



JESUS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Part 15 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 4:14-21 | January 24, 2010

Luke 4:14–21

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ 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.

²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Howdy Mars Hill, today we hit Luke 4:14–21, on Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It’s a very important text because it tells us about Jesus’ early ministry. Like so many ministries, Jesus’ began very simple, very humble. It’s interesting that this is actually the fourteenth year of our church since we first began gathering people for the official launch, which happened in the fall of 1996. And looking back at our first meetings in January of 1996, fourteen years ago, things were very simple, very humble, a handful of people. I can still remember going into the Super Bowl weekend, which was one of our first services, seventeen people, seventeen people were Mars Hill Church.

In the ensuing years, God has been exceedingly gracious to us, and I’ve been mindful of God’s grace as I’ve been studying all week, as we look at how Jesus’ ministry, like all ministries, start simple and humble. And Jesus began his ministry preaching and teaching the Scriptures as a Spirit-filled, Spirit-led Bible teacher. And so what we also find this week is he began his ministry, not in the big town of Jerusalem, but in the small towns, in the region of Galilee. He didn’t begin his public work with large crowds but with small crowds, not with stadiums but with synagogues, scattered throughout this rural area that he called home.

THE GALILEAN REGION

The Galilean region is interesting because it had small towns, dozens, hundreds of people, like the one that Jesus grew up in. Nazareth itself would have been a very small town, Jesus’ hometown. One well for the drawing of water, meaning it could not sustain a large population base. The other towns in the region would have similarly contained dozens, hundreds of people, farmers, fisherman, people who worked the land and worked the sea, people who were simple and humble, oftentimes illiterate. Many of them did not have access to formal education. Additionally we know that they married often in their teens. Their life expectancy was not particularly long. They were not given much political influence or affluence. These were simple, common, humble, poor, working-class people.

And when Jesus starts his ministry, he starts his ministry among them. You’re going to read with me in Luke but what I first wanted to do was give you some idea of the topography as we hear that Jesus is walking throughout this region and becoming, essentially, a bit of a rock star on tour, going from synagogue to synagogue. It’s important to get a glimpse of what the topography of the region is like. We were there this summer. This is actually a photo of the Sea of Galilee. And when you’ve heard of the Sea of Galilee, you may have thought of a small lake. When you hear that they would row across the lake with major headwinds against them, you may have thought that it would have been a simple task. That gives you some scope, I’m very small in that picture because the lake is so enormous. The Sea of Galilee, which is in some regards the center of the life of the region of Galilee, is an enormous lake.

And the topography really changes. Elsewhere in the region of Galilee where Jesus began his preaching ministry, you’ll find essentially barren desert. We read last week in Luke chapter 4 that Jesus was alone in the wilderness. This gives you some idea of what it looks like in the wilderness areas of the

Galilean region, very barren indeed.

Additionally there are some mountains and high areas. This is reported to be the area where Jesus actually transfigured and Moses and Elijah came down from heaven to be with him. Actually, just on the top of this ridge at present day is the Israeli-Syrian border. When we were there, there were snipers up on the hill and we were within shot and gaze, and so you don't want to travel too far. Very few tourists actually proceed up to that point, but in God's grace we were able to have access. And this is actually a steep, steep mountain range, very difficult to climb. You can see that it is very barren, during the heat of the day it would be exhausting.

And these are the kinds of places where Jesus walked as his ministry began throughout Galilee. Also, you can see some of the vast scope of the Galilean region. In this picture we put in one of the volunteers who was with us on the trip doing a lot of the running of gear to give you some scope and size of how much area we are talking about and how even what seems like a simple journey is in a very difficult terrain.

Nonetheless, there are also regions throughout Galilee that are very fertile. This photo is actually taken from the place where Jesus cast a demon out of a man and those demons were cast then into pigs, who then ran into the sea. And in the day of Jesus the sea actually came all the way up to, essentially, the road, and it has receded with growth in the present day but you can see fertile farmland.

So the region of Galilee that Jesus was from had a wide range of topography and as he is traveling, he is walking to preach and teach in these synagogues.

JESUS WAS A SPIRIT-FILLED PREACHER

And here is how Luke records it after speaking with the eyewitnesses who actually heard Jesus preach and teach, Luke 4:14–15: “And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee,” that's the region, “and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.”

And so this is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We don't know if it was weeks or months, but what we do know is that Jesus began his preaching and teaching ministry and the Puritans were fond of saying that God had one Son and he made him a preacher. Jesus was a Spirit-filled preacher. Today he is exalted as Lord, God, Savior, and Christ but during his ministry on the earth, he came as a Spirit-filled preacher. This is exceedingly important for me. I began Mars Hill Church with a desire to preach the Bible about Jesus, and we have continued to be a Bible-preaching, Bible-teaching church. This is absolutely central and essential and foundational for all that we believe and all that we behave. And for me this is so encouraging, personally as your pastor, that Jesus, he did heal, he did feed, he did counsel—and we want to do and we do do, by God's grace through the Holy Spirit, all of that as well—but everything begins with the preaching of God's Word. Jesus' ministry began and was sustained by the preaching and teaching of the Bible.

