

Disturbing the Peace

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[0 : 0 0] Now, we've come to the fifth of this little series, Preparing the Way of the Lord, in Luke chapters 3 and 4. We've seen how Jesus has been heralded by the Baptist, how he's been acclaimed from heaven by the voice of God himself, how the Spirit has descended, how he's been revealed as the last Adam, how he has met with the devil.

And now today and next week, in the final one of the series, we're going to look at the very opening stages of that earthly ministry. And we're going to read in Luke chapter 4, verses 14 to 30, and that's on page 859 in the Bibles.

Luke chapter 4, verse 14. It's immediately after the temptation by the devil in the desert. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.

And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 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 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 proclaim good news to the poor.

[1 : 3 1] 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

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.

He began to say to them, Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

And he said, Is not this Joseph's son? 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.

And Jesus said, Truly I say to you, No prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 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.

[2 : 4 1] And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 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. When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath, and they rose up and drove him out of the town, brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so they could throw him down the cliff.

But passing through their midst, he went away. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. I've spoken to many ministers of the gospel, and indeed have some experience of this myself, that people who have gone to their ministries and been welcomed with open arms, great enthusiasm, this is the person who is going to revolutionize everything, this person is going to change the church, fill the pews, everything will be wonderful.

It's not long before exactly the same people begin to turn with resentment and criticism, when the word begins to bite, when the word begins to have an effect on people's lives.

But I've never, ever heard of this reaction, or both these reactions, happening in the course of one sermon, as here, nor have I honestly ever heard of the reaction being so violent.

[4 : 23] People may have thought of that, but never heard of anyone who actually did it. Now, clearly, this is unique. As Jesus stands up in the synagogue, as he unfolds the scriptures from the prophet Isaiah, what he does is unique, as we'll see in a moment or two.

And yet, for other preachers of the gospel, indeed for every Christian, we are going to find both of these reactions. We're going to find from some people interest, sometimes just polite and superficial interest, and we are certainly going to find hostility.

There's a couple of things about the background of this, incident. In verses 14 and 15, Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit and taught in their synagogues.

There's an awful lot happening, which Luke summarizes here. The report clearly talked about this remarkable new preacher whom the Baptist had pointed to, and in particular, Luke emphasizes his teaching.

He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. That's a very important point, that Luke is indicating to us. Jesus did many marvelous things, casting out demons, healing the sick, and so on.

[5 : 41] We'll see this next week in the final study. But the thing that's most emphasized is his teaching of the word of the gospel. It's very important for us to remember that.

The gospel word is not something accompanied by the power of God. The gospel word is itself the power of God to salvation, as Paul says in Romans 1.

The gospel is the power of God to the salvation of all who believe. Sometimes in his grace, God allows wonderful things to happen, particularly here in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

But there is no greater miracle than people hearing the gospel word and coming from death to life. How could there be a greater miracle than that? Raising the dead to life.

So that's the first thing. The power of the Spirit manifests in many ways, but most especially in the word of gospel grace. And as Jesus enters his public ministry, this is the second point, this is more than simply the continuation of the story.

[6 : 49] God has invaded planet earth. This is not to be treated with indifference. And Luke is continuing what he's done in the early part of the gospel.

He's gone out of his way to emphasize who this Jesus is. After all, to begin with, Gabriel came to Mary, and said, the Holy One to be born of you is the Son of God, the Savior.

The angels had announced his coming, the Savior of the world. The Spirit from heaven had come down on him, and the voice from heaven had acclaimed him.

Here is the one who, as John says, will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Now with that in mind, let's look at particularly verses 16 to 30.

I want to say two things about this. And the first thing is, Jesus is the key to the scriptures. If we read the scriptures and don't find Jesus in them, we are missing the whole point.

[7 : 52] Jesus said that to some of the Jewish teachers in John chapter 5. You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life.

Now that was true. There was eternal life coming to them through the scriptures. But they testify of me. And if you don't find me in them, you're missing the whole point.

So it's never simply a case of reading the words of scripture, black ink on a page. It's a case of confronting the living Christ in scripture.

He goes to the synagogue as his custom. He is a devout and regular attendee at the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to indicate he had something to say.

And he's handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. And he reads from chapter 61. Picture of the coming one filled with the spirit who will bring in God's kingdom.

[8 : 47] And behind Isaiah 61 is Leviticus 25, the day of Jubilee when slaves were freed and when debt was repaid.

You see the picture, the snapshot of the gospel. What happens when Christ comes? Slaves are freed. He speaks and listening to his voice, new life the dead receive and so on.

