

It's All About Jesus

Session 1

March 3, 2024

The Mission of Jesus

The Point: Jesus came to deliver the good news of salvation for all people.

Session Passages: Luke 3:1-6; 4:14-21

Luke 3:1-6

Connection to the Point. John prepared the way for Jesus's mission.

The setting for Luke 3. All four Gospel accounts in our New Testament are anonymous. Tradition assigns authorship of the third Gospel to Luke, the physician and traveling coworker of Paul. Likely Mark was written first, either Matthew or Luke next, and John was written last. Most conservative scholars estimate the date of writing as AD 50-90 without further consensus. According to Luke 1:1-4, Luke "carefully investigated" his sources to present an "orderly" account of Jesus's life (v. 3). The book of Acts is a continuation of Luke's writing (Acts 1:1) as well as a continuation of what Jesus was doing through the Holy Spirit. When added together, Luke and Acts comprise over twenty-five percent of the words in New Testament. Luke 1 presents events surrounding John the Baptist's birth and the announcement to Mary that she would mother Jesus. Chapter 2 presents the events surrounding Jesus's birth and childhood. Chapter 3 describes the ministry of John the Baptist and the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

Fifteenth year . . . Tiberius Caesar (v. 1). This dates John the Baptist's ministry beginning around AD 27.

Various leaders (vv. 1-2). Luke's listing of these leaders (including two sons of Herod the Great), their geographical territories, and their official titles reveals Luke's historical diligence.

God's word (vv. 2-3). Before his birth, through a sequence of miraculous events, God set John apart to be a prophet—even before his birth (Luke 1:15-17). The function of a prophet is to speak God's word, His message. This phrase puts John in line with Old Testament prophets who had not spoken since Malachi, about four hundred years earlier.

Vicinity of the Jordan (v. 3). The Jordan River is the primary river in Israel and flows over two hundred miles from north of the Sea of Galilee south into the Dead Sea. This phrase also indicates that John traveled along the Jordan River as an itinerant preacher/prophet.

Proclaiming (v. 3). This word communicates an authoritative message from another. John was proclaiming God's message of repentance.

Baptism of repentance (v. 3). The act of baptism (immersion in water; John 3:23) represented an outward symbol of an inward change. Repentance involves a change of mind; both the Hebrew and Greek words reflect a change in direction of a person's thoughts and actions. The word picture is of a person walking in one direction, turning around and walking in the opposite direction. Merely feeling sorrow is not repentance. Luke used the word *repent* or *repentance* more often than the other three Gospel accounts combined.

For the forgiveness of sins (v. 3). *For* indicates the purpose of repentance—the forgiveness of sins. A central part of the gospel message, forgiveness for believers is a present possession (John 5:24) as well as a future

expectation (at the final judgment; Rom. 14:10). The gospel message is that forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice on the cross enables a right relationship with God (10:9-10).

Prophet Isaiah (v. 4). One of the great eighth century BC prophets, Isaiah often wrote of the coming Messiah (Hebrew title) or Christ (Greek title). Both terms refer to God's anointing of a person with oil, representing the Holy Spirit, to accomplish a task. All four Gospels refer to Isaiah 40:3 but only Luke includes verses 4-5. Although Isaiah's prophecy originally focused on God's deliverance of His people from Babylon, Gospel writers saw a further fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in the coming Messiah who would bring a deliverance from sin for all people who would believe in Him.

Prepare the way (v. 4). John's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus in much the same way as people prepared a way (road) for a visiting dignitary, making travel easier. John's message was for people to repent of their sins so they would be ready to receive the Messiah.

The Lord (v. 4). After John's naming, his father, Zechariah, praised God by saying, "And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways" (Luke 1:76). In Luke 2:11, the angel told the shepherds that "the Messiah, the Lord" had been born in Bethlehem.

Make . . . straight (vv. 4-5). Several actions were taken to prepare for a king's visit. Workers would make the road straight. They would fill in the valleys and make the hills and mountains lower and straighten out crooked roads and level them. To prepare for the Lord, John prepared the people by preaching repentance to straighten a crooked generation (Acts 2:40). He also preached humility, which required lowering oneself before God.

Everyone (v. 6). More than the other Gospel accounts, Luke focused on Jesus's concern and teaching for everyone, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, saint and sinner alike. This becomes even more prominent in Luke's second book, Acts, which reveals what Jesus continued to do through the Holy Spirit.