Mars Hill, it is my deep, profound, sincere hope that the Scriptures would matter to you. And that hearing the Word of God would matter to you because faith comes by hearing the Word of God. And that you would hold preaching in high regard. We're in a day when people are more desirous of dialogue instead of monologue. Well, the way we do it at Mars Hill is the preaching of the Bible is monologue and then we gather in community groups for dialogue. We want you to talk about the Scriptures. We want you to be on mission as the church. We want you to work through your issues and concerns and frustrations and immaturities, together as God's people. But everything at Mars Hill ultimately is riding on the preaching of God's Word, by myself and other elders and guests that are going to be joining us, including my amazingly helpful friend, Dr. John Piper, from whom I've learned so much. We want to bring you good Bible teaching. We want to bring you good Bible teachers. You might ask, why? Well, because if God would come to the earth and he would make it his first priority to establish his ministry through Bible preaching and teaching, then we simply want to follow in the example of Jesus. And you can pray for me and the other pastors who preach here and the guests that we're, by God's grace, welcoming in to preach on occasion, that we, like Jesus, would be filled by the Spirit. That we would be Spirit-filled Bible preachers and teachers. That we would ensure that Mars Hill remains a church that loves Jesus and loves the Bible and loves people and wants to see people meeting Jesus in the Bible.

And this is what we read, that Jesus was a Spirit-filled preacher. God becomes a man and, filled with the Holy Spirit, he has an itinerate, traveling, preaching ministry throughout the region of Galilee. He is preaching in small towns. He is preaching, it says, in synagogues. These are places where God's people would gather. There would be Scripture reading and prayer; perhaps some singing; if someone was qualified and present, a sermon, a moment of preaching and teaching. And these small towns, these synagogues were not generally large. They were built to house perhaps a few dozen people. When you're looking at small towns of dozens and hundreds of people, to even form a synagogue required at least ten adult men, and some towns would have had a hard time even qualifying to have a synagogue. They were that small and there were that few of God's people. But for those towns that did have a synagogue, you think of it kind of like Mars Hill Campuses. We meet in various locations and God's people gather there for Scripture reading, for prayer, perhaps some singing, and some Bible teaching. That's built off of the synagogue system. Christianity continued as God's people, having the church follow, in many ways, the model of the synagogue system.

And at this point Jesus has become very popular. As the Old Testament prophets, he begins with a period of real enthusiasm. Crowds come out. When he comes to town, the synagogue is full. There might only be dozens of people, but some of these people have walked many, many miles over rough terrain to come hear this fiery young preacher and what he has to say. They're not used to having great preachers, great Bible teachers; they're not used to having people of note and substance and significance in their midst. And here comes this hot, new, popular Bible preacher, this guy named Jesus and, as happens over the course of time with all the prophets, that honeymoon season of love and affection turns to opposition and ultimately murder. But this is the time when Jesus has very great support. And ultimately he is glorified by all, meaning they are talking about him. There is a great buzz about his preaching. It's different.

THE HOMETOWN RABBI

Moving on, verse 16 gives us a bit more information about Jesus, the Spirit-filled preacher: “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.”

He comes to his hometown. We’ll read elsewhere in Scripture that a prophet is without honor in his hometown, Jesus says; that he ultimately will be rejected in Nazareth. But at this point it is a phase and a season and a moment of curiosity. These are people who grew up with Jesus. They saw him as a little boy and a young man. And now he is officially a rabbi. This was a high honor, very unusual for a man from Jesus’ background and hometown to be a rabbi. He is in a town where education would have been very difficult. He is very well educated. We read earlier in Luke 2:52 that he grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God. He studied and he learned and he grew. God humbled himself to identify with us and he learned, as we must learn. He devoted himself to study the Scriptures, as we must devote ourselves to study the Scriptures.

And what we find is he actually becomes officially recognized as a rabbi, as a Bible teacher. This means he is an educated, literate, and learned man. Some would say, “Oh, I don’t need to learn and study. I just want to follow the Holy Spirit and I’m a simple Christian.” Jesus was filled by the Holy Spirit; grew in wisdom, stature, and favor; did study; qualified to be officially declared a rabbi, which means a teacher of Scripture. So he is a theologian. He is a thinker. He is a student. And if you want to be like Jesus, you need to learn how to study and grow in your wisdom and knowledge.

