

**The Year of the Lord's Favor**  
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**Luke 4:14-30**

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. **15** He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

**16** 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, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

**18** “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,

**19** to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

**20** 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. **21** Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

**22** All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” **23** He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” **24** And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. **25** But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; **26** yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. **27** There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

**28** When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. **29** They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

**30** But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

## THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR

The phrase, "the year of the Lord's favor" is the key to understanding this passage.

In his very brief sermon Jesus said that today the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Today, "the year of the Lord's favor" begins

What is this year of the Lord's favor? What does this mean?

Many scholars suggest that this passage refers to something called the Year of Jubilee.

The Year of Jubilee is explained in the 25th chapter of the Old Testament book of Leviticus.

In essence Jubilee is a "do over".

It gives everyone a chance at a fresh start.

Every fiftieth year all debts are to be cancelled.

Slaves are to be freed. And all land is to be returned to the original owners.

God's people were supposed to do this in order to learn an important spiritual lesson.

They did not own anything. God was the real owner of the land, and they were merely God's stewards, God's caretakers. (Leviticus 25:23)

Life was about more than just accumulating land and wealth because everyone knew that there would come a time when they would have to give it all back. The Bible puts it this way, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it." (Psalm 24:1; cf. I Corinthians 10:26) The year of Jubilee was a way of recognizing that.

Now whether the Year of Jubilee was good news or bad news depended upon your situation at the time. If you owned a lot of land, then the year of the Lord's favor would not be so favorable to you. You would stand to lose a lot of what you and your family had accumulated.

But, if you and your family had fallen on hard times and you lost your share

of the Promised Land, then the Year of Jubilee would seem like a great blessing. It would allow you to start over.

There is no record that the Year of Jubilee probably was even actually observed.

Maybe some thought that it wasn't fair or maybe the wealthy used their influence to stop this reform from happening.

We don't know.

## EXILE

But, something happened to change the thinking of God's people about the Year of Jubilee.

The Babylonians took God's people into exile, and everyone lost their share of the Promised Land.

When that happened, the year of the Lord's Favor, the year of Jubilee when all would be restored to God's people seemed like the best news possible.

This forms the background for the passage that Jesus read in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Isaiah proclaimed the year of Jubilee to a people in exile.

All God's people were in captivity.

Their homeland had been ravaged, and they were slaves in a foreign land.

They had lost everything.

These ruthless invaders had even demolished the Temple.

The Psalmist tells us that God's people hung their harps in the willow tree by the waters of Babylon and refused to sing. Their days were filled with weeping and despair.

And to this captive and discouraged people Isaiah wrote,

"A new day is coming. Your salvation is at hand.

God is going to help you start over.

You are going home to the Promised Land.

The captives are going to be free.

The poor are going to hear some good news for a change.

The blind are going to see."

## MESSIAH

Over the years this promise of restoration after the Exile became associated with the coming of the Messiah.

“When the Messiah comes it will be like a Jubilee Year.  
The old way of life will be restored.  
Our nation will once again be strong and proud.

Those who are in slavery will be free.  
The sick will be healed.  
All of us will find our way back home.”

And so when Jesus said, “Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” that was an amazing statement. It was the best news ever. No wonder they were (as the Bible puts it) “amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth.”

God’s people had been enslaved by one brutal power another for over 300 years. The Romans were just the latest to impose their rule over the people. No one dared to talk about freedom. It was too dangerous.

But, now Jesus tells the people that the words of the prophet Isaiah have been fulfilled. Today is the day of liberation.  
The Messiah had come to their hometown.

This was the good news that Jesus preached all over Galilee, and everyone who heard the message praised Jesus.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Luke emphasizes this sermon at Nazareth because it was Jesus’ mission statement.

Luke is telling us, “If you want to know who Jesus was and what he has come to do, the words of the prophet Isaiah summarize it well.”

It’s important for every organization to have a mission statement. I remember one that the Ford Motor Company used several years ago, “Quality is job one.”

That was a good mission statement.  
Everyone knew what was most important to the company, build a quality product.

Organizations often lose their way if they do not have a clear mission statement.

And the same is true in the church.

Baptist pastor, Rick Warren made this point with his emphasis on the purpose driven church. He said that the church program should not be based upon what we want to do but upon what God in Christ is calling us to do.

If what we do in the church is not related to the church's mission, then it is not helpful. It does not increase our faith. On the other hand if our activities are based upon what we are called to do as the people of God, our faith is increased.

So, if we want to be a purpose driven church, what are we called to do? Where do we find the purpose that drives all our activity as the people of God?

I would suggest that this passage defines the purpose of the church. We are not called to build big buildings or successful organizations. We are not called to give good advice.

We are called to proclaim good news.

And the good news is this.

Today, God in Christ is at work to lift up those that are broken by life.

In Christ those that are poor and those that are poor in spirit are offered hope for a new way of life. In Christ those who are captive to the injustice of others and those who are captive to their own sinful ways are offered hope for a new way of life.

