

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“NAZARETH MANIFESTO”
Luke 4:14-30

Jesus of Nazareth is a crisis man. More than that, he is *The Crisis Man* with a capital “C” and “M.”

📖 “Crisis” is a synonym for *disaster* or *emergency*. To some, Jesus is The Crisis Man because, for them, his coming is a calamity. He came {Lk 2:34} **“to cause the falling and rising of many,”** and he still does.

📖 But “crisis” has another definition: it is *a pivotal moment, a crucial situation, a turning point*. Jesus is The Crisis Man for all of us because how we answer his invitation to believe, receive, and follow determines who and how and why we are, now and forever.

☐ Please turn to Luke 4:14-30.

■ In verse 14 **“Jesus [returns] to Galilee”** from his own crisis. He emerges from forty days of isolation, physical hardship, and devilish temptation in the desert.

Giving in to Satan’s enticements would have disqualified him from Messiahship. His mission would have ended right then and there.

Thank God, Jesus stood firmly on the Word. His victory is a crucial turning point: it confirms him as God’s Beloved Son and it makes him even stronger to fulfill his high and holy calling, and so he returns **“to Galilee in the power of the Spirit”** (verse 14).

○ From Mark we learn that as Jesus goes, he proclaims: {Mk 1:14} **“The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”** In keeping with the

Gospel {Mk 1:21-26, 34} he sets people free from demonic oppression, {Mk 1:29-32} heals **“many who [have] various diseases,”** {Mk 1:40-44} and restores lepers to bodily wholeness and human community.

■ In Luke 4:14b and 15 the **“news about him [spreads] through the...countryside. He [teaches] in their synagogues, and everyone [praises] him.”**

Still, a backlash is beginning to build.

○ Everything about Jesus is {Php 4:8} **“true... noble ...right...pure...lovely...admirable... excellent ... praiseworthy.”** Yet the human {Jer 17:9, KJV} **“heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked,”** and often in conflict with the goodness of God.

Many sick people want to be healed; but not all do. Many addicts want to get and stay clean; but not all do. Many sinners want to be transformed; but not all do. To those who do not, Jesus poses a grave threat. He himself has said, **“The light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil”** (John 3:19 {NRSV}). Jesus is *The Crisis Man*.

■ In Luke 4:16 Jesus goes **“up to”** his hometown, Nazareth, **“and on the Sabbath day he [goes] into the synagogue, as [is] his custom.”** The synagogue leader invites him to read the Scriptures and expound on them.

It is not his first sermon; but it is the earliest one reported in detail. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Luke skips over the Lord’s initial ministry and to put this message immediately after his baptism and testing. He presents it as Christ’s inaugural address. It is the

Messiah's manifesto, a formal declaration of his goals and policies.

■ In verses 16-19 the Lord Jesus stands up and **“the scroll of the prophet Isaiah [is] handed to him.”** He unrolls it to chapter 61 and reads:

**“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
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's
favor.”**

■ In verses 20-21 **“he [rolls] up the scroll, [gives] it to the attendant and [sits] down”** (this is the posture for public teaching). He begins **“by saying... ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’”**

Jesus is making two momentous claims.

✎ 1st, he claims to be God's Anointed One.

He does not use the word “Messiah”; but he does say **“The Spirit of the LORD...has anointed me”** – and Messiah literally means “Anointed One.”

✎ 2nd, he claims Isaiah 61:1-2 as his agenda.

★ Let's work through these verses end to beginning: **“The Spirit of the LORD...has anointed me...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”** This is more than a general statement of goodwill; it is a reference to the Year of Jubilee.

In his Law the LORD makes every seventh year a Sabbath and every fiftieth year a Jubilee. During a Sabbath Year the land must lie uncultivated, Hebrew slaves must be liberated, and all debts must be cancelled. All of that applies during a Year of Jubilee, plus all farm land and homes in unwalled towns must be returned to their original owners.

This required trust in God and dependence on him. It promoted liberty and compassion. It guarded property rights and protected the poor and the weak from personal abuse, generational poverty, and life-long bondage. When Jesus says, **“He has sent me ...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,”** he means his Father has anointed him to implement the spirit (if not the letter) of the Law of Jubilee. This is Good News!