And Jesus comes to Nazareth, his hometown. Again, small town, rural town, farmers. If you go to Nazareth today, it’s perhaps a few hundred thousand people. It’s largely a Muslim town. But in Jesus’ day it was a small town, a simple town. His parents are typical of those who live in Nazareth. You’ll remember, his dad was a carpenter and his mom was young and poor and simple. They saw Jesus grow up. Important people didn’t come to Nazareth. Important people didn’t come from Nazareth. Later on the statement will be made, when the fame of Jesus spreads beyond the region, “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” Meaning: no one of substance, note, or significance has ever proceeded forth from this town of Nazareth. And so Jesus is coming home and he’s one of their own and they’ve seen him grow up and now he’s an officially learned man, he’s a rabbi. Not only that, he’s been preaching and teaching in the region and many are poor and illiterate and they have not seen someone with his capacity and capability and competency open the Bible to preach and to teach.

JESUS WENT TO CHURCH, AS WAS HIS CUSTOM

And Jesus shows up, we read, “as was his custom,” on the Sabbath day. For the Jews it was on Saturday, based on the Ten Commandments and God’s order in creation in Genesis. Upon the resurrection of Jesus, Christians started worshiping on Sunday because that’s the day of the resurrection of Jesus and it inaugurates the new covenant era and the new reality of life through the resurrection of Jesus. When it came to the United States of America, we didn’t know whether or not to do the Jewish or Christian Sabbath, and so we got a two-day weekend. That’s how it happened. They gave us both.

And he came to the synagogue, so think of him going essentially to the equivalent of the old covenant church. Jesus is going to church, as was his what? Custom. Jesus regularly attended corporate worship with God’s people, in the synagogue, the old covenant equivalent of the church. Jesus went to church all the time as a little boy and a young man, teens, twenties, and you would find him on Sabbath, being obedient to the Scriptures, showing up with God’s people.

Can you imagine how bad, think of this, how bad Jesus’ synagogue was growing up? You’re in a rural town, small little synagogue, not a lot of literate people. No rabbi of note wants to be there, they’re all over in Jerusalem or one of the big towns, it’s time to get up, get dressed, go to worship with God’s people. Do you think Jesus ever heard a bad sermon? Jesus probably always heard a bad sermon because if you were a good preacher, they would move you out of Nazareth. You’d get a better situation. Do you think Jesus ever sat there and heard someone mumble and stumble through the Scriptures? He did. Do you think there were ever eccentric, odd people who showed up to synagogue, annoying people, frustrating people? There were. Do you think there were people that were very irregular in their attendance of worship at synagogue? There were. And you know what? Jesus went. He didn’t complain. He didn’t despise. He didn’t check out. He didn’t criticize the church. He didn’t write a blog talking about all the reasons why his synagogue was horrible and he wished he had a better synagogue. No, Jesus went to be with God’s people, to hear from God’s Word. Jesus was humble. Humble enough to sit in what we would today say was a small, rinky-dink rural church, probably with a part-time pastor, going nowhere. That was Jesus. And isn’t it amazing that because his heart was for the Father and his mind was for the Scriptures and the Spirit was his power, Jesus became this amazing rabbi and preacher.

Let me say this, Mars Hill, and I say this in a lovingly, confrontational way: sometimes it has less to do with what church you are in and more to do with whether or not you avail yourself of the opportunities it provides. Mars Hill is not a perfect church. But the resources that you have are infinitely more than Jesus had at his little rural synagogue. Community groups, redemption groups, Re:Train, church planting, a full deacon process, a full membership process, training programs and classes, world-class Bible preachers brought in, free content online; there are so many opportunities, just in Mars Hill, not even including outside of Mars Hill. The books and the conferences and the digital media that are available. The fact that you could listen to some of the best Bible preachers in the world while you’re jogging or driving or vacuuming or mowing.

And what can happen is that the world is filled with resources for you to grow in your knowledge of Scripture and your likeness to Christ, but if you don’t avail yourself of them, they’re of no benefit to you at all. And what we see is that it was Jesus’ custom to avail himself of every opportunity. When synagogue opened for worship, he was there. Even if it wasn’t the best sermon on the earth that day, he was extracting from it whatever was true and helpful. He was there to connect with God’s people, to build friendships, to live in community, to be on mission, that’s what he did. And one of the things that just is so heartbreaking as a pastor is to see that— There are some like that, so let me not be totally discouraging. There are some who love

God and love God's people and love being with God's people and are willing to regularly attend church and sit under the preaching of God's Word, willing to study for themselves like Jesus did, willing to jump in a community group and be on mission as the church with God's people. — But we also have this consumer culture where people just come and go and take and don't give and complain and don't help. And for those of you who your first instinct would be to find what is wrong, let me say that that is a good thing and you should first seek to find out what is wrong with you. Not with other brothers and sisters in Christ who are doing their best and giving their most. Jesus participated in the life of a worshiping community. It was his regular custom. You need to be in church. You need to be under the preaching of God's Word. You need to be meeting with God's people. That was Jesus', what? Custom. This was his habit. This was his lifestyle. This was his routine.

