

Jan 13, 2018

Luke 4:14-30

The Certain Gospel: Jesus Cares

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Jesus cares. *Jesus cares about the poor.* He cares about those who live on **welfare**, those below the poverty line, those on **Medicaid**, those who will never live in Westford unless it's in low-income housing. He cares about the rural white poor and the inner city black poor.

Jesus cares about prisoners. He cares for those behind bars, not just the innocent ones, but the **guilty ones** too. Jesus cares for felons, for violent offenders, for white-collar criminals, for sex offenders. He cares about those locked up in MCI in Concord and Middlesex House of Correction near Route 3.

Jesus cares about the blind. He cares about those who can't see, both **physically** and **spiritually**. He cares about the sick and diseased. He cares about chemo treatments, surgeries, infertility, and catching the flu. Jesus cares about those with **mental illness**, with sick bodies, and with sick souls.

Jesus cares about the oppressed. He cares about those who are socially and economically beaten down, who are spiritually and morally beaten down, and those who are depressed and just plain sad. Jesus cares about unjust laws and burdensome taxes. Jesus cares.

Luke wrote his gospel for the **oppressed**, the downtrodden, the **outsider**. Luke wrote it to a Hellenistic audience, an audience who stood on the outside of **normal** religious life. He wrote it to show how God **elevates** the lowly in the **kingdom of God** (Luke 4:43). The first of Jesus' sermons Luke records shows just how much Jesus cares.

After Jesus was **tempted** by Satan in the **wilderness**, he returns to the region of **Galilee**, a marginalized region, to **Nazareth**, a town we think of about 400 people, and he goes into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, Saturday. He opens the **scroll** of the prophet **Isaiah** and begins to read these words.

Isaiah 61:1-2

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, (NIV®)

Jesus reads the first couple verses following **Isaiah 60**. In Isaiah 60, the prophet pictures the whole world in **darkness**, a thick darkness covering all people (Isaiah 60:1-2a). But then, like a **sunrise**, God's promises to shine his glory on his people **Israel**, and through them to light up the world. They are supposed to **act as a light** to the people living in a great darkness.

At the beginning of Isaiah 61, the chapter Jesus reads, Isaiah explains how this new day will dawn. God will send his **anointed one**, which is what **Messiah** means, who will preach good news to the poor, captives, sick, and prisoners. He will proclaim the rising of a new day, of a new **era**, the year of the Lord's favor.

Have you ever been **camping** and your **batteries** ran out? I once went camping in a cave and my batteries in my lights ran out. It got real dark, and I had to depend on the lights of my friends. **Imagine** for a moment that you and your family are camping and all of your batteries go out and clouds are covering the moon and stars. It would get really dark and your wife and kids would get scared but you wouldn't. Every **noise** would sound like a bear and there would be nothing you could do, but try to go to sleep till the morning. But then you remember you're camping in **Alaska** and it's going to be night for another **65 days**. Now you really want that light. But thankfully, you call for help, and a **park ranger** brings lamps to your campsite. He has the light, and gives it to you, and now the darkness isn't dark anymore.

Isaiah tells us the whole world is covered in a darkness called **sin**, but God will provide a light for his people, forgiveness for sin, and the Messiah will bring that light to them. But this isn't a light the Messiah will carry in his hand. This light will actually shine through his **mouth**. Isaiah says he will "**proclaim** good news" and he will "proclaim freedom." When he speaks, he can **forgive** sins. When he opens his mouth, the darkness **flees**. By his words, he will liberate the people in **spiritual captivity**.

God wants to address our sin problem. He is not content to let us live in darkness. He wants to set us free from captivity to our lusts, passions, greed, selfishness, and bitterness. He wants to set us free from our pride and ego, from **ourselves**. Over the last couple years **I've wrestled** with **bitterness** towards **an individual**. Every time I felt the hurt, I tried to forgive and stuff it away, but it kept resurfacing. This passage really helped me this week as I focused on how Jesus came to set the **captives** free. **Believing** Jesus came to set me free, I had a hard conversation this week with the individual to confess my **bitterness** and address some **issues**. God used it to set my **heart free**. I am a captive released from sin's power. Jesus wants to set you free from whatever sin is oppressing you. Come to him believing he sets the captives free.

