

## **Jesus Between the Seasons: *Jesus' Purpose*** **Luke 4:18-21**

Each Sunday, as we gather in this place for worship, we turn to a passage of Scripture and talk about some aspect of the Christian life. Now, I make it a point to vary my preaching between Old Testament and New, allowing the variety of texts to point us to the great truths and concerns presented in God's word.

My favorite Scriptures, though, are the ones that tell us about Jesus. And the best topics relate to His life and teachings, His death and resurrection, those that confront us with His invitation to come and follow Him, and then explain what this calling means for our lives.

Beginning today, and continuing through the end of August, we'll be turning to the Gospel of Luke while focusing on "Jesus...Between the Seasons." Let me explain.

We won't be considering any of the Christmas texts, nor will we look at any of the Lenten and Easter passages. We'll be sticking instead to the stories of Jesus that we find between those two most prominent seasons of the Christian life. We'll spend our time "between the seasons."

Today, we turn to Luke 4, and to a passage in which Jesus shares His purpose. He tells the people in His home town of Nazareth what it is that He understands His mission in this world to be.

As followers of Jesus today, this is one of those Scriptures that we need to know well—because the better we understand Jesus' purpose, the better we'll understand our own as we seek to follow Him. Our text is found in **Luke 4:18-21 (NKJV):**

<sup>18</sup> " *The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;*  
<sup>19</sup> *To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

<sup>20</sup> Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. <sup>21</sup> And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Picture this for just a minute – or maybe twenty minutes or so. Every eye was fixed on Jesus when He got up to speak. He was one of their hometown

boys. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus was in the synagogue, as was His custom.

It had been a while since Jesus was last there. but Mary and Joseph had brought Jesus to Nazareth while he was still in diapers. He grew up right there in their little town.

So, Jesus probably had play dates with their children. They knew his parents, his brothers and sisters. They had things built and repaired at his father's carpenter's shop.

In other words, He had been one of them; but at the age of 30, Jesus closed the door on the carpenter shop, went out into Galilee, the countryside around Nazareth, to begin His ministry.

But Jesus was not like some other young men who left home, never to be heard from again. The people of Nazareth had gotten lots of reports about Joseph and Mary's boy.

They had heard he had done some fine things--taught some good lessons, preached good sermons. There were even reports that he had healed some people. He had gotten rather popular.

So when Jesus came back to town and entered the synagogue, there was excitement. Expectations ran high. They asked Jesus to read one of the scripture lessons.

In their services, they always read from the law and the prophets. They asked Jesus to do the reading from the prophet Isaiah that day and to share some thoughts about its meaning.

Jesus opened the scroll and read this well-known passage. When he finished, he handed the scroll back to the assistant, sat down--that's the way they did it in those days--and He began speaking.

With their full attention focused on His every word, Jesus turned this happy homecoming into a mob scene. He read the passage; then he said, "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears."

In other words, "I am the fulfillment. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. I am the One anointed, the One sent, to preach and heal and set free. That's My purpose for being here."

And the folks at church that day began to say, "Wait a minute. Isn't that Joseph's boy?" But Jesus kept on speaking, and the more he said, the madder they got--until finally they rose up against him.

Their intentions were to throw him over a cliff—Nazareth was built on a steep hillside, and that’s how they took care of troublemakers—but on this occasion, Jesus managed to escape with his life.

Now, even though His message didn’t play well, Jesus had let them know who He was and why He had come. He described for them the dimensions of his mission and ministry. He hadn’t made any of it up either. It had actually been embedded right there in their scriptures for many centuries.

It’s just that when Jesus held those scriptures up, incarnating and enfleshing them, it made them angry. They reacted with violence. Sure, this was God’s word--it just wasn’t the way they were used to hearing it.

Now get this: as Jesus describes for them His purpose, He is also providing for everyone who would ever choose to follow Him clues as to what their purpose in this world is. And the question for us today is: how will you and I respond to His message?

Probably not with violence, but perhaps by thinking to ourselves, “That’s all well and good, what Jesus is saying here, but maybe I’ll just let somebody else do that.” Or we respond with sort of a “ho-hum” attitude, which is just as bad, really. That also does a kind of violence to the work and witness of Christ in this world.

But then, we could resonate with these words of Jesus. They might “flip a light switch in us,” and we say, “That’s my ministry, my mission, and I pledge my life, my abilities, my resources to getting this done.” Again, how will you and I respond to Jesus?

1. Listen to these words: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor...”*

Does this sound like some kind of first century war on poverty? Well, it is that, in part. Jesus was certainly concerned about taking care of the poor. That message is all through the Bible.

But that’s not all it’s about. For Jesus, “poor” was not just about economics. Poor was also a spiritual category. If not, this good news for the poor would be bad news for the rich. Sometimes it is, of course; but not always.

In Jesus’ view of the world, the financially poor could actually be quite rich. On the other hand, persons of great wealth could be poor. Zacchaeus was wealthy, the rich young ruler was wealthy, the Farmer with barns bulging from a bumper crop was wealthy--but they all knew the poverty of mere riches. They were spiritual paupers before God.

Jesus changed the definition of rich and poor. He brought good news to those who lack the resources for the living of their lives. He made possible the good life, the fulfilled life--eternal life--for both rich and poor.