JESUS UNROLLS AND READS THE SCROLL

"And he stood up to read," this was a high honor. My guess is that the synagogue that day was packed. It's not just a visiting rabbi, preacher, teacher; it's a hometown son. It's Mary and Joseph's little boy. It's Jesus. They've heard about his fame. Crowds are coming out, people are walking for miles just to hear him preach and teach. And, as it were, if you envision it a bit like a tour, it's a walking tour by the homeless, poor Jesus, but a bit of a tour nonetheless. The word comes that he's coming to Nazareth. His route is taking him throughout Galilee and he's coming home. This is the big event. For every band that's on the road, you know how it goes. They either begin or end the tour with what? The big hometown show. That's the big event. That's where all your family and your friends and the people you grew up with and the people who supported you and loved you and encouraged you and poured into you, they come out to share in your joy and to see God's grace in your life. And here it is, Jesus is coming home. We can assume that the synagogue was probably full. If he's drawn crowds in other towns, there's definitely a curiosity in his town.

And what it says is that he stood up to read. And so their services were a bit different than ours. You would stand for the reading of Scripture and then you would sit for the hearing of a sermon. And that's exactly what is going to happen. So Jesus stands to read the Scripture. Here is what he reads: "And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has 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 favor.'"

Jesus stands in authority as the Bible teacher, the preacher. And the scroll of Isaiah is handed to him. Now, until Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, books were hand-copied on scrolls or parchments: think long, rolled-up documents. And so it is not easy to find your place. What this indicates to us is that Jesus knew the Bible very well because the chapters were not added to our Bible until the 1200s and the verses were not added until the 1500s, so over a millennium later. Those are like addresses to find our way in Scripture, as we find our way toward destinations and the like. So to find the place that he wants to read and teach from, Jesus has to roll out Isaiah and he's going to read a bit of Isaiah 58 and Isaiah 61, so it's near the end of the sixty-six-chapter book of Isaiah and he's rolling it out, meaning he knows exactly where to go because he has studied the Scriptures.

And I feel impressed to even ask this question, can you imagine what kind of devotion you would have to have if your local town only had one or two copies of the Bible, the Scriptures, the Old Testament, and they were at the synagogue and they were in long scrolls that you'd have to roll out, how many of you would even read the Scriptures? How many of you would actually do the work of getting up, walking to the synagogue, getting the one or two copies, unrolling the scroll, no chapters, verses, no study Bibles, no online resources, no software, no tools, no commentaries, not like we have now, those were held in Jerusalem for the important scholars, these were simple folk.

JESUS PUT IN HIS HOURS

And apparently Jesus is so familiar with this scroll, Jesus has, from his early days as a young boy, walked to the synagogue, opened up the scrolls, rolled them out and studied, read, prayed, memorized, meditated. A lot of people want to be Bible preachers and teachers, but not a lot of people want to put in the hard work to really study and to know the truth. And Jesus put in those hours. The reason why he could be a great traveling preacher is because he put in the hours.

There's a new book that's out today, a non-Christian book, but the man has studied those who are the best in various fields, like medicine or sports or entertainment, musicians and the like, and he's come up with the equivalent of a ten-thousand-hour rule. That to really be world class at something, it takes ten thousand years of practice— Ten thousand years? Let me correct that. You would be very, very good if you gave yourself ten thousand years of preparation, in fact, you would preach much better than I am. Nonetheless, it is ten thousand hours of preparation. That is sort of the expert, world-class mark. That to really be world class at anything it takes about ten thousand hours, whether that's playing an instrument or reading the Scriptures and studying or whatever it might be.

At this point, we don't know how much time Jesus spent, but he's world class. He's grown in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God. He's a young man who is about thirty years of age and when his preaching and teaching ministry begins, he is ready to preach and teach. He does so with passion and clarity and authority, and people who've been listening to sermons their whole life have never heard anyone like this. What I'm telling you is, I don't know how many hours Jesus put in, but let's say he put in his ten thousand hours. He put in his ten thousand hours, so that when the day came for God the Father to bring him back home to Nazareth, he could just unroll Isaiah. He knew exactly where to go. He knew exactly what to say. He knew exactly what to do. If you really want to be used by God at whatever it is that God would call you to be and to do, you have to put in your hours. And if you want to be a Bible preacher, teacher, you need to put in your hours.

And Jesus opens the scroll of Isaiah, as we can infer that he often did, and he reads it. And here is what we see. The context is that he is pulling a little bit from Isaiah 58 and Isaiah 61. The context there in Isaiah is actually from chapter 40 through chapter 66, the context that he's pulling from, the big idea is the suffering servant. That God the Father would send God the Son into human history as the servant who suffers, the one who would be

betrayed and put to death and suffer and die and rise in our place for our sins as our savior. The second half of Isaiah 52 through Isaiah 53 is the great ultimate summary of Jesus' life and ministry, in all of the Old Testament, so much so that some have called Isaiah the fifth gospel because he's so clear, seven hundred years in advance, teaching and preaching and prophesying about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as the suffering servant.

