

# Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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## Luke's Gospel: Jesus at Nazareth and Capernaum

"THE DEVIL DEFEATED!" might well have been the headline in Israel of old. "The man they call Jesus, though physically weak after forty days of fasting, has managed to overcome the testing trickery of the devil! By correctly quoting the Word of God, he has sent the arch-enemy of God packing. Following this great victory, he has returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. He had been led by the Spirit of God into the wilderness to confront Satan. Now, by that same Spirit, he has entered into His public ministry, performing miracles which prove that the authority of his teaching is indeed from God. Is this the great light predicted by Isaiah the prophet so long ago? He prophesied, *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"* (Isaiah 9:2) Jesus certainly seems to be fulfilling this prophecy because he is travelling around all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom. But there's more! He's healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. As a result, His fame is spreading rapidly throughout Galilee, Syria, Decapolis and Judea."

Such a report leads us into the passage of Scripture to be studied today - Luke 4:14-44. We have seen that Jesus had returned to Galilee and, in Luke 4:15, we read: *"And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all."* The synagogue was a place of gathering. It was there the Galileans met on Sabbath days and weekdays, to read and pray. There they would hear the Scriptures explained. Christ was afforded opportunities to read and teach in these gatherings. The people were impressed with His teaching because we read that He was *"glorified by all"*.

In Luke 4:16, we find that Jesus travelled to Nazareth: *"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read."* The meaning of the name "Nazareth" is difficult to ascertain; but it was a town that was despised by other Jews. We only have to read the words of Nathanael to Philip in John 1:46 to see this: *"And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* Philip invited him to come and see for himself.

Philip was already convinced that Jesus was the Christ. Nathanael came to meet Jesus. Following a brief conversation with Him, Nathanael exclaimed, *"Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel"* (John 1:49). Nathanael recognised Him as the Son of God because, during their talk, Jesus had shown Himself to be omniscient (all-knowing). Hence, the best Person this world has ever known came from the despised city of Nazareth.

This particular Sabbath, Jesus was given the privilege to read from the book of Isaiah; but He Himself selected the passages. It was mainly from Isaiah 61:1-2 which He read: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord"* (Luke 4:18-19). After closing the book, He gave it to the minister, and sat down. He then said to the congregation: *"This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears"* (Luke 4:21). What an amazing statement! He, the man who grown up among them, was claiming to be the Anointed One - the Messiah of God - prophet, priest and king! The section He had read spoke of the work He was to do in grace during His first coming. The verses that immediately follow these in Isaiah speak of the characteristics that accompany His second advent in power and begin with "vengeance".

The *"Spirit of the Lord"* is none other than God the Holy Spirit. Here, He is seen as being "upon" the Lord Jesus. This Spirit came upon Him at His baptism (Matthew 3:16). This fulfilled Isaiah 11:1-3 where we read: *"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears..."* The rod out of the stem of Jesse is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Branch predicted in the Old Testament. He is the Messiah - the King, the Man, the Servant, the Priest and the LORD Himself. All the attributes of the Holy Spirit are found in Him.

These qualities empowered Him to do the work of God as a dependent man on earth.

Firstly, He was *"to preach the gospel to the poor"* (Luke 4:18). The word for "poor" means "beggar" or "pauper". Such people have nothing to hinder them from receiving the good news of salvation preached to them. They may be poor materially, but they are also the poor in spirit. The Lord Jesus taught that they would gain the kingdom of heaven

(Matthew 5:3). The fact that the poor are highlighted reminds us of the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26 as far as the Christian calling is concerned. He stated: *"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called..."* Let us always promote the preaching of the Gospel to the poor for there we will find a positive response!

Secondly, He would *"heal the broken-hearted"* (Luke 4:18). The broken-hearted are those who have been completely crushed by life. They have been humbled by their pain and distress, so much so that they are inconsolable. Christ was sent to heal people in this condition. Through His power, wisdom and understanding, He was able to cure them. His teaching would bring the joy of pardoning grace to their souls and remove their fears. His embrace would bring them hope. Christ was uniquely empowered to do this work; but as His representatives on earth in this present day, we should show the same compassion towards those whose hearts have been crushed.

