

The Messiah Full Grown Luke 4:14-21

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Luke 4:14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread throughout the entire vicinity. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, being acclaimed by everyone. 16 He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. As usual, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him, and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it was written:

Luke 4:18 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 freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. 20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."

Intro.

We're winding up the Christmas season, and so it seemed good to me, and, I trust, to the Holy Spirit as well, that we move forward in time to the moment when Luke reveals in Jesus' adulthood all that was promised in His birth. In other words, in today's passage we see the Messiah fully revealing Himself.

Up to now Angels have proclaimed Him, shepherds and wise men have worshipped Him, and Simeon and Anna have identified Him as the promised Messiah. But the infant Jesus has had nothing to say for Himself.

We've been given a few other glimpses of His growing up years: In Luke 2:41ff we're shown the boy Jesus in the temple at age 12 and we're told that He impressed the teachers by the questions He asked and the answers he gave; we're then told that he grew up graciously, increasing in wisdom and stature, and growing in favour with God and with people; we see him at age 30 coming to John for baptism; we see Him enduring and triumphing over Satan's temptations in the wilderness; and we are told that He spends a considerable amount of time (John's gospel indicates about a year) ministering, teaching and working miracles throughout the region of Galilee.

But in the gospel of Luke, at least, Jesus has yet to speak for Himself, to explain His own view of Who He is, or what He has come to earth to do.

Today's text, then, finds Jesus well into His adult life at about 31 years of age. He is locally famous, and so far well liked by the larger community. Now, having built His reputation in Edmonton and Red Deer (Capernaum and Bethsaida), He comes back to his home town of Calgary (Nazareth) to worship again with the same people who watched Him grow up.

If you continue to read past verse 21 you will find that Jesus' welcome was short-lived. The people soon turned against Him and His visit home ended with an attempt on his life by the very people who watched Him grow up, and who probably had listened to tales of His exploits in other towns with a kind of quiet pride ("He's our boy").

The problem was, Jesus soon made it clear that He was nobody's boy. He did not present Himself to Nazareth as the humble local boy who made good on his early promise (think Wayne Gretzky coming back to Brantford, Ontario). No, he came back to Nazareth to say, in essence, "all those years you thought you knew me as a boy and a man, as a dutiful son to my parents and later as a skilful carpenter in my own right (Mark 6:3). But the fact is, I'm nothing like you thought. I'm something else entirely. You have no idea Who, or what, I am.

I remember a scene in a movie where a priest says to a young man who had returned to England after years of fighting in the crusades: "I see the boy I knew in the man before me." Nobody felt that way on the day Jesus returned to His home town. They sensed they were seeing something entirely different. Why? Because they were forced to reckon with someone who was qualitatively different from anyone they had met before. They may not have been able to formulate the thought, "We are in the presence of God!" But in spite of Jesus' gracious words and quiet manner, they knew something was different, and they were afraid.

Sabbath and Synagogue

Before we go any further with that idea, however, I want to draw your attention to a little noticed, but highly important fact. It says in verse 21 of our text that it was "usual," or in other translations "customary" for Jesus to be in the Synagogue on the Sabbath Day. This relates to us because modern church worship is a combination of temple ritual and synagogue service (prayers, Bible readings, singing of Psalms, exposition of Scripture were all done first in the synagogues). Of course we no longer slaughter animals as they did in the temple, but in the Lord's supper we celebrate the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So remember where Jesus was on the Sabbath day—at church. Now there are those who want to say that as Christians we are free not to worship in church. "Nowhere," they say, "are we commanded to go to church every Sunday." And I agree. But before we decide that church worship is entirely optional, let's recall that there is much less said in the Old Testament about the synagogue (it isn't mentioned at all) than is said about church in the New Testament. Yet it was our Lord's custom, habit, practice, pattern, plan and program to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day wherever He was.

I want to say two things about that. (1) If we want to be like Jesus we might start by attending public worship as faithfully as possible. Hear me carefully. Jesus didn't always attend the same synagogue. As a travelling preacher with an itinerant ministry He couldn't always be at the same synagogue each weekend. But he could be in a synagogue, and so He was. In fact, as we see in today's message, being in the synagogue turned out to be one of the best ways possible for Jesus to witness about Himself. Let me encourage you then, upon the example of our Lord, to be as faithful as possible in public worship attendance. As happened with Jesus in Nazareth, God can use your faithfulness in worship as a means to His glory.

(2) If you agree that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8), then you already know where Jesus is on Sunday. He's in the same place He was in the days of His flesh. By the Spirit, He is in the churches. He's meeting with His people corporately in a powerful and unique way that is not possible in private worship.

Danger of private worship

The great danger is that in private worship I may end up in control of the agenda. In private worship

I select the Scriptures. I select how they are read and interpreted. I pray as I am able. Thus I am not always able to get apart from myself and hear what Jesus has to say to me. I try not to be in control, but I'm sure I do not always succeed. None of us do. Private worship always runs the risk of turning into self-worship, or ignorant worship at the very least. These Nazarenes, for instance, could have studied Isaiah 61 for a lifetime without ever discovering that it referred to Mary's son.