And moving a little bit further in chapter 58 and into chapter 61, the context is the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee was this pattern that God put into history among God's people when the slaves would be set free and the debts would be canceled and the land that had been lost through debt or tragedy would be given back to the people. It was this year where everyone got a fresh, clean start. Wouldn't that be amazing? I mean, today, people are so wicked and so abusive and so evil that if you set it up that there was a jubilee year, people would rack up their debts and they would abuse their finances and they would set themselves up in a horrendous way, to abuse this grace. That wasn't the intent. The intent wasn't that grace would be abused, but that people who had suffered and were poor and were struggling and were incarcerated or were enslaved, that they would get a fresh clean start. That God's grace would be given to them and they would get to start over in this life. It was a wonderful grace of God.

And so the context is around the Year of Jubilee. And so these ideas that he will share are about God giving us all, in him, a bit of jubilee.

GOOD NEWS TO THE POOR

He starts, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." We'll come back to that. "Because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor."

The first thing that we see is that Jesus is a gospel preacher and he is speaking here of the poor. He's speaking here of the poor. Luke highlights Jesus' ministry to the poor. Jesus himself was poor, contrary to whatever goofy, nonsensical, false teaching that has been promulgated by some. Jesus was poor. Jesus' mother and father were poor, his family and friends, his hometown, poor. And what he is talking of here is that in this world, if you are poor, you are at a distinct disadvantage. You know as well as I do, if you're poor, there's not access to certain medical care. If you're poor, there's not access to certain educational opportunity. If you're poor, there just are not the same number of resources to better your life, to change, to build a new legacy.

In fact, many religions know this and they've set it up so that the rich are treated in a distinctly different way than the poor. In Hinduism, in reincarnation religions, there are the upper castes. These are the people who are rich and they have lots of spiritual privileges. For some religions, if you want to be part of, let's say, a synagogue, you can actually buy a seat. You pay for it like season tickets to a sporting event, meaning, if you have enough money you always have a guaranteed seat on high "holy" days, use that word in quotations, and you can buy yourself privilege, spiritually. Even what I would say are cults, like Scientology, charge you lots of money to go through certain classes to get taught certain things and to elevate into certain levels and the result is that those who are most affluent are most committed because it's very expensive to get to the top. I know that's all very controversial but it's all very true and most true things are very controversial.

And what Jesus says is that he comes to preach to the poor. He's offering the same grace, salvation, love of God, forgiveness of sins, and seat in heaven for rich and poor. And it doesn't infer here that Jesus is against the rich. If there are people who misunderstand this, let me tell you something that I like to tell Mars Hill all the time: when it comes to money there are four kinds of people, two kinds of rich, two kinds of poor.

There are righteous rich and unrighteous rich. The unrighteous rich, they still, they cheat, they hoard, they don't give, they don't tithe, they're not generous, that's unrighteous rich. Righteous rich, they work hard and smart and by God's grace they have much and they're good stewards of it; they're generous, they tithe, they help the poor and those in need. This book of Luke is funded, we read early on, by a man named Theophilus. His name literally means lover of God and he is called, "most excellent Theophilus." That means he is an affluent, wealthy man. That's a distinguished, cultural title. So Luke's research that culminates in the writing of this book of the Bible by the power of the Holy Spirit is paid for by a righteous rich man.

When it comes to those who are poor, there are those who are unrighteous and poor. Proverbs speaks of those who are sluggards, they won't work, drunkards who won't stop drinking, fools who won't stop gambling, people who chase fantasies and get-rich-quick schemes and they come to ruin. That's unrighteous poor.

Jesus here is speaking of the fourth category, that is, those who are both righteous and poor. They're not poor because they've sinned. These are hard-working, honest, simple folk, like his dad, Joseph, who was a carpenter. And the question is, for those who are righteous and poor, what does God have for them? Well, complete equality in the sight of God through the person and work of Jesus. Rich and poor attend Christian church together. There's no preferential seating for the rich and there's no punishment seating for the poor. Poor and the rich sit together. In community groups, it's rich and poor. There isn't preference or there shouldn't be preference within Christianity for those who are rich. Jesus' brother James talks about this. Neither should there be mistreatment or neglect of those who are poor. And what that means is those who are righteous rich need to give generously so that ministry can be done to help those who are righteous poor. And those who are righteous rich should be giving to also personally help invest in and serve those who are righteous and poor.

