kind of an extension of the first. We have to look for and find that truth in the message that Jesus had for them. We need to do our homework. We have to translate the analogies. They knew that the seeds that they planted grew better when placed in good soil. It was an everyday part of their lives. They also understood the enemy of their crops were the

weeds that would sprout up with the grain and choke out the plants. They knew that good soil held water and nourishment below the surface and successful crops had to have roots that went deep below the surface in order to thrive. This was all common knowledge and second nature for them. Then came the message...the truth. It was the same with God's truth for their lives. Be the good, receptive soil for His truth, free from weeds (those things that choke out the message). Be a welcoming environment promoting good root development, so that when God's word is planted in them it would flourish in their lives and within their world.

Finally, 3rd, take that truth that we now understand and apply *that* message to our lives today. We so often want to take our conception of reality and apply it back onto the message that Jesus was teaching, adapting his message to our desires instead of adapting our desires to Jesus' message. Our task is to find Jesus' original message and meaning and, then, let it work on us, not the other way around.

When we consider sheep, we don't change the message because, you know, sheep just don't get lost today. We have fenced ranches and even GPS trackers. And if a single sheep were, somehow, to wander off into danger and potential death, well, in today's more advanced world we have business models and acceptable margins of loss that take into account these possibilities. And sheep no longer need to hear and recognize the voice of their shepherd. They don't need that type of thing anymore because we no longer corral them into common shelters at night with each shepherd calling them out by flock the next morning. So, maybe, for us today, hearing the voice of the master might be redefined to us listening to some inner, personal voice to lead us. That is what Napoleon Hill teaches us in his book, *Think and Grow Rich*. Surely, we tell ourselves, it makes more sense for us in our post agrarian world to overlay our new way of seeing things in order to update an outdated message so that it would fit our life and culture, right? The problem is, that in doing so, we miss the original message and the deeper truth.

So how does this all apply to our passage for today? Jesus has returned home to Nazareth. Word and reputation have proceeded him. Wherever he went in Galilee he was praised, and that included, of course, Nazareth. Maybe even especially in Nazareth. He was there hometown boy, you know. Who knows, maybe the sign as you entered the city already said, "Nazareth, Population 500, Boyhood Home of Jesus". I mean until that point in time, the only thing you might have heard about Nazareth is a question about whether anything good comes from there. Now something does and they probably packed the synagogue basking in their "shared" glory.

And Jesus is given the scroll of Isaiah and reads from Chapter 61: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He then sat down, took a breath, and told them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

So, what did you hear? Better yet, what did they hear? What did their 1st century ears and context think he was talking about? Well, they knew exactly what he meant. The year of the Lord's favor could have meant only one thing. Jesus was talking about the Jubilee year. It was a year in the Jewish tradition that came every 50 years. It was the year that all debt was forgiven. All slaves were set free. Reconciliation was expected among all the people. It was a reset year. All things went back to their original state. It was a year that had been part of the Jewish tradition beginning when the Jewish nation entered Canaan in 1416 BC. And it was understood by them as practice for when the Messiah would come and reset things forever. They would have understood the Jubilee message. After all, for the most part, they had been living it and practicing it for over 1400 years.

What about us, today? What do we hear. For most of us, the truth is that we tend to recoil at the concept of Jubilee. Forgive all debt? That doesn't make good economic sense. Of course, our concept of debt has been mostly limited to monetary debt. Return things to their original ownership. Ah, I don't think so! If people are blind, we have optomologists for them and captives or slaves are not allowed anymore, so those parts just don't apply today.

But, if you go back and put on 1st century Jewish ears you hear that Jesus is telling them that the thing that they have been practicing for over 70 generations was now made real and not just practice. He took a concept that had been infused into a national structure and brought it to life for all time. He took a time honored tradition and transformed it into the realization, into the fulfillment, of an eternal promise. He was telling them that the Messiah for whom they were preparing was here!

The Spirit of God was upon Him. He was anointed. He was THE anointed. That was what Messiah means in Hebrew. He was the anointed one to bring Good News to those disconnected from the joy of that way of life. Deep Joy to those who had none. Good News of new life, and a new way of seeing life, itself. He was sent and anointed to facilitate a reset of things; to set things back to how they were always meant to be. The Jewish people had been practicing for it in small ways for as long as they could remember, every 50 years. He was now accomplishing it is a huge way, for eternity.

The year of the Lord's favor. Those who had been held in bondage to sin were freed. Their shackles shattered. Their life restored. Those who had been lost in blindness, had their ability to see clearly, to understand fully, to follow faithfully, restored. Those who had been weighed down by oppression; oppression by the forces of the world, found passage out from under its thumb and into the freedom to be who they were created to be. Those who heard Him in the synagogue that morning, holding that scroll, knew what Jubilee meant. They just had to take it to a new, spiritual level. We are called to do the same thing.

This true Jubilee for all humanity came with Christ. The complete fulfillment of Isaiah's words came through the Anointed One. It was, He was, the spiritual embodiment of Jubilee. He brought the restoration, the reset, of all things back to their original, created state. All debts paid.

All transgression forgotten. All consequences healed. All JOY reinstated! Walking with God, side by side, in a beautiful garden.

Do you know when the next Year of Jubilee is in the Jewish tradition? It's now. It started in the Fall of 2015 and will continue until the Fall of 2016. It marks the 70th Jubilee, which some say has great significance. All I know is that in that synagogue in Nazareth the eternal Jubilee was fulfilled. Our task, as a Jubilee Community, is to embrace it and live into the joy that it brings to us and, through that, bring that joy to all others.

Amen