But in public worship, where many people worship together, God is free to speak to us in unexpected ways. He speaks through someone else's prayers. He speaks through Scripture that someone else chose to read. He forces us to listen to someone else's interpretation and application. And He does all that to challenge our thinking, to correct us, to encourage us, to teach us, to call us to new ways of service and new commitments, etc. Dear friends, all of us need public worship.

The Messiah full grown

Let's look again at Jesus' visit to Nazareth and try to enter into it imaginatively. Jesus is in a familiar place. After all, this is the synagogue where as a boy he learned to read the Bible. Chances are, he knew these people as well as His own family. And they thought they knew Him. There is almost no chance that He hadn't read Scripture at that synagogue dozens, if not hundreds of times before. To read Scripture with appropriate commentary was an art that every educated Jewish man tried to foster. Jesus would almost certainly have been one of those reader/commentators since his teens.

So let's picture it. The golden boy is back. Nobody could read Scripture like Jesus. And now "our Jesus" is being handed the scroll of Isaiah and he is getting ready to read. Whether this passage was scheduled to be read, or whether Jesus deliberately selected it, is not known. But no matter. The passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 was exactly what he needed to support His message. Hear it again.

Luke 4:18 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 freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Please understand, these people were neither ignorant nor uneducated. In some ways they knew the Old Testament better than we do. They knew, for example, that this passage was Messianic. They knew its context, that is, they were familiar with Isaiah's entire presentation of the Messiah as the Son of God, the suffering servant of mankind, Who would be pierced because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities, and Who would heal us by His wounds. They knew Isaiah went on to speak of a glorious resurrection and an even more glorious reign upon the earth.

Moreover, they knew that Isaiah was using the language of Jubilee (Lev. 25), a covenantal time of restoration (intended to occur every 50 years) when lost property—and properties—were returned, when slaves were set free and injustices were set right—in short, when everything that over the years had gotten upside down would be set right side up again. What Jesus read from Isaiah was only one small part of the loftiest, most profound, and most divine passages in all of Scripture. And the Jews of Jesus' day knew it well.

Imagine their surprise, then, when Jesus sat down and said, "*Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.*" It could not be more shocking to you and me if someone stood in this pulpit, turned to Revelation 9 and read from verse 16 about the huge army with 200 million horsemen, riding horses with heads like lions, from which issued fire, smoke, and sulfur, and who were destined to

kill a third of humanity, then sat down and said, “I’m the head of that army and we ride this afternoon. The apocalypse starts today.” That would be shocking. But seriously, Jesus’ words were just that shocking to His hearers. They could not believe that what He said about Himself was true.

On some level it is hard to blame these Nazarenes for failing to believe what Jesus said. They did not have our advantages. That is, at this juncture in the narrative they could not know that Jesus would go to the cross to take away the sin of the world. They had no idea of His resurrection, His glorious ascension to heaven, or His sending the Holy Spirit to empower and transform each of His born again disciples. As the saying goes, to understand is to forgive, and if we understand just how radical Jesus’ statement was, we can, perhaps, cut his hearers a little slack for their failure to believe.

But we cannot excuse ourselves. To us our Lord’s life, suffering, death and resurrection are history. Plus we have the New Testament to explain things to us. Thus if we do not believe what Jesus says here, we have no one but ourselves to blame. We certainly cannot claim ignorance as an excuse.

The Messiah as embodiment of blessing

Look again at Jesus’ words: “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” There can be only one possible meaning. Jesus is claiming that He is the promised jubilee, that He embodies all the blessings described in Leviticus 25. But what does that mean?

The deepest meaning of the Jubilee year is found in Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God. His kingdom is a place where everything perverted by man’s sin is ultimately restored, where man is freed from the enslavement of sin, where true liberty is established for the children of God, and where, in the end, even Creation itself will be freed from the bondage of corruption to which it was subjected on account of man's depravity. The Jubilee was also a time of trusting in God, as the people were told to neither plant nor cultivate; For two years they were to trust that God would provide what they needed.

But let me say it again: Jesus is the eternal Jubilee. All that it offers (restoration, liberty, a simple life of faith) is available in Jesus. This is what it means when we say, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved!”

The comfort

So Jesus is saying, “You can trust me to free you from the guilt and penalty of your sin and restore to you what sin has taken away. You can trust me to set you free from the continual bondage of sin. You can trust me to see you through this life, to provide all that you need, and in the end you can trust Me to bring you safely into My Father’s house.

The Challenge

Is Jesus full grown in your life? Is He God? Is He Lord? Is He able to make good on His promises? Do His words come to you as the Word of God, to be understood in obedience? Or do you treat His words as you might evaluate some “expert” speaking on TV?