And debts are paid. And this is a totally awe-inspiring moment. The living word is expounding the written word.

Let me realize just how staggering this is. So one of two things about this. The relationship of the living word, Jesus Christ, to the written word of scripture.

You notice that Jesus doesn't say, we can forget about Isaiah now. You've got me. I'm here, so shut up the book and we'll forget about it. He doesn't even do that later in the gospel after the resurrection.

[9 : 48] He says to the two on the Emmaus road, oh, if you want to understand me, you need the scriptures. Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he unfolded all the things about himself.

So if we want to know Jesus Christ, the Lord, how are we going to know him? We're not going to know him apart from the scriptures. And we're not going to know him in the scriptures unless the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to him.

Paul says in Galatians, the letter kills. In other words, if you simply read this as words, it will have a deadening effect. But if the spirit takes these words and leads us to Christ, then scripture will come alive.

Let's say this is a unique situation. He opens the scriptures and says, this is about me. No preacher today could ever dare to do that.

We open the scriptures and say, this is about him. But you see, it's the same pattern, isn't it? When we want to know what scripture is about, then we know it's about him.

[10 : 55] Jesus loves me. This I know. How do I know it? Because the Bible tells me so. So he opens the scriptures. The second thing is, his teaching is radical and revolutionary.

It's as radical as the Baptist. Remember when the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, so as a few weeks ago, that he basically turned the countryside upside down. Remember that passage where the word of God bypasses the good and the great, the Annuses and the Caiaphas, the Pontius Pilate and the Herods, and comes to John in the desert.

And this is the beginning of what John said would happen. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. What's going to happen? Good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, setting at liberty those who are oppressed.

Now, of course, the poor refers to monetary and financial matters. But it's far more than that. It's those who are poor in the sense that they are helpless and vulnerable.

The captives are those who are literally in prison. It refers to all of us. You see what he's saying? This is a message that opens eyes, that frees people from bondage, that gives people new life.

[12 : 20] And the miracles he's going to perform are miracles pointing to the new creation. You see, his ministry really is in two stages, isn't it?

There's the ministry he does while here on earth, which shows the coming of the kingdom, but the kingdom is still to come in the future. Many were healed, but many were not healed.

Some were raised from the dead, but the cemeteries didn't empty. Nevertheless, what he did shows that he is the coming Messiah, the one in whom the Spirit dwells.

And the third thing about him being the key to the scriptures is that his teaching is teaching which saves. He is the Savior, as the angel said, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

And if you look back at the passage in Isaiah, if you look at it later, you'll find that he stops in the middle of a verse to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Isaiah goes on, and the day of vengeance.

[13 : 24] That doesn't mean, of course, he didn't believe in judgment. He came to save. He came to judge. What it means is at this moment, the emphasis is all on salvation.

The judgment is coming. After all, the Baptist had implied that when he called people to repent. And obviously, very clearly, this is a summary of what he said. Luke has many sermons and acts which are clearly summaries.

I cannot believe that Paul only spoke for two minutes to the Athenians. After all, there's one famous occasion where he spoke until after midnight when Eutychus fell out the window.

The ESV somewhat pristily says, Paul continued his discourse until after midnight. I love the NIV. Paul went on and on.

And he went on and on to the extent that Eutychus fell out the window. Those of you who are tempted to emulate the apostle's example, make sure you also have his power to raise the dead.

[14 : 25] But all of these sermons involve real engagement with scripture. Like, this is the model for all of them. Even when Paul's talking in Athens, he doesn't say the Old Testament says this because the Greeks didn't know the Old Testament.

What he does is he gives them a kind of course on biblical theology. The big picture. God the creator. God the savior. God the judge. God the one who has appointed a day. So, the living word unfolds the written word.

And by unfolding, he places himself right at the center. The Baptist, after all, that's how he preached. The Baptist preached by saying, this is the one. He's here.

At long last, the one whom all the prophets pointed to, he is here. It's a rather silly rhyme, which is appalling, appalling poetry and even worse theology.

So, shut your Bibles up and tell us how the Christ you speak about is living now. The one way not to tell people about how the Christ you speak about is living now is by shutting your Bibles.

[15 : 32] You'll only tell people how the Christ you speak about is living now if we open our Bibles and expose them to the living word who comes to us in the written word.

That's the first thing. He is the key to scripture. The second thing is Jesus and his words demand a response. Now, never try and separate Jesus and his words.

Famous Methodist preacher of an earlier generation, Lord Soper, who used to preach at Speaker's Corner in London in the days when that was a popular activity. His mantra was, the Bible is a great servant of the spirit of Jesus, but a bad master.