In Christ those who are sick and tired of being sick and tired are offered hope for a new way of life. In Christ those who are blind and those who are blind to the truth are given hope for a new way of life.

Again, whether we hear this as good news or bad news depends upon our situation in life.

When God's people were free and thought that they controlled their own destiny, there was no need for a Jubilee Year. As Jesus once told the religious leaders who criticized the fact that he spent time with tax collectors and sinners, "Those who aren't sick have no need of a physician."

But, when we're sick, we long for a physician.

When God's people were in captivity, they longed for the year of the Lord's favor.

And the message of the prophet was a word of unspeakable hope.

They wanted a new day.

They wanted their nation to be great again.

We long to be a great nation.

## COMPASSION

But, what does it mean to be a great nation?

What does it mean to be faithful?

That depends upon how we define faith.

That depends upon our mission statement.

Let's ask it this way. What is job one for the Christian community?

What is the one word that summarizes our mission together?

What is God in Christ calling us to do as a people?

What would the Year of the Lord's Favor look like today?

I guess there are many words that would work, but I vote for the word "compassion".

In the Kingdom of God, compassion is job one.

The prophet Isaiah said that the mountains and the hills might be moved but the steadfast love of God, his compassion would last forever. (Isaiah 54:10)

Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians describes God as "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort."

Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan gives us an example of this compassion in action.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

And of course the most challenging thing Jesus said is this,

"Compassion is not just for those that we love.  
Compassion is also for our enemies."

Now for most of us that is a bridge too far.  
Yes, we would like our nation to be great again.  
Yes, we would like to have our health and our happiness restored.

But, can we have compassion on those that are not a part of our nation, our group? That's a great challenge.

How can we have compassion on those who bring suffering on themselves with their poor choices?

How can we have compassion on those who have harmed us in some way?

This seems like too hard a thing to do.

## GRACE REJECTED

And indeed this was the case for the folks at Nazareth. Those who praised Jesus for his gracious words, rejected him when his message of grace seemed to extend beyond the borders of the Promised Land.

The folks from Nazareth had thought that all their problems were due to what other people were doing to them. If the Messiah would just come and heal their diseases and drive the Romans out, then everything would be fine.

They were the righteous ones. They were God's chosen people. They deserved God's salvation. They had earned it the old fashioned way through righteous and faithful living.

But, Jesus challenged that belief. Jesus said, "Listen, I know you've come to expect miracles from me, but the message I bring is more important than any miracle I might do. I was born here, but I bring a message of salvation that is for the whole world.

God's love is greater than you can imagine.

Our Scriptures prove this. From time to time God even decided to go outside our nation in order to demonstrate the depth of His grace.

Think about that widow from Zarephath for instance. Did you ever think about why God chose her, a foreigner to shelter His prophet, Elijah? Did you ever think about why she was the only one to receive aid during a time of famine?

Or, if that doesn't convince you that God sometimes uses outsiders as the vessels of his grace, think about that Syrian commander, Naaman. There were many people who had leprosy when Elisha was a prophet in the land. But, God chose to heal only Naaman, an enemy commander in order to further His purposes. If ever there was a passage that proves my point this is it."

We say that charity begins at home, but Jesus said that sometimes charity begins away from home, and he had Scripture to prove it!

That didn't make the home town folks happy. In fact that made them hopping mad. They disliked Jesus' sermon so much that decided to run him out of town on a rail ... or in this case throw him off the nearest cliff.

That didn't happen, but their reaction to Jesus certainly foreshadowed things to come. In the Kingdom of God compassion is job one. But, the scope of that compassion can be breathtaking and very disturbing.

## THE CHALLENGE OF COMPASSION

Yes, we can understand God showing compassion on the righteous and those who are like us. But, when God shows compassion on foreigners and sinners and even enemies, that just causes us to be angry.

The Scripture tells us that Jesus passed right through the middle of that crowd that wanted to kill him and went on his way. I guess that was something of a miracle given the extent of their anger.

But, it was also a missed opportunity.

The Messiah was among them proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. And what did they do?

They ran him out of town.

This story is not just about what those folks in Nazareth did long ago. It's also about the choices that we make here and now.

Jesus comes among us proclaiming good news of God's compassion. We all know Jesus better than even the hometown folks at Nazareth knew him. We know that he's not the son of Joseph. We know that he's the son of God.

But, does our knowledge help us accept his message? Can we really celebrate the year of the Lord's favor if it means that God's compassion extends beyond the borders of our country?

Can we really celebrate the year of the Lord's favor if it means God's compassion is for losers as well as winners? Indeed, this passage suggests that God's compassion begins with those who have lost the most.

Yes, Jesus comes among us today.

Today the year of the Lord's favor begins. The question for us is this: Is this good news or bad news?

Our actions will give the answer.

AMEN.