See, Christianity is not built on an economic model where you get what you pay for. Christianity is built that if Jesus is your God, he gives grace thoroughly, completely, equally, fully to all. And it's amazing that in our day, we live in a world where you are what you drive, you are what you make, you are what you wear, and Jesus says, "I have good news for the poor. I'm here to atone for your sins. I'm here to love you and be your God. You don't have riches but now God is giving himself to you as the greatest gift of all." That's the good news to the poor; that they have God giving himself to them as Jesus Christ.

LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES

Number two. He speaks of those who are captives, meaning they are prisoners of war, prisoners of war. It's amazing that in our day, this concept of captives is not really believed. I want you to know that there still are captives, there are slaves being held, around the world to be sure, and we need to fight for liberation and justice because people belong to God. They belong to God. They don't belong to other people. Slave trading as was practiced in America is a horrendous sin, and when you say "slavery," lots of Americans would almost immediately say, "Yes, that was a horrendous season of our nation's history and we are so glad that we no longer have slavery," but the truth is we still do. The sex industry today is slavery. Today, prostitution is slavery and it's not often dealt with like that because people say, "Well, they're prostitutes and they do nasty things and, you know, they're doing what they want to do and they're both consenting adults and no one gets hurt," and that's all a demonic lie. It's not true. And the sex trade industry is slavery. A pimp is a slave master.

We had it recently in West Seattle where some gang members were convicted of human trafficking for forcing into prostitution, beating, mistreating, enslaving young women. The *Seattle Times* has been doing, at least in Seattle, a number of investigations and reports. They say that there are between three and five hundred children, children in Seattle who are in sexual slavery. On a good Sunday at Mars Hill we'll have, let's say, a thousand children in our nursery. Imagine if every one of them disappeared because some pimp enslaved them as a sexual slave, that's what's happening.

We've had Justin and Lindsey Holcomb join our team. He's one of our newest pastors. He's been a professor at Emory University, at the University of Virginia, the women's studies and sociology departments. He's the academic dean of Re:Train. He's got two master's degrees as well and he lectures at Reformed Theological Seminary. His wife, Lindsey, ran the cases for a domestic violence shelter. They have worked hard to help, literally, get women out of slavery, sexual slavery.

It's a growing aspect of our ministry here at Mars Hill. Some women have been going out in the evenings, on the weekends, to meet with women who are prostitutes and dancers and such, and the reports are horrendous. Many of them that they meet are eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen years old—fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, in Seattle. For those of you guys who look at porn, give money to porn, give money to clubs and escorts, you are contributing to modern-day slavery. You are contributing to modern-day slavery, and Jesus says that he has come to what? To proclaim liberty to the captives. That he wants captives released. That he wants slaves set free. That he wants particularly battered and abused and neglected women to see justice.

And let me say this as well, there is another form of slavery that is self-selected. You and I are self-selecting slaves. For some of you, drugs are a slave master, alcohol is a slave master, other people's opinion is a slave master. For some of you it is food, drink, gambling, entertainment, foolishness, high-risk behavior, compulsive spending. Those are slave masters that we choose and they rule over us, they control our life. I had this horrendous discussion praying with a woman recently. She was an alcoholic and got off of alcohol but didn't meet Jesus and then got addicted to drugs and drugs now are her god, they're her functional god. Not in a saving way but in a killing way. So much so that her body is so hooked that she has neglected her own young children and the state has come and taken her babies away. Do you know what that is? Slavery. What people don't just need is behavior modification and self-esteem, they need salvation and the Spirit's power. And for us at Mars Hill, this is a big deal. We have things called redemption groups. These are people who have been abused or addicted. To use Jesus' language, they are captives that need to be set free from what has been done to them or what they have done.

You can pray for Justin and Lindsey Holcomb as they are writing a book for abuse victims. You can pray for Pastor Mike Wilkerson as he is writing a book and curriculum for redemption groups. They're starting to go out nationally and globally, and yeah, like Jesus' ministry, it's a humble, simple beginning. Up in the far left-hand corner of our country in the middle of nowhere, in a building that's hard to get too and doesn't have any classrooms and the parking is deplorable, but we believe that God, like he did with Jesus, can work in simple, humble, unexpected places through regular people who put in the time and effort to help do what? Set the captives free.

And our goal is to roll this out to Albuquerque and to roll this out nationally and globally, why? Because people need help. Because there are captives that need to be set free. And sometimes there are other churches and ministries that are the righteous poor and they just don't have the money and resources for it and if by God's grace our people would be generous, that we could give things away online and we could bring people in for training and conferences and we could record everything we do and equip those who love and serve and help others. For those towns that are like Nazareth and the pastor there does love Jesus, but doesn't have access to resources, could we even use our technology to help him, help his people. Could he start community groups, could he start redemption groups, could he help set captives free, could he take those who are addicted and abused, those who have been molested and raped, those who have been under the control of others and substances and to do what Jesus says he can do, to set captives free.

