

(mis)Understanding Jesus [Part 5]

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 October 2021

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] to turn back to the passage that we read in Luke chapter 4. As you know at the moment we are doing a study in our morning services that's got two titles. Our main title is Understanding Jesus and we're looking at some of the big moments in the life and ministry of Jesus so that we can better understand who he is and why he has come.

But the other title as you know by now is Misunderstanding Jesus and we're hoping that we're going to identify ways in which Jesus has been misunderstood both by the people in his own time and by people today. This morning our focus is on the words of verse 16 to 21 of Luke 4. He came to Nazareth where he'd been brought up and as was his custom he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him and he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written. The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. Throughout this series we've been looking at some key moments in God's plan of salvation what we call redemptive history. So far we've looked at the birth of Jesus, the baptism of Jesus and the temptation of Jesus and today we come to another crucial aspect of God's redemptive plan. As we come to that I want you to ask yourself the question when you think of Jesus what words come into your mind? Maybe words like Savior, King, Lord, Son of God, Miracles, Cross, Salvation,

Forgiveness, all of these are true, all of these are brilliant but the reason I ask that question is because we can easily forget that when we think of Jesus one of the key words that should come into your mind is preacher. Jesus was a preacher, in fact he was the greatest preacher that has ever walked on this earth and a key moment in that preaching ministry comes here in Luke chapter 4. Jesus enters the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth.

He stands up and the scroll is given to him, he turns to the prophet Isaiah and he quotes primarily from Isaiah 61 verses 1 to 2 that you can see on the screen before us and the reason he does all of that is to show that his preaching ministry is fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies and it's a key reason why he's been anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism and already we can see that everything is fitting together so perfectly.

Jesus has come as the Messiah, the Savior, the one that they've been waiting for for centuries, he's been anointed by the Holy Spirit through whom he's empowered to undertake his mission and all of that is fulfilling what was promised centuries ago in the Old Testament as Jesus says in verse 21, today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing and the point I want us all to recognize today is that a key part of that mission is to proclaim good news and this is reminding us of one of the most important things that we need to recognize about Jesus and that is he said amazing things and I think that's an incredibly timely thing to notice because I am pretty sure that every single one of us is fed up of having to listen to people who've got nothing decent to say.

[4 : 3 7] Globally today we're swamped with leaders who twist the truth, who offer empty promises, who just say what people want them to hear in order to protect their own position.

Locally you might go to work every day and be surrounded by people who are complaining, who are critical and confrontational or maybe in the community you're surrounded by people just looking for the latest bit of gossip or scandal or complaint and even personally as individuals maybe the most damaging voice of all is the one in your own mind that tells you that you're useless, that you're a failure or a waste of space.

Every week of life we are confronted with voices who've got nothing decent to say. Jesus is completely different. Jesus has got something brilliant to say and yet here is another example of how easy it is to misunderstand Jesus.

It's easy to think that Jesus' message is like a nice bit of positive thinking or good advice for life or a friendly but maybe slightly cringy self-help for religious middle classes.

It's easy to think that Jesus is the bearer of quite nice news. Something that might make you feel a little bit better about yourself but that really doesn't make much difference at all.

[6 : 30] So many people think like that, including some of you. And the reason I know that that's true, that people think that that's really what Jesus' message is about, the reason we know that's true is because so many people think that rejecting Jesus isn't a big deal.

And the reason people think it's not a big deal is because they think that their message that they're rejecting or the message that they're putting off for now is just a message of quite nice news.

If that's you, then you're totally misunderstanding Jesus and you have no idea what you're rejecting.

Jesus is not anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim quite nice news. He was anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim utterly brilliant news.

And the reason that we know it's utterly brilliant is because of what he says in verse 18 and 19. He says, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[7 : 53] He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. Now in these verses, Jesus says five massive things and all of them are incredibly easy to misunderstand.

And we're going to look at them together today. First of all, he says that he's been anointed to proclaim good news to the poor.

Here the potential misunderstanding arises around the question, what does he mean by poor? Is he speaking economically? Does he mean that wealthy people are excluded from this message that he's proclaiming?

And that's very relevant for us because in comparison to a huge proportion of humanity, all of us are wealthy in comparison. Is that what Jesus means?

Well, here as in many places, there's a risk of creating a false dichotomy, a false either or. Because the answer is both. It's absolutely clear that in God's plan, both as it's revealed in Luke's Gospel and as it's revealed in the whole of Scripture, it's so clear that God cares passionately about the poor, the rejected and the outcast.