The series of phrases preceding that are equally explosive: **“He has anointed me...”**

★ **“...To release the oppressed.”**

To the marginalized, cut-off- and despised – the lepers, Samaritans, tax collectors and sinners – Jesus gives physical, social, and spiritual release. By his life, death, resurrection and ascension he is making us {Eph 2:19} **“citizens with God's people and members of God's”** family, {Ro 8:17} **“heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”** This is Good News!

★ **“...To proclaim...recovery of sight for the blind.”**

Physical blindness is a terrible affliction; spiritual blindness, the inability to see the truth, is 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 but yet are willing to see. This is Good News!

★ **“...To proclaim freedom for the prisoners.”**

Many are bondage to habitual sin, lies, addiction, and {Eph 6:12} **“the powers of this dark world.”** They have lost the capacity to say “Yes” to God. Jesus casts out demons, unshackles the deceived, and has begun the process of liberating {Ro 8:21} **“creation itself...from its bondage to decay.”** This is Good News!

★ And **“...to preach good news to the poor.”**

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.”** And 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.

This is all Good News!

Still, it provokes a crisis of life-changing decision for all, and calamity for some.

■ There are hints of this in Luke 4:22: **“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. ‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?’ they asked.”**

The Greek in this verse is notoriously difficult to translate. It *might* describe an outpouring of praise brought on by admiration for Jesus, as the NIV indicates; or it *might* just describe a buzz of general astonishment, as the Bible in Basic English implies: **“they were all giving witness,**

with wonder, to the words of grace coming from his mouth.”

If these listeners are complimenting Jesus, it is in a back-handed way: **“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”** they ask. Which really means: “He’s pretty impressive for the illegitimate son of a disgraced carpenter.”

■ In verses 23-24 Christ Jesus identifies their lack of faith: **“no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”**

■ Next, in verses 25-27 he points out that in a time of deadly famine the prophet Elijah miraculously fed a Gentile widow while Hebrew women starved, and the prophet Elisha cleansed a leper who commanded enemy armies but never healed a leper of Israel.

✎ His point: the Kingdom is open to all who believe, receive, and follow Christ. On the other hand, none who reject him have a place in it regardless of their ethnic, economic, cultural, moral and religious qualifications.

For those who believe Jesus and embrace his mission this is the best kind of crisis, one that initiates a new life in the Kingdom of God. For those who reject him it is the worst possible crisis, one that sets them on a course of ever deeper poverty, bondage, blindness, oppression and alienation from God.

Most of the crowd falls into the second category. They are deeply offended at the statement that they are on equal footing with the Gentiles, whom they consider to be no better than filthy, damnable dogs. (In fact, every morning first century Jewish males offer a prayer of thanks that they were not born **“a woman, a Gentile, or a dog.”**)

■ In verses 28-30 “**they [get] up,**” and in their fury they “[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.**”

Hearing this, we might be inclined to say, “Thank God we would never do what they did!”

Except that we do reject Jesus and his mission every time we violate the spirit of Jubilee.

We do reject Jesus and his mission every time we insist on remaining in spiritual poverty because we think we are rich, and every time we participate in the oppression of those who are literally poor.

We do reject Jesus and his mission every time we insist on remaining blind, closing our eyes to the truth God has revealed.

We do reject Jesus and his mission, every time we choose the bondage of habitual sin, addiction, and falsehood, or impose bondage on anyone else.

We do reject Jesus and his mission, every time we indulge in spiritual pride, thinking and acting as though we have a claim on the grace of God and he is lucky to have us.

Thank God, it does not have to be this way!

Jesus keeps coming to us, through his Word and his Spirit, and he says to us who are poor, “**The Spirit of the**

LORD...has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.”

And he says to us who are in bondage, “**The Spirit of the LORD...has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.**”

And he says to us who are blind, “**The Spirit of the LORD...has sent me to proclaim...recovery of sight for the blind.**”

And he says to us who are downtrodden, “**The Spirit of the LORD...has sent me...to release the oppressed.**”

And he says to all of us, “**The Spirit of the LORD...has sent me...to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.**”

If we say “Yes!” to Messiah Jesus and his mission, it will be for us the best crisis, the turning point that sets us on a course of abundant life, freedom, enlightenment, and union with God.

Luke 4:14-30 is the Nazareth Manifesto. It is the Word of the Lord.