Now, what Lord Soper meant was that he had a way of accessing the mind of Jesus, which was independent of and superior to the scriptures. Now, that, of course, is totally wrong.

Jesus and his words cannot be separated. After all, he's going to say later, anyone who is ashamed of me and of my words will be ashamed.

[16 : 36] The son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his kingdom. And so here his words create a response. First of all, there's polite interest.

Verse 22. All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming out of his mouth. Gracious words indeed. This is the Lord of language speaking and using words such as they had never heard before.

Words which were going to penetrate right into their hearts. And we need to remember this, that words are the God-appointed way of bringing people to faith.

Now, in the context of Luke, this, of course, is very interesting. Previous, the previous chapter, which we looked at last week, the devil is misusing words.

And he's using scripture wrongly. He quotes scripture, but he doesn't quote it, he doesn't quote it and apply it accurately. Whereas the words that the true servant of God, the one in whom the spirit is, he uses scripture and expounds it in such a way that the words provide both comfort and challenge.

[17 : 53] So there is polite interest. The second reaction, of course, is total hostility. Now, as I said, this is a unique situation.

Nevertheless, when these words are spoken, when the word of the gospel is spoken, and Paul says this in 2 Corinthians, when you speak the word of the gospel, some will smell the fragrance of Christ and they'll be attracted.

They'll come to know him and to love him. Others will smell the stench of death and they'll hate it and they'll hate you for proclaiming it. You see what's happening here.

People are, people enjoyed the sermon. I mean, some people actually use this as an excuse to evade it. I remember people in my past ministries, one guy in particular, was a good friend in some ways.

Oh, I like your sermons. But he uses that to evade the point. What he meant was that he didn't mind somebody speaking, provided it had nothing to do with him.

[18 : 58] And not so much nowadays. In earlier generations, used to get sermon tasters, went around to hear the great preachers of the day, without actually allowing what they said to impact on them.

And what they want here is miracles. Verse 23. What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well. And that's probably implied in verses 14 and 15 in the report that went through all the surrounding country.

We heard you did wonderful things at Capernaum. Why not do them here? Now you see the point. If these wonderful things done in Capernaum were true, simply repeating them in Nazareth was going to prove nothing.

See what voice they are speaking with. They're speaking with the voice of the devil himself. If you are the son of God, throw yourself from the temple. Prove that you are.

And as Herod was later to say, Herod said he wanted to see a miracle. He wanted to see Jesus. And one of the criminals, not the one who repented, says if you're the son of God, come down from the cross.

[20 : 08] You see the point is that it's the words themselves which are life-giving. If God allows these to be accompanied by miracles, and this is going to happen later on in the gospel, and it happens in the next passage that we'll look at, that's fine.

That's God's prerogative to do that. Even if the miracle is not present, the life-changing power of the word is. And what particularly offended them, of course, was the stories of Elijah and Elisha.

After all, they wanted to hear about themselves, about their own people. Elijah was sent to the land of Sidon. Elisha was used in the cleansing of the prophet Naaman, the Syrian.

See, the point is, as Luke's already made in the earlier chapters, this is good tidings of great joy to all people. This is not a national gospel.

It's an international gospel. It's not a word for those who call themselves the children of Abraham. It's a word for those who, by repentance and faith, show that they're the true descendants of Abraham, even if they're not genetically.

[21 : 23] Good tidings of great joy to all people. Now, that battle there is the battle which still faces us today. The battle lines are set.

The serpent crusher of Genesis 3 has arrived, and therefore the serpent is going to be especially active. And this is going to culminate in the cross and in the resurrection.

So you see how this story, like all these other stories we've looked at in Luke, a kind of hourglass passage, pointing back to the conflict between the serpent and the serpent crusher, which begins in the Garden of Eden, reminding us of Abraham, through whose descendants the gospel is going to come to the whole world, and pointing forward to the new creation when all the lands will worship.

And this story leaves us with the question, what is our response to be? Is it to be simply polite interest, which turns into hostility?

Or is it to be the response of those who throughout ages have followed him and have owned him as Lord and God? John Wesley, the great evangelist, summed up his ministry in this way, I offered Christ to them.

[22 : 44] That is a good, that's a very good motto for every Christian and for every church. I offered Christ to them. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord God, forgive us for the times we project ourselves rather than Christ. Forgive us for the times when we want sensationalism and don't believe the word that you have spoken.

And above all, Lord, we pray that that same Christ who healed the sick, cleansed the leper, and above all, saved the sinner, that Christ will be the center of our lives and of our ministries.

It is his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.