[9 : 17] Jesus's message is most definitely a message of good news for people who are economically and materially poor. But at the same time, Jesus's message is so much bigger.

He's addressing more than just economic needs. Ultimately, Jesus is addressing our eternal needs. And that makes perfect sense because to be poor simply means to be lacking, to have less than you need, to be far below what you should be.

And in terms of our relationship with God, that's exactly where sin has left us. That's where sin left me and you.

If you think about it, if you are standing face to face with Jesus and he asked you about your righteousness, your holiness, your godliness, would you say to him, I'm loaded?

Or would you say, I'm poor? The amazing thing about Jesus is that even though he recognizes your poverty and my poverty, he hasn't come to shame you or expose you or embarrass you in your inadequacy.

[10 : 37] He's come to give you good news. And it's a great reminder that the qualification to be the person that Jesus is talking to today is if you can look at yourself and think, I'm poor.

I'm lacking what I should be. If that's you, then you are exactly the person that Jesus wants to talk to. But what does he want to say?

Well, that takes us to the second thing that we see these verses, that he's been sent to proclaim liberty to the captives. This again is easy to misunderstand and think, well, that's not me, because we're not in prison.

We're not living in an occupied nation. And we've got wonderful civil liberties that we enjoy every day. So in terms of the criminal justice system or the geopolitical status of the location in which we live, none of us are incarcerated.

And thank God that we aren't. So what is Jesus saying? Is it relevant at all? When he says I come to proclaim liberty to the captives, does that have any relevance to you sitting here today at all?

[11 : 47] Well, in order to see the relevance, you need to ask yourself the question, have you ever felt trapped? Trapped in a life that you hate.

Trapped in a cycle of negativity. Trapped in loneliness and isolation. Trapped in a terrible habit that you can't get out of.

Trapped in the pressure of being successful. Trapped in the grip of fear about what might happen to you or to your family. Trapped in a sense of guilt about all the mistakes you've made in your life.

Trapped in terror about the day you die. The Bible explains all of that, all of those feelings.

It's all because sin has brought the whole of humanity into captivity. And that's the easiest doctrine to prove of all the proclamts in the Bible.

[12 : 55] It's the easiest one to prove because human beings keep on doing stupid things. Sin has enslaved humanity. Sin holds the human race captive.

And that captivity is the source of everything that's awful in your life and in the lives of people around you. But Jesus has come into the midst of all that mess to proclaim something incredible.

He has come to proclaim freedom. Freedom from the grip of sin so that you can become the person that you were made to be.

Freedom from isolation so that you can be brought into a family that stretches across the whole world. Freedom from a mindset of negativity.

You can enjoy God's goodness today and look forward to an amazing future with Jesus in eternity. Freedom from a life that feels pointless so that no matter who you are, no matter what you do in terms of your job or your life or whatever, you can honour God in every part of that life.

[14 : 06] Freedom from constant worry about what other people think and above all freedom from the power of death. Because for everyone who listens to Jesus and who trusts in him the day we die stops being the moment that we are most terrified of.

And it becomes the doorway to paradise. If you feel trapped, Jesus is proclaiming freedom.

But it's really easy to think, well that sounds wonderful, that sounds great but it all seems too good to be true. It all seems like wishful thinking. Well that brings us to the third thing that Jesus says.

He's been sent to proclaim recovery of sight to the blind. Again we can misunderstand this because we immediately think about physical blindness, don't we?

And of course Jesus did go on to heal people who couldn't see. But what we have to remember is that these miracles where the blind were healed, like all of Jesus' miracles, are signs pointing us to something bigger.

[15 : 18] And that means that if we think well I'm not blind so this isn't for me, then again we're misunderstanding Jesus. In scripture blindness doesn't just refer to people who can't see the world.

It refers to people who can't see the truth. Sometimes that's people who are looking for answers but haven't found them yet.

And if you read on in the gospels you'll read that many times people came to Jesus and he taught them and he explained things to them so that they could see and understand. So some people are blind because they think I don't know the answers I need to find them.

But other times blindness refers to people who think they have the answers. But in reality they're full of nonsense.

Later on in his ministry Jesus interacted with a group of people who were exactly that. It was the religious leaders of the day and Jesus called them blind guides.

[16 : 24] And the point I want to highlight here is that the message Jesus proclaims is going to help you see the truth. And this is absolutely crucial for us to recognise because so many people misunderstand Jesus today and they think the opposite.

