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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“WALKING IN NAZARETH”
Luke 4:14-30

☺ Jesus is all about the Good News.

📖 That is what the word *Gospel* means: good news.

→ In Mark 1 {1:14} **“Jesus [goes] into Galilee, proclaiming *the good news of God.*”**

→ At the end of Luke 4 {4:43} Jesus declares, **“I must proclaim *the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.*”**

→ In Matthew 9:35 **“Jesus [goes] through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming *the good news of the kingdom* and healing every disease and sickness.”**

→ In Matthew 11 {11:3-5} someone asks, **“Are you the [Messiah]?”** The Lord answers: **“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and *the good news is proclaimed to the poor.*”**

☆ Walking with Jesus means trusting, experiencing, verbally proclaiming, and actively incarnating his Good News.

But what exactly is the Gospel?

📖 Here is a bare-bones definition: by his life, death, resurrection and ascension Jesus has created God’s kingdom, and He invites us to participate in it by repentance and faith.

That is Good News, indeed! But the Lord gives us even more in Luke 4:14-30.

○ In verses 14-15 **“Jesus [returns] to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.”** Significant time has passed since Jesus’ desert duel with the devil in the preceding section. He hints at this in verse 23: **“you will tell me, “Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”** His words make sense only in the context of prior ministry.

There has been ample time for **“news about [Jesus]”** to **“spread through the whole countryside. He [has been] teaching in their synagogues, and everyone [has been praising] him.”**

○ Verses 16-21: **“He [goes] up to Nazareth, where he [was] brought up, and on the Sabbath day he [goes] into the synagogue, as [is] his custom. He [stands] up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah [is] handed to him. Unrolling it, he”** finds chapter 61, verses 1-2. After reading it **“he [rolls] up the scroll, [gives] it back to the attendant and [sits] down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue [are] fastened on him,”** because He is just getting started. (In first century Judaism it is customary to stand while reading Scripture, but to sit while preaching.) **“He [begins] by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”**

We will work through this backwards, in light of the question: What is the Gospel?

● In verse 21 Jesus says, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,”** this prophecy is realized in me, it is coming true as I speak!

✧ The Gospel is that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the perfect prophet, priest and king sent by God

to deliver us. Or, as Jesus said in another place {Jn 14:6} **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

☑ It is increasingly popular to acclaim Jesus as a moral teacher or spiritual guru, while denying that He is *the* Christ. C.S. Lewis hit the nail on the head {M.C.}:

I am trying...to prevent anyone saying... “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic... or else he would be the Devil Either this man was, and is, the Son or God; or else a madman or something worse....

● In verses 18-19 Jesus outlines his mission by reading from Isaiah 61: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

☐ **“To proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”**) is more than a general statement of God’s good-will. It is a reference to the Year of Jubilee.

☆ A little background is helpful here. When the LORD rescued Israel out of Egypt, He directed them to build a new kind of community. Hebrew society was to operate along five basic principles: 1) God’s ownership of every

person and thing; 2) God’s commitment to liberty and justice; 3) God’s compassion for the vulnerable; 4) Human dependence on God for life and provision; and 5) Human embodiment of God’s priorities in social, political and economic relationships.

To bring this to fruition the Almighty mandates a cycle of Sabbaths and Jubilees, which are laid out in Leviticus 25. In this rotation:

🕒 Every 7th year is a Year of Sabbath, during which farm land lies fallow – no crops are planted, slaves are liberated, and all debts are cancelled.

🕒 Every 50th year is a Year of Jubilee, during which farm land lies fallow, slaves are liberated, debts are cancelled, and all farm land and houses in unwalled towns are returned to the original occupants who owned it at the beginning of the cycle. (Properties within walled cities were exempt.)

This cycle required dependence on God, and promoted liberty and compassion. It guarded property rights and free enterprise, and it protected the poor and the weak from personal abuse and structural injustice.