Thirdly, He was *"to preach deliverance to the captives"* (Luke 4:18). Those who had been captured in war were to be set free. Israel itself was under Roman rule at the time of Christ. Captives could be saved by transferring them into a different kingdom entirely, the kingdom of God. Of course, all men are captives to sin and Satan; but Christ, in His ascension to heaven, was to lead captivity captive (Ephesians 4:8). Through His death and resurrection, He would destroy the power of the devil and deliver lost souls from their sin. Hebrews 2:14-15 states: *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."* As to sin, Romans 4:25 tells us He *"...was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."*

Fourthly, He would *"preach recovering of sight to the blind"* (Luke 4:18). Here the blindness is viewed as a dark dungeon that needs to be opened to allow light to enter. The Lord Jesus made blind eyes see in the physical world (Luke 7:22); but He also opens minds that have been blinded by Satan. 2 Corinthians 4:4 reads: *"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* By the Spirit's power such minds can be opened.

Fifthly, He would *"set at liberty those who are bruised"* (Luke 4:18). The word for "bruised" also means "crushed" but it is not a matter of healing but one of freedom. It gives the impression that this set of bruised people was being oppressed.

Sixthly, He would *"preach the acceptable year of the Lord."* This is a reference to the Year of Jubilee during which there was a proclamation of liberty; release of debts; restoration of inheritances, and cessation from work (Leviticus 25:8-20). Christ, in His Spirit-directed ministry, was to herald a wonderful day of grace that would result from His sacrificial death, for the trumpet used to announce the Jubilee of old was sounded on the Jews' Day of Atonement.

Also, we can see, to some extent, these things experienced by Christ Himself. One has written:

*The poor were known by Thee, O Lord,  
Thy word they would believe.  
But, Thou, the holy Son of God,  
Wouldst poverty receive.*

*The broken hearted, Thou didst see,  
And healed them in Your love.  
Reproach once broke Thine own heart, Lord,  
And set Thy prayers above.*

*The captives Thou didst free by power  
And joy was their blest gain.  
But wicked hands arrested Thee.  
Thy blood they sought to drain.*

*Darkness was turned to light, dear Lord,  
As blind were made to see.  
But soldiers took away Thy sight  
When they blindfolded Thee.*

*Those bruised by men, Thou hast set free;  
Oppression lost that day.  
But bruised for our iniquities,  
God's grace Thou didst display.*

*The Spirit's power in Thee was seen  
With love beyond compare.  
His fruit abounded in Thee, Lord,  
With kindness and with care.*

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Initially, all bore Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth, but the teaching that followed would sting the congregation and Christ would be rejected by them. Realising they had doubts because He was seen by many as the son of Joseph, He said to them: *"Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country."*

As ever, the Jews, generally, were not content with His word; they wanted a sign as proof that He was indeed the Messiah. After all, they had heard of the signs that He had performed elsewhere. Instead of giving them one, He went on to state a general principle, namely, *"No prophet is accepted in his own country"* (Luke 4:24). He showed them that a prophet would be accepted in other countries by reminding the congregation that God sent Elijah to a Gentile widow who lived in Sarepta, a city of Sidon. She had been fed miraculously during a time of famine because she accepted the word of Elijah the prophet (Luke 4:25-27, see 1 Kings 17:1-24). It was the same with Naaman the Syrian, who, finally, taking the word of Elisha the prophet to heart was miraculously healed of leprosy at the River Jordan (see 2 Kings 5:1-19). Today, we find the word of God in the Bible. Do we take Him at His word or do we want to see miracles? *"Faith comes [to us] by hearing and hearing [comes] by the word of God"*, not by miracles (Romans 10:17).

At another time, Jesus had said: *"...An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas"* (Matthew 12:39). The sign of Jonas the prophet represented the resurrection of Jesus. Was there any greater miracle than that! The wonder of His resurrection from among the dead leaves us all without excuse for our unbelief.

Realising that the Lord Jesus was rebuking them for their lack of faith, all those in the synagogue were filled with anger (Luke 4:28). What a change! They rose up, drove Him out of the city and brought Him to the brow of the hill on which the city was built (Luke 4:29). They were fully intent on throwing Him over its precipice. But His time was not yet come. If they wanted a miracle, here was a minor one because the passage goes on to state: *"...he passing through the midst of them went his way"* (Luke 4:30). The people of Nazareth had rejected Him.

The Lord Jesus then journeyed to Capernaum (Luke 4:31) where, firstly, we discover the power of His teaching because the people, hearing Him, were astonished at His doctrine (Luke 4:32). Unlike the teaching of others, His word was given with a unique authority.