But spiritual liberty can feel a bit **abstract**, can't it? Light and darkness, sin and forgiveness? The passage in Isaiah, which Jesus reads, isn't for **philosophers**. It's for **concrete reality**. Isaiah 61:1 isn't unique. It's quoting another part of the Bible. This is like the movie **Inception**, a dream within a dream. We're **quoting** Luke, who is quoting Jesus, who is quoting Isaiah, who is quoting Leviticus and the **Year of Jubilee**.

Leviticus 25:10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. (NIV®)

The **Hebrew** word for "liberty" in Leviticus 25:10 is the same Hebrew word for "freedom" found in Isaiah 61:1. I know this because Terry told me so, and because I double-checked it. The Year of Jubilee is a special year God gave Israel every **50th year**. Property owners were supposed to return all purchased **lands** to their original families who owned them, all **slaves** and **servants** were supposed to go free, and all **debts** were supposed to be cancelled. But as far as we know, Israel **never** celebrated the Year of Jubilee.

God's kingdom is supposed to look **different** than all the other **kingdoms** of the world. He wants spiritual liberty, but also social, economic, and physical liberty. He wanted Israel to taste that in their world and he still desires this for us. God cares about **social justice** and the **social gospel**. He wants to end slavery in all parts of the world. He wants to set free **women** who sell their **bodies** and **men** who sell their **lives**. He wants to cancel debts. He wants to give homes to the homeless. God not only wants to **fix** our hearts, he wants to fix our world. He **doesn't promise** everything will be made right before the return of Christ, but as we come to Christ, pockets of light and change should pop-up all around us.

By reading this passage in Isaiah, which is then referencing Leviticus, Jesus is saying his ministry is about spiritual liberty and physical, social, and economic liberty. Jesus **isn't imposing** this on the text. It's there in Isaiah, and in Leviticus too. The Year of Jubilee kicked off on the **holiest day** of the year, the **Day of Atonement** (Lev 25:9). The Day of Atonement was a special day set aside every year for the High Priest to make sacrifices for the sins of the people, to atone for them. The people were supposed to see how God's liberty is all encompassing, for our souls, our cities, and our world. His freedom is spiritual, physical, total.

Being in the synagogue on that Sabbath day, **Jesus** would have seen both their physical need and their spiritual need, and he's **the one** who can do something about it. He reads:

Luke 4:18-19

"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." (NIV®)

Then he rolls up the scroll, gives it back, and says in verse 21, "Today this scripture is **fulfilled** in your hearing." Jesus is claiming to be the anointed one, the Messiah, the **Christ**. Jesus bears the **flashlight!** He has the **mouth-light**. He speaks the **good news**. When he talks the **sun rises**, our sins flee, and the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed are lifted up as valuable and precious. When Jesus comes, his **kingdom** comes too, not in its **fulness**, but in its **beginnings**.

Luke 4:43 But he said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (NIV®)

As we read the **book of Luke**, we see Jesus **ushering** in his kingdom with both its spiritual and physical healing. Jesus sets the spiritually and physically oppressed free by **forgiving** sins and driving out **demons** (Luke 4:31-37; 5:17-26; 8:26-39). You see him caring for the physically poor and spiritually impoverished (Luke 14:15-24; 19:1-10). He cares for the blind, the sick, and the dead (Luke 18:35-43; 17:11-19; 8:40-56).

In fact, in Luke 7 **John the Baptist** sends his disciples to investigate if Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the anointed one, and this is what happens.

Luke 7:21-22 At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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. (NIV®)

So what does this mean for us? If we think back to **Isaiah 60**, we remember that Israel was supposed to become a light to the **nations**. As followers of Jesus, we're supposed to become a light to the nations too. We're supposed to spread the kingdom. How do we do that? **Isaiah 61** and **Luke 4** tell us Jesus **proclaimed** the good news, so we do the same. Just like the light came through Jesus' mouth, we bring the light through **our mouths**. We talk about Jesus, how he forgives us and takes care of all our needs. We're supposed to take this message to the outcasts, to those others look down upon, the poor, prisoners, the sick, and oppressed.