They think that if you're going to become a Christian you actually need to abandon the truth. So faith is seen as blind. It's seen as a leap in the dark and if you're going to believe in Jesus then you have to shut your eyes to the facts that are in front of you and just hope for the best.

That is not true. In fact it's the opposite of the truth. I want you to imagine two people going for a walk.

One is a Christian the other is a consistent naturalistic atheist. And the walk that I'm going to take you on in your mind is a little bit of an odd route but I want you just to use your imagination.

So these two people are going for a walk together. They walk up a mountain on a clear warm sunny day. The Christian says I see a beautiful masterpiece.

[17 : 38] The consistent naturalistic atheist says I see a chance accident. They walk through a city. It's getting dark.

They look down a quiet alley and they see a young woman being taken advantage of by a strong man. Christian says I see injustice. The other says I see survival of the fittest.

They walk through a graveyard. Christian says I see a horrible enemy that I want to be defeated. His friend says I see an inevitability that you just got to accept.

They carry on. They find themselves wandering through a hospital. They come to a neonatal intensive care unit. They see a baby struggling for breath. The Christian says I see a precious life.

The other one says I just see another cog in the machine. They walk along a beach having left the hospital and they see a man proposed to his girlfriend.

[18 : 38] Christian says I see love. The other says I see reproductive instinct. Which one is blind?

One of the amazing things about Jesus' message is that it's so intellectually satisfying. He has not come to give us a message of brainless wishful thinking.

He's come to give sight to the blind. Fourth thing he says is that he's come to set at liberty the oppressed.

One of the many wonderful things about the Bible is that it makes it so abundantly clear that God cares for people who are suffering.

And that suffering and oppression can come in so many different ways. It can come from people teaching us badly. It can come from circumstances working against us. It can come from illness attacking us.

[19 : 44] Or it can come from fear and guilt consuming us. And again it's easy to think that this applies more to others than it does to us. And it is the case that you can almost always find someone who's going to be suffering more than you are.

But it's also true that every single one of us is a victim. Because sin has broken the world and all of you are suffering as a result of that to one degree or another.

The Bible recognizes that. God knows it. And I want us to just dig a little bit deeper for a moment into the word that Jesus uses and that word oppressed.

Because there's something very cool about the Greek that doesn't really come out in English. So I want to show this to you. So the word oppressed that you can see there on the screen before you is a word that literally means broken in pieces.

And it's used in relation to pottery and it can also be used in relation to being oppressed. Which is kind of powerfully capturing the fact that suffering leaves us broken.

[20 : 59] But what's even more amazing and what I want you to see is that as you know in grammar we have lots of different tenses. So in English we'll think of past, present and future.

So we'll say I spoke, I speak, I will speak. There's lots of different tenses in English. Greek is the same. It's got lots of different tenses. Some of which are the same as used in the same way as English.

Some of which are different to English. The word that's used here is in what's called the perfect tense in Greek. Now what that means is that in terms of the time that this oppression takes place, it's not just the past.

It's not just like a dot in the past there. It's easy to think you know oppressed, that sounds like past tense. That's thinking about a dot in the past. The perfect tense in Greek doesn't just mean a dot in the past.

What the perfect tense in Greek refers to is something that takes place in the past. But the implications of it continue into the present.

[22 : 09] So it's like a dot and a line. Something that's happened, the implications of which are ongoing and continuing. Now that might sound very, very boring to have a wee lesson in grammar, but what I hope you can see is that it's actually amazing.

Because it's telling us that when Jesus talks about the events in your life that have left you broken, he knows fine well that suffering doesn't just happen in a moment and then disappear.

He knows that the pain, the bruises and the scars linger. The agony of an event in the past continues right on into the present day.

The pain of past oppression stays with us right into the present. And I'm sure every single one of you can think of a moment in your life that hurt you and you can still feel that hurt and see that hurt in your life.

It's a reminder that the Bible is just awesome because even the grammar understands what suffering is actually like.

[23 : 23] Jesus knows exactly what it means to be oppressed. That is exactly who he has come to preach to.

And he has come to tell you that he will release you from that oppression. Now that doesn't mean that following Jesus means that everything in your life is going to be rosy.

What it means is that with Jesus your past hurts no longer define you. Because every single one of us has been hurt in our lives, sometimes by events, usually by people.

And if that hurt has left you bitter or suspicious of others or unwilling to allow anyone to get close to you or defends him or just all around broken, if it still has that effect on you then it's controlling you.

Jesus says, I want you to be free from that. I want to release you from that.