Salvation of God (v. 6). John's message pointed beyond himself to the Messiah who would bring salvation to all who believed in Him. Jesus's parents brought Him to the Jewish temple when He was eight days old to be named. Later, elderly Simeon saw Him and declared, "My eyes have seen your salvation" (Luke 2:30). Jesus is God's salvation for all who trust Him (Rom. 6:23).

Luke 4:14-19

Connection to the Point. Isaiah prophesied the purpose of Jesus's mission.

Jesus returned to Galilee (v. 14). Following His baptism in the Jordan River (Luke 3:21-22), Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Luke 4:1-13). From this wilderness area, He walked about seventy to eighty miles north to Galilee.

Power of the Spirit (v. 14). Jesus is God (John 10:30). In a way we can't completely understand, the Son had complete access to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

News about him spread (v. 14). Jesus's teaching differed from that of other rabbis. He taught with God's authority (Matt. 7:28-29), causing people astonishment.

Teaching in their synagogues (v. 15). Jesus's primary activity during this time was teaching. When the Jewish population of a community reached at least ten men, they established a synagogue. This meeting place served as a school most days and a place of worship on Saturdays. Worship typically included prayer, reading from the Old Testament followed by an explanation of the verses, and singing of a psalm.

Praised by everyone (v. 15). Jesus's teaching was so powerful and insightful everyone initially praised it.

Nazareth (v. 16). This village of less than five hundred was about fifteen miles west of the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee. Galilee was composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Nazareth was Jesus's childhood home until He was about thirty years old and began His public ministry (Luke 3:23). Both Matthew (13:54-58) and Mark (6:1-6) also report Jesus preaching in Nazareth.

Sabbath day (v. 16). The Jewish day began at sundown, so the Sabbath extended from 6 p.m. Friday to 6 p.m. Saturday. It was designated as a day for rest and worship based on God's completion of creation (Gen. 2:2-3).

As usual (v. 16). Jesus's habit of worshiping on Saturdays meant going to the synagogue. Likely the service began with prayers, a statement of faith (Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21), and a reading from the Law (first five books of our Old Testament, read in Hebrew then paraphrased into Aramaic, the common spoken language). As a visiting rabbi (teacher), Jesus was invited to read Scripture from the Prophets (primarily the "Major Prophets" and "Minor Prophets" of our Old Testament) and to comment on it.

Scroll of the prophet Isaiah (v. 17). The synagogue assistant handed Jesus this rolled up scroll from a wooden box where Scripture scrolls were kept.

Unrolling the scroll (v. 17). This indicates Jesus was looking for a specific passage. He read from Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6. What Jesus read from Isaiah described the focus of Jesus's ministry in detail. Isaiah 61:1-3 is a prophecy of the coming Messiah, the future Anointed One who would fulfill God's plans.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me (v. 18). Jesus identified with God's Spirit. Throughout the Gospel of Luke, the Holy Spirit is emphasized. We certainly don't understand everything about the Trinity (a contraction *tri* meaning "three" and *unity* meaning "one"), a term first used about AD 200. However, we can understand that God has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son, and Spirit united as One God in three distinct Persons.

Because he has anointed me (v. 18). In the Old Testament, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with oil to represent the Holy Spirit's guiding presence with them. The Messiah (Anointed One) would be the person in whom God's Spirit fully dwelt. The remainder of verses 18-19 states the purpose for which Jesus was anointed and what He would do in His ministry.

To preach good news to the poor (v. 18). Part of Jesus's mission was to preach the good news that God's salvation is available to everyone, including the poor. We call this good news *the gospel*; our Bibles have one gospel according to four Gospel witnesses.

He has sent me (v. 18). Jesus came because God sent Him as Immanuel ("God is with us;" Matt. 1:23) to preach the good news that all who believe in Him would be saved (Rom. 10:9-10). Jesus told His disciples the Father had sent Him (John 20:21).

To proclaim release to the captives (v. 18). Originally announced in the eighth century BC, the release prophesied by Isaiah may have referred to prisoners captured in a war. However, Paul acknowledged that all people were captives or slaves to sin and that believing in Jesus brought release from sin (Rom. 6:6,16-22).

Recovery of sight to the blind (v. 18). Jesus's ministry involved numerous healings of many kinds. Some healing was from physical blindness; other was from spiritual blindness.

To set free the oppressed (v. 18). Salvation in and through Jesus Christ set free all who were oppressed by Satan—those whom Satan burdened down with the weight of the guilt of their sin. This salvation comes by trusting in Jesus.