At Cornerstone, we have a **target audience**. It's families with children and teenagers who are probably just like us. That's a **starting point**; but **based on this text** it's not the same one Jesus started with. From **our**

passage, what do you think **Jesus' target audience** looks like today? If you were to imagine the kind of people Jesus is trying to reach, what would they look like?

I think of someone who grew up in **Lawrence**, in low-income housing, who dropped out of high-school, who can't hold down a job, and is close to overdosing on **opioids**. Who do you think of when you hear Jesus came for prisoners? Do you think of someone locked behind bars, covered in **tattoos**, has a shaved head, and can benchpress twice your bodyweight? I bet when you moved to Westford, you looked up some of your **local felons** so you could buy a house close to them. Who do you think of when you hear Jesus came for the blind? Do you think of your spiritually blind **yoga instructor** who embraces all forms of spirituality? Do you think of you think of your **elderly neighbor** who can't see well anymore? Jesus does.

I know when I think about trying to reach the lost with Jesus, I tend to think about people that **look** and **talk** and **smell** just like me. This passage challenges me to **cross boundaries** (social, cultural, and economic) to share Jesus with others. We're called to share the gospel message with people that don't look like us, talk like us, and smell like us. They need to hear that Jesus cares about them because in our modern world they're not valued. *Jesus cares.*

When **Jesus' audience** in the synagogue heard Jesus say these things and that he was going to **fulfill** Isaiah 61, at first they thought it was great. Verse 22 says they were amazed at his gracious words and asked, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" They're not criticizing him, they're **claiming** him. They're saying, "He's from Nazareth. He's one of us. He belongs to us." It's like the **celebrities** we claim from Boston, Ben Affleck, Matt Damon, Mark Wahlberg, Amy Poehler. They claim Jesus like it somehow makes them better, **but** Jesus won't have it.

Luke 4:23 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.'" (NIV®)

He knows these people aren't really interested in spiritual liberty. They just want physical liberty, but that's **not the full gospel**. It's not everything Jesus offers. They want the **benefits** of Jesus' kingdom without the **rule** of the **king** over their lives. They want the **prosperity gospel**. They want health and wealth and power in this life, without recognition of sin, repentance, forgiveness, or realizing the full kingdom is yet to come.

So Jesus tells them **two stories**. He tells them of the Old Testament prophet **Elijah** who could have helped any of the widows in Israel, but instead helped a widow outside of Israel. Then he reminds them how **Elisha** only healed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy, a non-Jew. The good news is for more than just the **insider**. The good news is for the **outsider**. The gospel isn't just for **us**. The gospel is for **them**.

When the people of his hometown of Nazareth hear this, it makes them so **mad** they try to murder him. They take him to the edge of a cliff and try to throw him over, but he escapes. They can't take the idea that their **hometown boy** is the Messiah and he won't show them **favoritism** (c.f., Luke 4:43).

Do you ever feel like the gospel is just for a us? Do you ever feel like Christianity is just for Christians? I saw a **Chevy commercial** over the Holidays. It featured Chevy employees, not actors. It showed them going home for the Holidays, getting Christmas trees with their kids, and preparing Christmas dinners with their families. As the commercial plays with lots of nice new Chevy vehicles in almost every scene, employees say, "This time of year is all about family, and we'd like you to be apart of ours, so our Chevy **employee discount** is now available to everyone. You pay what we pay, and not a cent more. We're so happy to share this with you. It's our way of saying Happy Holidays and welcome to the family, the Chevy family." That had to **cost** them something right? It must have cost them financially (although I'm sure they're hoping to make it back), but it also cost them **privilege**. Sharing Jesus with others is worth the cost.

We have something better than a **new chevy**. We have the kingdom of God. We have light in the darkness and we share it with our **mouth flashlights**. We have the the year of the Lord's favor. We have the the Year of Jubilee. We have liberty for the captives, for the spiritually and physically oppressed. We have the good news that Jesus cares and that is going to right every intangible and tangible wrong on earth. *Jesus cares.*

May we embrace the good news of spiritual and physical liberty Jesus offers us, but may we share that with the world, with the outsiders, the poor, the broken, the downtrodden, prisoners, the sick, and outcasts, with people that don't look, talk like us, or smell like us. It's a good thing that **Jesus** came to save people who don't look, and act, and talk like him. That's all of us. May it be said of us that we care. Why? *Jesus cares.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).