[24 : 34] And the way he does it is by showing you that you are not ultimately defined by your brokenness. You are defined by what he thinks of you.

And in Jesus' eyes, you are worth dying for. And in Jesus' eyes, you are so special he wants to be your friend for eternity.

How many times have you been picked up and put down by people in life? Jesus is different.

He comes for you, he wants to grab you and hold you and never ever let go. It's a reminder that Jesus will never ever hurt you.

No matter how much life has battered you, Jesus will never do that. So Jesus is proclaiming good news for the poor, liberty for the captives, recovery of sight for the blind, release for the oppressed.

[25 : 54] And number five, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. This has echoes of the Old Testament year of Jubilee. In the Old Testament there was this wonderful system whereby every 50 years slaves were set free, debts were cancelled and property was returned to families.

So you think about somebody who maybe everything had gone wrong in their life, maybe their farming had failed, they had to sell their land, maybe they'd fallen into slavery, maybe their family had lost its possessions and inheritance.

Every 50 years that was put right. You had this wonderful year of Jubilee where debts were cancelled, slaves were freed, property was restored. It was a year of thanksgiving, of restoration and of great joy.

It was a brilliant year. Jesus is not saying that the year 29 AD or whenever it was when he stood in this synagogue giving this sermon. He's not saying this is now a 12 month period where you can find God's favour and you better get it while you can.

He's not saying that at all. He's saying that the time has now come where God is going to pour out his goodness, his mercy and his love through his son.

[27 : 12] How do we misunderstand this? Well there's two massive ways in which misunderstanding happens. The first is by thinking that the Gospel is depressing.

Now there's no doubt that in the last 2000 years many Christians have done a good job of making the Gospel look depressing. We must never forget that Jesus' message is good news and it's good news because it's a message of God's favour.

It's the news that God wants to be good to you, that he wants to welcome you, that he actually wants you. And if you remember anything from this morning, I want you to remember that that God actually wants you.

You've probably maybe been rejected dozens of times in your life but God wants you. The Gospel is the message that the time has come when you can receive something incredible from God.

It's the year of his warm, loving, welcoming, relentless, immeasurable favour.

[28 : 26] And if you think that the Gospel is depressing, then you don't even remotely understand it.

And if as Christians we behave as though the Gospel is depressing, then we barely understand it either. But the second misunderstanding in this verse is even easier and even more dangerous.

It is so easy to think that the year of God's favour is next year. In other words, to think that the time to become a Christian is in the future, not now.

And of all the misunderstandings in these verses, this is the one that I'm most certain is in this room. And so I'm going to ask again, as I asked two or three weeks ago, what's the next step for you?

I want you to really think about that. What's the next step for you in terms of your relationship to God? Is it to pray for the first time? Maybe you've not prayed before, then next step is pray.

[29 : 41] And it can only be a really short prayer. God's not looking for quantity. He's just looking to hear your voice. You've never prayed. That's your next step to pray. You've never picked up your Bible, haven't picked it up in years. That's your next step.

Pick it up, download it on your phone, read it, read through Luke or Mark or any passage of Scripture. If you've been kind of toying for years with coming to the prayer meeting, that's your next step.

Come and be part of it. If you know that you love the Lord but you've always felt that you just can't profess faith and become a member, that's your next step. If you've been a member for years, there's so much to be done in terms of serving, in terms of getting alongside one another, to disciple one another, to help and encourage. That's your next step.

If you've fallen out with somebody, your next step is to reach out to them and try to patch things up. All of us have a next step. Please think about what your next step should be.

Jesus here is proclaiming the good news of God's salvation. He's offering it to everyone.

[31 : 02] And this is where you need to remember that there's no such thing as a ticket to hell.

What takes you to hell is not a ticket that says God doesn't want you. What takes you to hell is a torn up invitation to heaven.

But by God offers you this salvation and you scrunch it up and you say no thanks.

Has Jesus come with quite nice news? No. Jesus has come with utterly brilliant news.

It's a message that speaks of generosity, abundant generosity to those who lack everything. It's a message of liberty to those who are trapped.

[32 : 09] It's a message of truth for those who are searching. A message of release for those who are battered. A message of favour, beautiful, warm, kind, welcoming, abundant favour from God.

That is why Jesus is so amazing. That is why his message is such good news. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have been anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to proclaim release for those who are oppressed, to announce the year of the Lord's favour.

Oh God, may we all come to know you and may we all live for you. Amen.

Now closing Sam is from the Sing Sam's version of Sam 67.