

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

November 8-14, 2020

Sermon Series: Being Jesus

Week Two: “Jesus @ Times of Injustice”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Holy God, drive far off from us all wrong desires; incline our hearts to keep Your laws; and guide our feet into the way of peace, so that having done Your will with cheerfulness, we may rejoice to give You thanks. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

Many people like to try to make Christianity out to be a black and white answer to the gray areas of life. But we don’t live in a world that is naturally slanted toward faith. The assumption of the existence of the sacred has taken a hit by years of focus on science and the temporal world. So how do we as Christians live out the sacred in a world that doesn’t just naturally accept that there is anything but the secular? How do we live in a world that may even be antagonistic toward the sacred? How do we live out the sacred in a secular world?

This Week’s Sermon Theme:

Jesus, using the words of the prophet Isaiah, claims for Himself the status of the Anointed One. This doesn’t mean “better than everyone else” but instead means “chosen to proclaim”. His proclamation is good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and liberty for those who are oppressed. 2000 years later, His followers have not yet succeeded in living out His proclamation. In what ways can we move forward with this proclamation of Christ?

Sunday Scripture Reading: Luke 4:16-21 (A group member should read the passage aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

Where did Jesus go at the beginning of the passage, and what is significant about that town? (4:16a)

Where specifically in this town did Jesus go, and what was the first thing He did when He got there? (4:16b)

Which scroll was Jesus handed to read from, and what did Jesus do with it? (4:17)

What has the Spirit of the Lord anointed the speaker in the scroll to preach? (4:18a)

What three things does the Spirit of the Lord want the speaker to proclaim? (4:18b)

What term does the speaker in the scroll use to sum up the proclamation of all these things? (4:19)

What did Jesus do with the scroll when He was finished reading? (4:20a)

How would you describe the response of those who heard Jesus read? (4:20b)

What did Jesus claim with regard to the prophecy He read? (4:21)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We might wonder if there was a specific reason Jesus headed to His hometown of Nazareth.

We might also wonder about the “custom” of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath – was that just Jesus’ custom, or was it a “customary” thing for Jews to do on the Sabbath?

We probably wonder if Jesus needed to get permission to stand up and read in the synagogue, and whether just anyone could do that.

We might also wonder why that specific scroll of Isaiah was handed to Jesus.

Similarly, we probably wonder if Jesus chose the passage He read, or if He was supposed to read a particular passage on that day of the year.

Unless we are reading from a footnoted Bible, we might wonder exactly which passage from Isaiah Jesus reads.

We might wonder if it was normal to simply read and sit down, or if there was an expectation Jesus would then expound on what He had read.

Along the same line, we might wonder what it was about the way Jesus read the passage that made everyone so seemingly enraptured by His reading.

Finally, we probably wonder just exactly what Jesus meant by saying the prophecy had been fulfilled in their hearing.

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6; Isaiah 61:1-2; Isaiah 58:6; Luke 1:19; Luke 3:18; Luke 7:22; Luke 4:22-30

The story of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth comes at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke's gospel. Immediately after His baptism and temptation in the desert, Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth. This is in striking contrast to where the story occurs in the other synoptic Gospels of Matthew and Mark, where Jesus' visit to Nazareth occurs well into His time of ministry (see Matthew 13:53-58 and Mark 6:1-6). This chronological shift is done by Luke for a specific purpose – this particular reading from the scroll of Isaiah sets the programmatic foundation for Luke's presentation of Jesus' ministry. Everything Jesus does subsequently in His ministry is the carrying out of His anointed calling. Whereas Matthew and Mark state that Jesus taught in the Nazareth synagogue, and was then rejected in His hometown, neither reveals the content of that reading – only Luke gives us that information, and it sets the stage for everything to follow.

