

WHAT DID JESUS PREACH?

Matthew 4:12-23 Text: vs. 14 *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

You’ve heard someone say, “I’m in the habit of going to church on Sunday.” Maybe you’ve said it yourself. Jesus was in the habit of “going to church” attending Jewish synagogues in Galilee on the Sabbath. He would often be asked to read the Bible and preach, which meant reading a specific passage from the *Pentateuch*, the first five books of the Old Testament. And then he read a self-chosen passage from the *Prophets* while standing in the front of the people. Then the reader would then go sit in Moses’ Seat, a special chair of honor in the Synagogue, where the Pharisees would interpret the law of Moses from the *Pentateuch*, and Scribes who were, also, recognized teachers of the Law of Moses would sit in Moses Seat as teachers for the Oral Law, the unwritten spoken rules of behavior for Jews handed down from generation to generation.

And Matthew 23:2-4 says, *“The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So, you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do. They do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders. But they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”* So, *“on the Sabbath day in His hometown of Nazareth Jesus went into the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read the scroll of Isaiah the prophet which was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on Me ...’ Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. And He began by saying to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’* It’s not known what part of the *Pentateuch* Jesus read, but He chose Isaiah 61:1-2, for His reading.

*The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,*

He changed the reading in a couple of places. First, He dropped the last half of Isaiah 61:2 where it says, *“the day of vengeance of our God”* and added a phrase from Isaiah 58:6. *“To release the oppressed”*. This might seem slight. A little Scriptural manipulation. But it was acceptable for the Jews as they often linked verses together that contained similar words or phrases to make their point. So, what Jesus did was *okay* by them. Now, Isaiah 61 has the Biblical theme of the Jews’ return to the Promised Land after they had been in Exile in Babylon, and it’s linked to Jubilee.

But the point Jesus was making was to link Jubilee to the promise of the coming Messiah. Messiah would not only bring Jubilee for Israel. Messiah was going to bring God’s judgment on all their oppressors. Many Jews, including John the Baptist, looked forward to Messiah bringing freedom. He was going to be a warrior. He was coming with a sword. But Jesus changed the reading to challenge their expectations while waiting for Messiah. Messiah was *not* coming with *“vengeance.”* Jubilee was to be the time for Messiah and the people of God to work together. He said it was a call for Israel to perform Jubilee themselves. They were to take care of the poor and the oppressed. They weren’t to wait for Messiah. They were to do it themselves! *“Then after He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant He sat down”* and began His sermon. *“The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ 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. Jesus said to them, ‘Surely you will quote this proverb to Me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell Me, ‘Do here in Your hometown what we have heard that You did in Capernaum.’ Truly I tell you, He continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time when the sky was shut for three and a half years, and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet, Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet. Yet not one of them was cleansed. Only Naaman the Syrian. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove Him out of the town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw Him off the cliff. But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way. Then He went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath, He taught the people. They were amazed at His teaching, because His words had authority.”* (Luke 4:20-32)

He had told them He was Messiah! *“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* Of all the prophets, Jesus picked Elijah and Elisha, who went to help people who were not part of the people of Israel which implied Jesus had a ministry beyond the borders of His hometown. A ministry that would not be done in His hometown. The implication was,

His ministry was available to all. And He made it very clear, He would not be a prophet who served only the special interests of His hometown. He was a messenger of Good News for the whole world. And that made His hometown crowd angry. They had just heard Jesus proclaim Good News. Now, they wanted proof. They wanted signs Jesus was the prophet He claimed to be. And they responded with anger. They rose up and tried to kill him (v. 29) making Jesus' ministry begin the way it ended. Jews wanting to kill him! Wow! It's kinda' like the old preacher who stood up behind the pulpit, looked out over the congregation and said, "First, I'm gonna' tell you what I'm gonna' tell you. Then, I'm gonna' tell you. Then I'm gonna' tell you what you thought you heard me tell you!"

Those Jews in Nazareth didn't like what their *hometown boy* had just told them! Jesus had preached and He had applied new meaning to it. He had applied it to them, in their day. To their everyday lives. He gave them something in which they could find hope. Everywhere He went, His purpose was to increase believers' awareness and knowledge of God. To draw them closer to the loving Father. Jesus preached "*the Good News.*" But that's where most people have a problem. Numerous people have told me through the years, "*I'm no preacher. God didn't call me to preach!*" Yes, He did! He may not have called you to have a public preaching ministry. But as a follower of Jesus, you are called to "preach." Not as a *preacher*. You have the *mission* of a preacher.

Now, if you've ever opened your mouth, other than to put food in it, you have "*spoken*" something. You've "*made something known.*" In other words, you have *preached!* But the question is, *what* have you preached? Your mission as a follower of Jesus is to tell the "*Good News*" of Jesus! To put it simply, you're just a beggar, telling other beggars where to find bread. If you share your good fortune with your family and friends, you're also, to share the "*good news*" of Jesus with others.

A Peanuts cartoon had Snoopy sitting outside in the middle of a snowstorm. He was shivering in the cold. Linus and Charlie Brown, all bundled up in coats, happened by and saw Snoopy all cold. They said, "*There's Snoopy. Let's go cheer him up.*" They went over to Snoopy and said, "*Be of good cheer, Snoopy!*" The cartoon's next panel shows them walking off satisfied they had "cheered" him up, but still leaving Snoopy sitting outside in the middle of a snowstorm. And you're thinking "How does all this apply to me?" Evangelism isn't just teaching and preaching. Jesus showed there's more to evangelism than that. It's helping people. Jesus reached out. It was personal with Him. He did it Himself. In the tenth chapter of Luke, an expert in the Law of Moses asked Jesus how to get to heaven. Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.*" It's kinda' like that old saying, "*I'd rather see a sermon than hear one.*" Jesus was saying, meet people at their point of need.

Doctors in Jesus' time could do little to relieve human suffering. They didn't have the scientific knowledge we have today. Their greatest problem was pain and suffering. We haven't solved all of that today. But we're doing a lot more than those doctors. And there are times God healed people directly.

But the one thing Jesus did was to get His message across on how to help people. It's God who uses you to meet people at their point of need. Putting your actions where your mouth is. *Doing* something, rather than *saying* something. It's twenty people at our Wednesday Food Distribution in Fellowship Hall preparing and handing out donated food to our community. It's handing out clothing and blankets provided to us by the Knights of Columbus of St. Finbar's Catholic Church. It's handing out food collected by the Post Offices in our area. It's our Missions Program, directed by our Missions Committee. It's helping the Abused Women and Children in Collier County. It's helping Franklin Graham with postage to send boxes of Christmas gifts to children around the world. It's providing funds for children at the Mission in Baja, Mexico. Yes, it's our church reaching out meeting people at their point of need. It's our church in action! But it's also you, reaching out to your family. Your spouse. Your children. Your grandchildren. Your neighbors. And when you're doing that, you're telling a story. The Good News story Jesus told as He "*went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.*" My friend, if that's what Jesus did, then you should be doing it as well, starting today! AMEN

