

Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ

Lecture 5

Jesus: Proclaimer of the Good News of the Kingdom

Introduction

- Jesus begins His ministry following the arrest of John the Baptist – see Mark 1:14
“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.”
- What John had prepared the way for, what he had pointed to, all was now in readiness to become reality.
- Questions:
 - Where did Jesus’ public and preaching ministry begin?
 - In what circumstances?
 - In particular, what was at the very heart of His message?

1) The Circumstances

a) Luke 4:14-32

- i) Once again Luke highlights the activity of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus – He returns from His encounter with Satan “in the power of the Spirit” (v.14)
- ii) Jesus begins His public ministry calling God’s chosen people to hear God’s voice and to receive God’s Servant
- iii) He begins by teaching, preaching and doing great and mighty deeds which give clear proof of Who He was
- iv) He declares the primary reasons He has come to earth:
 - (1) to forgive sin
 - (2) to set free those imprisoned by sin, the fear of death and Satan’s control
 - (3) to destroy the works of the evil one (1 John 3:8)
 - (4) to pronounce the Day of the LORD and the coming of the Kingdom

b) Nazareth

- i) Note Jesus' early popularity – see Luke 4:14-15.
- ii) Note the place where Jesus begins His ministry = in His home town – see Luke 4:16, He begins His ministry in His home town, Nazareth – He first goes home, among the people who know Him best including His mother, brothers and sisters as well as the others who knew Him so well as “Joseph’s son” or as “the carpenter” etc. – to the place where He was raised (v.16) and where He customarily went (also v.16 – “as was His custom”). This means that Jesus didn’t enter upon the stage of ministry through a back door (i.e. in some isolated, distant place where He wasn’t yet known) – rather He was led by the Spirit to step out upon the stage of ministry through the front door – through the very place where He was already well known.
- iii) Note the scene for this early ministry = in His home-town synagogue¹ – He went straight to the place where the regular Jewish “gathering place” (to the place where they regularly met for teaching = synagogue) – this was the synagogue in His own home town.
- iv) Note His purpose = to begin opening the veil for those who had ears to hear:
 - (1) Jesus reads from a clearly messianic OT passage: Is.61:1-2; 58:6 – it’s not clear how this passage was chosen – whether it was the selected passage for that day (God’s sovereign overruling of such matters) or Jesus’ deliberate choice – but it is clear that He “found the place” in the Scriptures where these words are recorded
 - (2) His purpose was to announce the most important message: “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,” cf. how God sent His Spirit “upon” the prophets of

¹ **SYNAGOGUE** *sunagoge* (συναγωγή, 4864), properly “a bringing together” (*sun*, “together,” *ago*, “to bring”), denoted (a) “a gathering of things, a collection,” then, of “persons, an assembling, of Jewish religious gatherings,” e.g., Acts 9:2; an assembly of Christian Jews, Jas. 2:2, RV, “synagogue” (KJV, marg.; text, “assembly”); a company dominated by the power and activity of Satan, Rev. 2:9; 3:9; (b) by metonymy, “the building” in which the gathering is held, e.g. Matt. 6:2; Mark 1:21. The origin of the Jewish “synagogue” is probably to be assigned to the time of the Babylonian exile. Having no temple, the Jews assembled on the Sabbath to hear the Law read, and the practice continued in various buildings after the return. Cf. Ps. 74:8. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words)

old in order to accomplish great and mighty things as well as to prophesy and speak the word of the Lord (see Judges 6:34; 14:6,19; 1 Samuel 10:6,10; 16:13; Ezek.11:5)

(3) Note that in His use of Isaiah 61:1-2, He purposefully leaves out “and the day of vengeance of our God” as this is part will be fulfilled in His Second Coming)

v) Note the entrance of God’s Servant / Prophet coming among God’s people in order to preach the Good News and to proclaim the great saving works of the LORD (the Good News for the poor, the oppressed, the blind, the downtrodden) – a clear declaration not just of Jesus’ forthcoming ministry but of His Person – where He fit into the kingdom of God, i.e. as the One who would set captives free et al so that God might have a people for Himself, a people reigning and ruling with Him.

vi) Jesus then makes certain declarations of great significance:

(1) TODAY Scripture (prophecy) is being fulfilled in your hearing – see Luke 4:21²

(2) Jesus demonstrates that He knows and discerns the condition of their hearts – on the one hand, it seems that He is treated as a popular figure among them, but in reality Jesus knows that they are fickle and will suddenly change from peaceful to violent, from quietly listening to the Word of the Lord to running riot with mob rule – He uncovers the true

² ***The neighbors’ reaction*** (Luke 4:22). Jesus’ announcement of God’s grace (His “gracious words”) was met with amazement. The Greek word translated “marveled” is neutral, and indicates neither positive nor negative emotions. But soon the crowd turned antagonistic. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they began to mutter.

Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, the supposed son of Joseph. He had lived among them, very possibly walking each day to the nearby city of Sephoris to work as a carpenter. Jesus was undoubtedly known as a good neighbor, but He had taken no advanced theological training. Jesus was just one of them—an ordinary Jew of Galilee, a province whose people were looked down upon by the elite of Judea as less committed to God and His Laws than they should be.

And now Jesus claimed to be the Messiah! To his neighbors Jesus must have seemed to be putting on airs, despite the reputation He was gaining beyond their little town.

Richards, L., Pegoda, D., & Gross, P. 2001. *Every teaching of Jesus in the Bible*. Includes index. T. Nelson: Nashville

condition, certainly with the purpose that they will recognise their hidden condition and return to the Lord with a contrite spirit

- (3) Jesus is not there to be a popular preacher, to gather around Himself a “popular movement” of people who followed Him because they agreed with and liked what He had to say – He is God come among men exposing the real condition of their hearts through His incisive teaching and commentary
- (4) Jesus’ reference to Gentiles was the issue that most stirred up a fighting and negative reaction – see vs.23-27³ – through His commentary on this text, Jesus is declaring that the Good News to the poor, the oppressed, the downtrodden et al is a message for peoples of all backgrounds and races, not just the Jews – in this way Jesus exposes their hearts that were controlled by a passionate Jewish hatred for the Gentile “dogs” (remember that Gentiles believers were the first to receive this Gospel in the first century) – He had come to be the Saviour of the world, of all peoples – Jesus is here demonstrating that He has not imbibed this Jewish prejudicial mindset from Nazareth.

vii) Their reaction is immediate – see vs.28-31 – they were bent on getting rid of Him by hurling Him to His death over some cliff, down on to some jagged rocks – but Jesus in absolute control of the moment walks through the crowd and on to His next ministry assignment.

c) Capernaum⁴

³ *Jesus’ claim rejected* (Luke 4:23–27). The hostility of the crowd must have been palpable. Jesus responded to the growing hostility by pointing out a historical fact: “no prophet is accepted in his own country” (v. 24). The history of the Jews was filled with stories of prophets like Jeremiah, Amos, and Ezekiel, whose contemporaries refused to accept them or their message. The response of the Nazarenes to Jesus fit a long-established pattern, for God’s people had long been stiffnecked and rebellious (Acts 7:51, 52).

Jesus then pointed to two incidents in Israel’s history. The prophet Elijah had been sent to a widow in pagan Sidon, although there were plenty of widows in Israel. And Elisha had healed the Syrian general Naaman of leprosy although there were many lepers in his homeland. The implication was clear. If God’s own people would not welcome their Messiah and His message of God’s grace, the Messiah would offer His gifts to Gentiles. And Gentiles would experience the healing that Israel refused to accept!

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- i) Jesus now moves on to Capernaum where He continues His teaching ministry, teaching the people on the Sabbath day (see v. 31 [NLT] = “every Sabbath day”).
- ii) Once again Jesus enters fully into the life of the Jewish nation including their religious activities – come in the flesh as a Jewish man, willingly making Himself subject to the present Jewish religious practices though not placing Himself under the control of the “false shepherds” of the day
- iii) The Gospel writers – Luke, Mark – emphasise the *authority* displayed in Jesus’ teaching ministry – see Luke 4:32; Mark 1:22,27.
- iv) The authority of Jesus’ teaching must be seen in connection with the Spirit of the LORD who is “upon” Jesus – through the Spirit of the Lord He proclaims the Word (logos = message) of the Lord – God is speaking through His Servant to His people – with divine authority – not like the Pharisees and the scribes who loved to debate all aspects of the Law, looking into all sorts of minor interpretations, with their speculations (cf. 2 Tim.2:14)