Israel’s record on this was spotty; but their failure to obey did not negate God’s expectations. When Jesus says, **“He has sent me ...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,’...Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,”** He means his Father has anointed him to implement the spirit of Jubilee.

⚙️ What is the Gospel? It is that Jesus is Messiah, *and* the citizens of the kingdom live and relate in keeping with Jubilee principles.

□ The series of phrases just before that are equally explosive: **“he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free.”**

- **“Good news to the poor.”**

→ To those who are economically poor Jesus says: you are {Mt 6:15-34} **“much more valuable”** than the birds God feeds and the flowers He clothes. Trust him to provide. And to those who stand before God with nothing but brokenness and shame, Jesus promises: {Mt 5:3} **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

- **“Freedom for the prisoners.”**

→ Many are in bondage to habitual sin, falsehood, addiction, and {Eph 6:12} **“the powers of this dark world.”** They have lost the capacity to say “Yes” to God. (Apart from Christ that’s everyone, isn’t it?) Jesus casts out demons, unshackles the deceived, and is in the process of liberating {Rom 8:21} **“creation itself... from its bondage to decay.”**

- **“Recovery of sight for the blind.”**

Physical blindness is a horrible affliction; spiritual blindness (the inability to recognize upon the truth) is even more devastating. Jesus heals the physical eyes and optic nerves of those who are literally blind, and He opens the spiritual eyes of those whose hearts are blind yet who long to see.

- **“To set the oppressed free.”**

→ To those who are marginalized, cut-off and despised – the lepers, the Samaritans, the tax collectors and

notorious sinners – Jesus gives physical, social and spiritual release. He has come **“to seek and to save [the] lost.”** By his life, death, resurrection and ascension He is making us {Eph 2:19} **“citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.”**

⊗ What is the Gospel? It is that Jesus is Messiah, *and* the citizens of the kingdom live and relate in keeping with Jubilee principles, *and* Jesus gives physical, social and spiritual {Jn 10:10} **“life ...to the full.”** This is the Good News God calls us to trust, experience, proclaim and incarnate. It is a crucial component of walking with Jesus.

The question is: *Do we want to walk with Jesus? Are we hearing the Gospel as Good News?*
The crowd in Nazareth does not.

○ To be sure, they are *amazed* by Jesus. Luke 4:22: **“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.”** But they do not take his message to heart.

○ Jesus forces the issue in verse 23: **“You will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”** He is the Christ, yet they refuse to believe.

○ Next, in verses 24-27 Jesus declares: **“prophets are not accepted in their hometowns”** and reminds them that the prophet Elijah saved a Gentile widow even as Hebrew widows starved, and the prophet Elisha healed the leper who commanded the armies of Israel’s enemy, not a Jewish leper.

✠ The Messiah’s point is that the Gospel of the kingdom and its benefits are available to everyone:

male and female, healthy and sick, rich and poor, slave and free, evidently worthy and blatantly worthless, Jew and Gentile alike. However, no one who rejects him can participate in it regardless of their other ethnic, economic, cultural, moral and religious qualifications.

○ Verses 28-30: infuriated by his warning “**They [get] up, [drive] him out of... town, and [take] him to the brow of the hill on which the town [is] built, in order to throw him off the cliff.**” It is not yet time for Jesus to lay down his life, so He walks “**right through the crowd and [goes] on his way.**”

What about us? *Are we embracing the whole Gospel*, the Good News that Jesus is Messiah, *and* the citizens of the kingdom live and relate in keeping with Jubilee principles, *and* our Lord gives physical, social and spiritual {Jn 10:10} “**life ...to the full**”?

Do we trust it in its entirety? Are we experiencing it in its fullness? Do we proclaim it freely? Are we incarnating it even to the unworthy? Even to the unlikely? Even to the horrible sinners we are tempted to hate?

☺ Brothers and sisters, Jesus is all about the Good News. By the grace of God, let us walk with him!