To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (v. 19). In Leviticus 25, God commanded Israel to celebrate His goodness every fifty years by not planting crops, freeing slaves, and forgiving debts. During that Year of Jubilee, the Israelites would have to depend on God's favor to provide for their needs. In a much superior way, Jesus brought God's favor, His salvation, to the entire world—to all who believe in Him.

Luke 4:20-21

Connection to the Point. Jesus declared that He is the long-awaited Messiah.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant (v. 20). This event provides insight into a first-century synagogue service. Much of what we know about synagogue worship is from later times. Most scholars assume the worship service that day was similar to later synagogue worship services. Jesus stood to read from Isaiah. After He finished reading, He rolled up the scroll. The synagogue attendant took care of matters regarding the synagogue; he was more than simply a custodian. When Jesus gave the scroll back, the attendant probably placed it in a wooden box called an ark where Scripture scrolls were stored.

Sat down (v. 20). Likely Jesus followed the custom by standing to read the Scripture then sitting to deliver the explanation of that Scripture.

Everyone in the synagogue (v. 20). After Jesus read the Scripture, those present attentively waited for Him to explain it. Nazareth was a small village of less than five hundred people in the first century. Women and children probably outnumbered men 2:1 or 3:1, meaning there were probably less than one hundred men. Women were not allowed in the synagogue unless they were behind a screen.

The eyes . . . were fixed on him (v. 20). The congregation expected Jesus to say something of interest. During this historical period, a number of men claimed to be the Messiah. Most attempted to be the military/political hero people expected seeking to expel the Romans. This particular passage from Isaiah certainly would have grabbed their attention.

He began by saying to them (v. 21). The word *began* indicates Jesus continued to speak. After reading the passage, He handed the scroll back to the attendant and sat down before resuming speaking. Verses 22-30 record how the people responded to Jesus.

Today as you listen (v. 21). That which the prophet had spoken hundreds of years earlier had a contemporary relevance, if the people would but hear. Jesus's words were more of an application of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah than merely an explanation of Scripture. The Jews were looking for God's kingdom to be the restored Israel. Jesus told His listeners God's kingdom had come in Him.

This Scripture has been fulfilled (v. 21). The Greek verb tense indicates a past completed action resulting in a current state of being. Because of Jesus's incarnation (His coming as the God/man—Immanuel), He was now the Messiah, the Christ, the Anointed One on whom God's Spirit rested fully. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's words about the Messiah in several ways.

First, God's Spirit was upon Jesus from His conception (Luke 1:35), at His baptism (3:21-22), in His ministry (4:18), through His death (23:46), as well as in His resurrection and later appearances. Second, through His Spirit, God anointed Jesus. The Father gave the Son His mission of salvation. Luke 4:18-19 lists elements of that mission. Third, Jesus preached the good news to the poor. At that time, most (perhaps as many as ninety percent) of the people were poor economically. But people were also poor in spirit; many had lost hope. Both groups needed God's good news that would help them. Fourth, God sent Jesus to proclaim release to those in

the captivity of sin. All people have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The apostle Paul wrote: "But thank God that, although you used to be slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that pattern of teaching to which you were handed over, and having been set free from sin, you became enslaved to righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18).

Fifth, God sent Jesus to help the blind recover their sight. Some of Jesus's miracles involved His healing people who were physically blind (Matt. 9:27-31; 15:30-31). However, blindness can also be spiritual (2 Cor. 4:4; Rev. 3:17-20). Only Jesus can heal from spiritual blindness (John 14:6). Sixth, God sent Jesus to set free the oppressed. The Jews viewed Rome as their oppressor and thought Messiah would deliver them from Rome. But the Bible points out that sin and Satan oppress people (1 Pet. 5:8). Since all people have been oppressed by sin, God sent Jesus to free us and to give us abundant lives (John 10:10). After listing numerous things often believed to separate people from God, Paul proclaimed: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). Jesus's half-brother, James, wrote: "Submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7).

Seventh, God sent Jesus to proclaim the year of God's favor. Jews divided time into two distinct eras: the present evil age (dominated by the devil) and the age to come (dominated by the Messiah). The New Testament present the present era as "the last days" (which began with Jesus's first coming and will conclude with His second coming). In making this announcement of the year of God's favor, Jesus pointed to Himself as initiating that time. God's favor is salvation, found in Jesus and in Him only. With these seven elements, Jesus pointed to Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy of a coming Messiah. For the previous four hundred years (since the prophet Malachi), the Jews had been waiting for a word from God. On this day the Jews in Nazareth received the Word from God.