By writing that it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, Luke demonstrates for us that Jesus is a pious Jew. Luke will portray Jesus as active in the synagogue in several additional passages of His gospel, and it will be the focal point of early Christian preaching in the book of Acts as well (also written by Luke). In the first century AD, at the time of Jesus, there were synagogues not only in Judea but throughout the lands where Jews had settled. It served as a meeting house, a place of prayer, and a school for religious study. This passage from Luke actually provides some of the evidence of the liturgical practice of regular attendance at synagogue on the Sabbath.

At these synagogue services, a sequence of prescribed readings from the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy) was followed by a sequence of readings from the prophets. Luke's citation from Isaiah is not an exact quotation from the Greek version of the text but is clearly drawn from Isaiah 61:1-2 with language from Isaiah 58:6 merged with it. The language of unrolling and rolling the scroll refers to the structure and usage of a scroll – the two spindles were held, one in each hand, with one hand rolling, and the other unrolling, the parchment from the spindles. Within Judeo-Christian culture, the shift from the use of scrolls to the use of the codex (forerunner of the modern book) happened between 200 and 300 AD.

The passage quoted makes very clear the prophetic nature of Jesus' messiahship in Luke's gospel. The text uses language of "anointing with the Spirit." In the Old Testament, the language of "anointing" was used for kings, prophets, and others who were sent by God to accomplish a purpose on God's behalf. The passage makes clear that the purpose of the one "sent" is to "preach good news." The Greek word used here for "preach good news," "euangelizomai," is the root of the word "evangelism," and is used thematically throughout Luke's Gospel (for just a few examples, see 1:19 for the angel's announcement to Zechariah, 3:18 for John the Baptist's message, and 7:22 for Jesus' description of His own ministry). In Luke, Jesus is portrayed as the prophetic spokesperson for, and representative of, God Himself.

This "good news" is specifically for the "poor." This represents not only economically impoverished persons in Luke, but everyone marginalized, or outcast, from the ordinary human social life. Release of prisoners, sight for the blind, and liberation of the oppressed are specific ways this good news is to be proclaimed, and the rest of the narrative in Luke will show Jesus carrying out this mission. The passage from Isaiah concludes by calling this the proclamation of "the year of the Lord's favor" – a year in which

Jesus will express God's favor on the people through personal exorcisms, healings, and social interaction with these outcasts.

With every eye in the synagogue fixed on Him (the text uses a single Greek word which means "to gaze attentively"), Jesus declares, literally, "today, this Scripture in your ears has been fulfilled." In doing so, Jesus claims to be the Anointed One who will proclaim God's good news through the carrying out of His appointed mission. Reading ahead in verses 22-30, we also see that Jesus assumes the role of prophet to Israel, even comparing Himself to Elijah and Elisha. The comparison, though, elicits the anger and rejection of the crowd, a foreboding of the way Jesus' ministry itself will create a division in Israel. It is precisely because this good news is meant for *all* that Nazareth rejects Jesus, and it is precisely because this good news is meant for all that others throughout history reject Jesus, as well (see Acts 13:44-52 for another early example).

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

How should the fact that this scene, and the passage from Isaiah, are used by Luke to set the thematic foundation for Luke's story of Jesus affect one's reading of the rest of Luke's Gospel?

What does the fact that, in Acts, the Spirit of the Lord is poured out on the apostles at Pentecost imply about *their* mission? What does this passage imply *they* are sent out to do?

What does the fact that, according to the New Testament letters, we are united with Christ through baptism imply about *our* mission today? What does this passage imply *we* are sent out to do?

Why do you think the church has not fully succeeded in living out this purpose over the past 2000 years? What stands in the way?

How do you think the church today can best move forward with this proclamation of good news?

What are you personally willing to do to live out this purpose?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Holy God, we pray for a fresh anointing of Your Holy Spirit so that we too can proclaim good news to the poor. Help us this day to continue to demonstrate the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, and show the world what it means to proclaim release to the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberation for the oppressed. We long to move forward with this saving work of our Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray, Amen.