Some people are “down and out,” but so many people that we rub shoulders with could be called “up and out.” “Out here,” they seem to have everything. But “in here” is empty. They need to hear the good news that they can be rich within.

To Zacchaeus who was up a tree with his sin and guilt, Jesus said, “Come down, you are forgiven.”

To the poor woman who had her body on the market--a plaything for anyone who would buy her--Jesus cast no stones, but shared with her the fantastic news, “Go in peace. God loves you and forgives you. He has purposes for your life.”

Friends, the good news of Jesus speaks to impoverished people, whether they live in mansions or shanties. Our job is to get the word out, to let people know, that God provides the resources to make life rich and abundant. That’s good news for the poor, no matter what income bracket we’re in.

2. Next, Jesus said, *“He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted.”* Into all the hurts and pains of this world, Jesus brings a ministry of healing. The Great Physician has paid us a house call. He’s come to heal the brokenhearted.

Please notice what is not said. It does not say that Jesus prevents hearts from getting broken. He doesn’t. Christians are not exempt from life’s hurts and pains.

Sometimes our hearts are broken--broken by the loss of a loved one, broken by rejection, or disease, or failure. Life is mean at times. It can break us. It can break our hearts.

Jesus made no attempt to explain away the evils that befall us; instead, He made us aware of His healing presence in the midst of our pain. He doesn’t leave us comfortless. By his grace, He mends our broken hearts. That’s another good word that we need to hear, and share, with our world.

3. Then Jesus said, *“He has sent me to preach deliverance to the captives.”* Now what does this mean for us? We don’t have any captives in here--well, some of you may feel that you were forced to come this morning--but I don’t see anybody in chains. You may even have on orange, but at least it’s not that same orange they wear over at the local jail.

But listen. There are more captives on planet earth than ever before. That’s because there’re more people than ever before – people who are bound by all kinds of chains.

Some are bound by the chains of prejudice, the inability to see past color, nationality, religion or politics. Some of us may be bound up by clocks, calendars, and deadlines.

We may be chained to ourselves, bound by the kind of self-centeredness that has no real concern for those around us. Or guilt could be our prison, that nagging awareness that we don't measure up to what we could be, or should be.

Jesus Christ sets us free from our chains. How? By binding us to the right things. I know this sounds like a paradox--it is!--but Jesus sets us free by binding us to good things...like love—His kind of love—a love that overcomes our prejudices and self-centeredness.

Jesus binds us to the knowledge that we are accepted and forgiven, that we don't have to be constantly pushing to prove ourselves or to gain the acceptance of others. We have worth, amazing value, in the eyes of God.

Our purpose, friends, is to tell people who are bound to all the wrong things that true freedom comes from being bound to the right things--the things we discover when we finally make the decision to trust Jesus. He sets the captives free!

4. Now this: *"He has sent me to preach recovery of sight to the blind."* Now, at first, this may seem to be a rather limited ministry. We already have doctors and hospitals and the Lions Club who serve people who are visually impaired.

But how many times in the Gospels do we find Jesus catering to people in whose lives the light has gone out? This is what blindness does. It robs us of the light--be it physical or spiritual light. If it's physical, we can't see the light of day. If it's spiritual, we can't see the light of God.

There's lots of blindness in our world, even among those with 20/20 vision. The finest eyewear cannot cure this blindness, because it's a blindness of the spirit.

Some people are class blind--they can only see their own kind and class. Status has become their god.

Some are creed blind. They are so locked up in their own little narrow beliefs, they will not respond to any new light that comes from God's word.

Some are gender blind. They refuse to hear that in Christ, there is neither male nor female. There are so many blindnesses that stem from the heart, not the eyes. Part of our purpose in this world is to help people see.

Of course, as we carry out this ministry, we need to be ever aware of Jesus' warning that "the blind cannot lead the blind, lest they both fall in the ditch."

Our challenge is to stay close enough to Jesus that we can see things from His vantage point, to see people and things the way He sees them.

Jesus had a remarkable way of seeing people--seeing them not as they were, but as they might become. He sought to make something out of the people He saw. And He made it clear that this is our purpose too—to see, to care, and to be part of His ministry of touching and transforming lives for His Kingdom.

5. Also, *"To set at liberty those who are oppressed."* Oppression takes many forms. Nations can oppress nations. People can oppress other people. But there is also the kind of oppression that we bring upon ourselves.

Sin and guilt, coupled with insecurities and phobias and everything else that prevents us from being all that God intends. Jesus' purpose is to set us free to live positive, purposeful lives. And His freedom always comes to us on its way to someone else...as we share the blessings of freedom in Christ with them.

6. Finally, Jesus tells us He's come *"To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."* Now, lots of people have tried to figure out exactly what year that is.

But let's just think of it as any year in which God's will is known and done—it's any and every year when you and I begin to take seriously Jesus' purposes in this world and make them our own.

So the question becomes, "Will this be the acceptable year of the Lord in my life, and in yours?" Will this be the Lord's acceptable year in the life of our church?

Well, yes, it can be. It will be  
—if we know Christ Jesus as Savior,  
--if we make it our aim to follow Him as Lord of our lives,  
--if it truly is our heart's desire to make His purposes our own.

Friends, let's make THIS "the acceptable year of Lord" for us!

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