2) The proclamation

a) Luke 4:42-43

- i) The message that John had proclaimed now becomes Jesus’ message: "The time has come," he said. *"The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:15; cf. Matt.4:17).⁵

Capernaum

Early in his ministry, Jesus made his home in Capernaum, after his rejection in Nazareth. He used the town as his base to travel out into Galilee and probably stayed in the home of Simon and Andrew, where he had healed Simon’s mother-in-law. He healed many people in the town, which drew large crowds, and gained it a reputation as the place where Jesus worked miracles (Luke 4:23). Jesus later attacked Capernaum for its lack of response to him (Luke 10:15).

⁵ “The word kingdom (Greek *basileia*) may mean (1) the exercise of sovereignty, a government; (2) the governed community; and (3) the place or territory where sovereignty is exercised. (Quote from O. Cullmann.) In the context of Jesus’ preaching it is specifically related to the arrival of a new age characterized by the sovereign reign of God in his Son. It deals with a new order of life. It is a decisive moment, the *kairos* (the appropriate time) of God, in which his sovereign will appears among men in a concrete, personal, yet cosmic form. It implies the formation of a new community and the exercise of God’s sovereign rule over all principalities and powers. Hence, it is accompanied by

- ii) The centrality of the message of the KINGDOM is clear from the frequency it is referred to in the synoptic Gospels:
 - (1) Mark – 15 times
 - (2) Luke – 39 times
 - (3) Matthew – 46 times
 - (4) Cf. John – 3 times

- iii) See Luke 8:4-18; 13:18-21; 17:20-21 for some other passages where Jesus teaches concerning the Kingdom of God. Cf. Psalm 24:7-10; 47:2,7; 103:19; 145:11-13.

- iv) Jesus never defines what He means by “the kingdom” to His hearers – nor do His hearers ask for an explanation or definition because every Jew already had a clear idea of what this Kingdom would mean. It was at the very heart of their hopes and life. From the OT beginnings of God’s nation, this was referred to, prophesied about and hoped for.

- v) For the Jews the kingdom of God was NOT a realm, eg the Roman empire with some form of human administrative system for ruling over a people – it was solely God’s rule over His holy people, Israel.

“Though the Lord had reigned over his creation from the very beginning, he began to rule over a nation chosen by grace when he made his covenant with Abraham. He had confirmed his promises by delivering the Israelites from the land of Egypt into a land of their own, revealing to them his laws, and raising up for them a priesthood, a temple, and a line of kings. Even though these symbols of his presence sometimes yielded to the shocks and bruises of history, one thing remained sure. Israel’s future, like her past, belonged to God. He alone was King. Despite the nation’s persistent disobedience and periodic rebellions, God’s firm purpose was to prepare Israel for that day when he would exercise his rule directly and totally over the whole world.” (New Testament Speaks, Glenn Barker, William Lane & J. Ramsey Michaels; Harper & Row, 1969; p.82)

- vi) The question that divided God’s people in Jesus’ day was how God would bring His kingdom on earth? Would it come through His decisive intervention

signs and wonders (Mk.1:27) and the call to repentance and faith (Mk.1:15). (The Church and Its Mission, O.Costas: 65)

in the political arena? Or would it come about supernaturally? Could the coming of God's kingdom be hastened or speeded up by the actions of certain individuals ("... 'taking upon themselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven' in prayer and good works?" – NT Speaks: 82)? What would the nation of Israel's role be in the coming of God's kingdom? Would God take action by raising up a messianic king in the line of King David in order to avenge past wrongs and restore Jewish fortunes and bring them back to their former glory (especially the glory experienced during the reigns of Kings David & Solomon)?

vii) Jesus' proclamation concerning the Gospel of the Kingdom spoke right to the very heart of Israel's identity and sense of destiny. Nevertheless Jesus introduced at least three new emphases:

- (1) A shift in the chronology or timing of the coming of the Kingdom – Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom to be “*near*” or “at hand” – see Luke 10:9-11 – John and Jesus' proclamation concerning the Kingdom were essentially identical except for one important factor: Jesus' word actually was instrumental in bringing in God's kingdom of which He spoke – the coming of the kingdom may be future but the reality and the power of the kingdom was present (see also Matt. 11:12; Luke 17:20) – “It can no longer be thought of in future terms alone, for the future belongs only to those who in the present moment welcome its redemptive power.” (NT Speaks 83)
- (2) A shift in the sphere of penetration of the Kingdom – Jesus agrees with John the Baptist and the OT prophets that judgment belongs to the final manifestation of God's rule (= “the day of the LORD” – a day of wrath and judgment with the coming of the Messiah) – for Jesus, however, this day has now begun with His coming and His ministry – Jesus' purpose wasn't just to proclaim the Kingdom but to bring about its penetration in the world right to the very heart of the strongholds of evil – hence His preaching was accompanied by the manifestation of kingdom power pushing back and overcoming the power of the kingdoms of this world – those bound and afflicted by Satan are set free – see Luke 4:33-37; 8:2; 11:14; 13:16 – when the disciples report this successes in ministry, Jesus responds by telling of His seeing Satan falling “like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18) – whenever Jesus subdues the powers of darkness, He is doing so “*by the finger of God*” (“*But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the*

kingdom of God has come to you.” Luke 11:20) – “Wherever he acts to effect God’s reign, a skirmish with the powers of evil has been waged and won.” (NT Speaks 83)

- (3) A new understanding of the Kingdom as to how it affects Israel – Jesus never once supported the vision of a political victory over Rome and Israel’s other enemies – He never once encouraged the Jews to dream that He would lead them and an army against their enemies in order to restore the Kingdom to David’s former earthly glory – whenever people wanted to push Jesus to become this kind of king, He withdrew into seclusion (John 6:15) – some commentators even believe that in Judas’ mind, his betrayal of Jesus was motivated by his frustration concerning the coming of the kingdom and thus he wanted to force Jesus’ hand to bring about the Kingdom by force – Jesus’ continually focused upon a kingdom that is not of this world (i.e. does not arise by human effort or follow the patterns of this world – “world” referring to this temporal sphere) see John 18:36 – however, Jesus needed to speak about the Kingdom with guarded tones so as not to arouse both the hopes of the Jews or the suspicions of the Roman authorities – “His purposes were not political but redemptive in nature; they were not national but universal in scope.” (NT Speaks: 84)

b) The call to decision

- i) Jesus had not come to provide new information concerning the kingdom but to call men to decision – not to serve two masters (Matt.6:24) or to put off taking a decisive stand for the Kingdom of God – the time had come for them to respond: NOW! No longer was God’s action “sometime in the future,” *but* “*now*” – this matter could not be treated carelessly or flippantly but with deliberate action and utmost urgency.
- ii) Jesus likened the decisive nature of their action to the following:
 - (1) to a man planning to build a tower – Luke 14:28-30
 - (2) to a king confronted by hostile forces – Luke 14:31-32
- iii) If a person hearing Jesus’ call to respond in view of the coming judgment takes action, then God is ready to forgive and heaven responds with great rejoicing – Luke 15:7,10

- iv) However, the decisive action required for entering God's Kingdom (= repentance) is not just a one-off response/decision – rather the call is a call to a life of radical commitment and obedience covering every aspect of one's life because the Kingdom is a total and absolute rule of the King over every area of the lives of His subjects.

- v) The urgency of taking a decisive stand concerning God's Kingdom also implies that no excuses or reasons for postponing the response are acceptable – Luke 14:16-24 – not even legitimate family concerns/responsibilities are permitted for postponing the response – Luke 9:59-62; also Luke 14:26 (cf. Mark 8:36f).

- vi) Ultimately Jesus speaks of deciding for Christ and His Kingdom in POSITIVE terms – the Kingdom is not a burden imposed upon a person but the wonderful climax to all his searching:
- vii) Choosing the Kingdom means laying aside anxiety and finding peace and rest – Matt.6:33
- viii) The wonderful realities and benefits of the kingdom are so special that no sacrifice will be considered too great – Matt.13:44-46
- ix) Those who are invited to join in the King's banquet consider themselves fortunate, greatly blessed – Luke 14:12-14, 21-24

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