Secondly, we see His power over demons. On one occasion there was, in the synagogue, a man who was possessed by a spirit of an unclean devil. Addressing Jesus, he shouted, *"Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God"* (Luke 4:34). The demon speaks for himself and the man. We see this in the use of the pronoun "us". He recognises Christ as Jesus of Nazareth and the Holy One of God. There are many scripture references that speak of God as the Holy One of Israel<sup>1</sup>. Holiness is an attribute of God's nature. Hence, there is a direct indication that Christ, being the Holy One of God, is the Son of God who is God (see Hebrews 1:8). What followed certainly demonstrated the power of God because Jesus commanded the spirit of the unclean demon to be quiet and to leave the man. We see this because He uses the singular word "thy" for "you" in Luke 4:35: *"Hold thy peace, and come out of him."* The demon threw the man down and came out of him without causing any injury. The people who saw this were astonished and wondered at Christ's supernatural ability and power over unclean spirits (Luke 4:36).

Thirdly, we see His power over sickness (Luke 4:38-39). He went to the home of Simon (Luke 4:38) who was one of His disciples. Simon's mother had a severe fever (Luke 4:38). Those who were there pleaded with Him on her behalf. Ever responsive to the prayers of the faithful, He stood over her and rebuked the fever (Luke 4:39). It left her and she rose up immediately and, being fully well, attended to their needs (Luke 4:39).

It seems that Jesus remained at the house for we next read of the sun setting (Luke 4:40). This marked the end of the Sabbath Day because the evening began a new day in the Jewish table of time. It was then that all those who were diseased in some way were brought to Him. Faith was being exercised by many. Note the little word with a huge meaning, *"All"* (Luke 4:40). What a busy time! Jesus laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. All those brought were healed and that without exception! The fact that He laid His hands on each of them emphasises His personal approach in identifying with the suffering of individuals. Oh, let's bring lost souls to Him in prayer. Let's bring them under the sound of His word. He is able to save to the uttermost! (see Hebrews 7:25).

Furthermore, those who had demons were set free. Many of these beings cried out knowing and proclaiming Jesus to be Christ, the Son of God! The Lord Jesus rebuked them for doing so (Luke 4:41). He didn't need and didn't desire the witness of demons.

This healing ministry may have continued deep into the night, because the next thing we read is: "...when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place" (Luke 4:42). It was customary for Jesus, as the Dependent Man and the Perfect Servant of God, to seek out a quiet place where He could pray without interruption. In Mark 1:35 we read of the same occasion: "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." Beloved Christian, do we exercise this kind of dependence upon God or are most of our prayers snatched away by the hustle and bustle of the day?

On this occasion, the people sought Him out (Luke 4:42). They came to Him. They pleaded with Him to stay with them. Oh, that this were the desire of people today!

Jesus told them that He had to go to other cities to preach the kingdom of God (Luke 4:43). In the words: "...for therefore am I sent" (Luke 4:42), He reveals that He was determined to continue the work which God the Father had given Him to do. The Greek verb for "sent" here seems quite similar in structure to that for the noun "apostle". He was not only representing God but had the authority of God also. In Hebrews 3:1-3 we read: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses **was faithful** in all his house. For this **man** was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house."

In the King James Bible, Luke 4:44 states: "And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee." He had His work cut out because the Galilee of New Testament times had more than two hundred towns. So the Lord Jesus faithfully progressed the purpose of God for His life. May we progress the purpose of God for ours!

Let these words of Kate Wilkinson be our prayer today:

*"May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,  
Live in me from day to day,  
By His love and power controlling  
All I do and say.*

*May the Word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through His power.*

*May the peace of God my Father  
Rule my life in everything,  
That I may be calm to comfort  
Sick and sorrowing.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him - exalting, self - abasing,  
This is victory.*

*May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,  
As I seek the lost to win,  
And may they forget the channel,  
Seeing only Him."*

<sup>1</sup> References to "The Holy One of Israel" - 2 Kings 19:22; Psalm 71:22, 78:41, 89:18; Isaiah 1:4, 5:19, 5:24, 10:17, 10:20, 12:6, 17:7, 29:19, 29:23, 30:11, 30:12, 30:15, 30:29, 31:1, 37:23, 41:14, 41:16, 41:20, 43:3, 43:14, 43:15, 45:11, 47:4, 48:17, 49:7, 54:5, 55:5, 60:9, 60:14; Jeremiah 50:29, 51:5; Ezekiel 20:39, 39:7.

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