See, we don't do that, Jesus does, that's what he says. But if we belong to Jesus and he's given us the Holy Spirit, then we want to be about his business because we love him and we appreciate him and we are so grateful for his work in our life to set us as captives free. And some of us are still fighting through our own captivity, but because of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, captives can be set free.

SIGHT TO THE BLIND

He goes on, number three, to talk about those who are blind, "the recovering of sight to the blind." Jesus actually did bring sight to the blind, can you imagine that? Jesus actually gave sight to the blind. John the Baptizer, some years later, would wonder, is Jesus really the Christ? John's followers came to Jesus and asked, "Are you the one?" And he said, "Tell John this, the blind are now seeing." It's a fulfillment of prophecy. We would know that God had come when blind eyes were open. And he does this spiritually as well. Jesus can and does heal. We need to know this for ourselves. We believe that. When James says to pray for the sick, we do that and we do know and believe that God can and does heal. He heals physically. He heals spiritually. We believe that. Do I see it all the time? No. Have I seen it? Yes. I have seen physical healing. God heals. God's a healer. So we pray for that. We're not healers, we're prayers. God is the healer.

And he does this spiritually. People who are blind to the things of God, people who don't see the goodness of God in Christ, God opens their blind eyes. How many of you have had that experience? You didn't understand who Jesus was, you didn't know that he was God become a man, you didn't know that he'd lived a life that you could not live to die the death you should have died to give the gift you cannot earn, you're just blind. You may have heard about Jesus or knew something about Jesus or in your past your parents took you to church, but Jesus wasn't in your gaze. He wasn't central and essential and preeminent and prominent. Your eyes weren't fixed on him, like Hebrews says, the author and perfecter of our faith. You're blind to him and maybe it was self-selected blindness. The Bible was taught, the church was present in your life, God's people were available, and you just closed your eyes, you chose blindness. And God opens, Jesus opens blind eyes to understand the Scriptures and to know and to love and to belong to him.

LIBERTY TO THE OPPRESSED

He goes on to say, "to set at liberty those who are oppressed," and the oppression here are those who are abused. This is the girlfriend whose boyfriend, every time she gets out of line, he puts her in line. This is the mom who's got a bunch of little kids and the dad's an angry, dangerous, terrifying man and she lives under that threat of abuse all the time. We deal with so many people who have been abused, sexually abused, physically abused, emotionally abused, spiritually abused, I mean, it's horrible, horrible, horrible.

I mean, recently I was praying for a woman, she came up and said, "Pastor Mark, I just need you to pray for me." I said, "About what?" She said, "I don't know. I just feel like you should pray for me," so I put a hand on her head to pray for her. She began shaking violently. I didn't know what was going on. She said, "The last time a pastor touched me he took my virginity." Oh my gosh. That's physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, spiritual abuse. Jesus used that word "oppressed." I was doing a radio show this week for a program in Minneapolis. I'm going to preach a conference there and people were calling and I lost it. I'm not much of a crier. I mean, as I get older, I think my kids are opening my heart, my daughters especially. I was taking calls from all of these women. All the calls, for forty-five minutes, but one, were all women. "My husband is addicted to porn." "My husband has a girlfriend." "My husband doesn't want to go to church." "My husband, my husband," and my heart just broke, like, that's oppression, that's oppression. These women don't have husbands who are loving them like Christ loves the church, but oppressing them.

And the one that just slew me, where I was just choked up and holding back tears— This woman calls anonymously. She's a Christian, her husband claims to be a Christian, I don't know all the details. He's got a girlfriend that he's living with. He's left his wife to go live with a girlfriend he was having an affair with—and it's not an affair, it's adultery. Let's just use the real word. And she's a soft voice, seems like a timid spirit, and she says, "What am I gonna do? He won't talk to me. I don't know what to do." And you can just hear her voice wavering, trembling, and I said, "Well, do you have children?" She said, "We have four children under the age of six," and I just lost it because all of a sudden I heard her baby cooing and making noise in the background. See, that's oppression. That's a woman who her husband has cheated on her and committed adultery and broken a covenant and has moved in with another woman and he's abandoned her and she's got four children under six and she can't just go get a job because what are you gonna do with four kids under six? That's oppression. "To set at liberty those who are being oppressed."

JESUS' KINGDOM

Jesus here is talking about the dawning of his kingdom. That he's a King who does what? Well, he takes care of the poor and the captives and the blind and the oppressed. He did it in his ministry. He still does it today through his church and one day ultimately at the end of time, when a kingdom finally is unveiled and Jesus comes back in all his glory, do you know what? The poor will be blessed. The captives will be set free. The blind will see and the oppressed will weep no more. Until then, we do community groups and after-service prayer and pastoral counseling and church membership and church discipline and redemption groups and all we can. And by God's grace we do see this: we see broken, devastated lives put back together.

JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF ALL SCRIPTURE

We read then, Luke 4:20–21, it seems fitting to end sitting down, since Jesus did. This is actually a picture. We went to the place in Nazareth where Jesus read these Scriptures. It is believed, tradition holds that this is where the synagogue was, there's evidence for that. And after Jesus read and preached there, ultimately a church was built over the ruins of the synagogue and you can actually go to this church today. You can pray for that pastor. He is in the middle of a very intense Muslim district, when we were there the call of prayer went out. People were following us because we were Americans. It was very tense because I had a film crew. It was pretty exciting. But as we went into this little church and the Christian pastor there still preaching Jesus, and this guy must be courageous and I shook his hand and thanked him, there's a picture hanging up in the place where they believe that Jesus actually read these Scriptures and taught this message and this is actually the painting hanging on the wall in the location where all of this actually happened. It's not mythological. It's historical. It really happened.

And so verses 20 and 21, we'll close with these: "And he rolled up the scroll," Jesus did, "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.'" Jesus sits down to preach and teach. People either sat at his feet or he was elevated up on a stage, there are various ways that this could have transpired historically. And all of this is read and there's this expectation, this anticipation by these people who are poor, how will our lives change? By these people who are captives, how will we be set free? By these people who are blind, how will we see? By these people who are oppressed, how will we be vindicated? And Jesus rolls up the scroll of Isaiah and with a dramatic gaze, I am assuming, says, "Today, today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is the fulfillment of all Scripture. A prophet had not spoken for four hundred years. The rabbis were debating, has God abandoned us? Has the Holy Spirit left us? Is God no longer pleased with us? Where is the Holy Spirit? No prophet had preached. No book of the Bible had been written. No Spirit-filled man had been on the scene. No servant of God had shown up, not to this degree, for four hundred years, and Jesus says, "Today, this little room, this

little town, with these simple people, the Spirit of the Lord is on me. I'm the Christ," which means anointed one. "All of this is fulfilled in me. I'm your riches. I'm your freedom. I'm your sight. I'm your liberation. That's me," Jesus says. "It's all about me," and it is. It's all about Jesus.

THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

We only have a partial transcript. "He began to say," we don't know what the rest was.

Two things I would say. Number one, if you are a Christian or become one, you have the Holy Spirit. So far we have seen that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, that he was baptized in the Holy Spirit, that he was filled by the Holy Spirit, that he was led by the Holy Spirit. In this section we read that he was empowered by the Holy Spirit and here we say, Isaiah 61 has come true. The prophecy has been fulfilled, that the Spirit of the Lord is on him. That he is the second member of the Trinity empowered by the third member of the Trinity for the glory of the first member of the Trinity. And that if you are in Christ, you enjoy the same presence and power of God the Holy Spirit.

TODAY

Number two, one of the words that just continually rang in my ears as I was preparing for this sermon is this, "today." Isn't that amazing? The first word of Jesus' sermon, "today." It's not that you give your sins to Jesus some day. You give Jesus your sins today. You don't commit yourself to regularly gathering with people in church some day—today. You don't commit yourself to reading the Scriptures as Jesus did someday—today. You don't determine that at some point in your future you will overcome your addiction and your sin and your pride and your slavery and identity issues related to your sin or sins committed against you—that day is today. You don't confess the deep dark secrets of your heart and your mind and your life someday—that day is today. And the Bible says, if today, this day, today, you hear his voice, please, for your soul, for your salvation, for your joy, do not harden your heart, do not harden your heart.

Father God, I pray that we would seize today. That there would be a sense of urgency about us individually and corporately. That the Holy Spirit would stir and awaken in us a sense of sanctified discomfort. We want to know more. We want to be more. We want to do more, and so, Holy Spirit, we are confessing sin and unbelief and laziness. Some of us it is not studying. And some of us it is not serving. And some of us it is not caring. And some of us it is not trying. And some of us it is self-imposed slavery. We have picked gods other than you to rule over us. And for some of us it is idolatry that has oppressed us and now we are in a terrible situation or at least we see it coming. For some of us it is poverty, not just righteous poverty, but we have been horrible stewards. We've not given to your cause. We've not helped those in need. We see images rolling in from Haiti and all of a sudden we realize who Jesus is talking about when he's talking about the poor. He's not talking about those of us who have to drive a used car and struggle with a slow Internet connection. He's talking about those of us who can't find clean water and a place to sleep. We are blessed and spoiled and I pray, Lord God, that through the Holy Spirit this year we would become a more passionate, generous people. God, for some of us it is self-selected blindness. You are right in front of us. Your Word is right in front of us. Your people are right in front of us. New life is right in front of us, and we close our eyes and we're not just blind, we're foolish. So, God, I pray that today would be a great day. I pray that today we would love Jesus. That today those who have been suffering but growing would be encouraged to continue. And those who have never met you would begin a whole new life and relationship with you. Holy Spirit we can do nothing, you can do anything. So we invite you to have your way with us, in Jesus' good name, Amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.