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Luke 4:14-30

7th Message

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DIVINE MANDATE

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

The question I would like to ask you today is, do you have a vision [statement] for your life? Or perhaps I should better rephrase the question: Do you know what God's vision for your life is? Do you believe he even has one? "Mandate" may be more accurate since it conveys an authoritative commission whereby you are acting on behalf of a higher authority. Ten years ago Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, published his book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. The book struck a cord among evangelicals, recording sales of 32 million. The book's success highlights the fundamental need we humans have to know with certainty what our God-given purpose in life is. Who wants to live a wasted life?

Organizations need a clear vision as well, or else they flounder in a sea of ambivalence, indecision, and poor planning. Our elders have been pondering this issue for quite some time and last month they sought the mind of the Spirit and came up with what they think should be our "vision statement" for the coming year.

In our text today Jesus sets forth his divine mandate before his hometown synagogue in Nazareth. As we reflect on this historic homecoming, we will discover three essential ingredients needed for our vision statement:

1. What has God *called* me to do? This gives you focus, to say "yes" to the best and "no" to all that is merely good.
2. How does my calling fit into the *overall plan* of what God is doing in this age? This gives you *significance* that you're playing a role in a drama much larger than yourself.
3. What are the *means* by which it will be accomplished? This gives us *realistic expectations*.

People who truly know who they are and what they are called to do are inspiring to be around. Their "yes" is "yes" because they've learned the freedom of saying "no" without worrying whether they are disappointing others, especially their parents or their children. They work hard, but they are not harried. They live balanced lives with healthy boundaries, so they don't burn out by overextending themselves. As they age, they may slow down, but their passion doesn't wane as they bring more experience, tenderness and care to what they do. At the end of life they can stand before the Lord and say with confidence the words that Jesus spoke to his father: "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4).

I. The Setting: Praise in Galilee (Luke 4:14-15)

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. (Luke 4:14-15 ESV)

Luke begins the account of Jesus' public ministry with a brief summary of the impact his teaching had in Galilee. Luke doesn't tell us the reasons why Jesus chose Galilee as the center of his ministry, but

Matthew explains it was to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that the light of the gospel should appear where the need was the greatest.

**"The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—
the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned." (Matt 4:15-16).**

For the eleventh time in the gospel, Luke makes mention of the Holy Spirit. The one who was conceived by the Spirit, endowed by the Spirit after his baptism, and strengthened by the Spirit in wilderness, arrives in Galilee in the power of the Spirit. In contrast to the rabbis, Jesus' teaching exhibited an authority and power that made hearts come alive and burn. The response throughout Galilee was overwhelmingly positive, "being glorified by all."

Luke, the master storyteller, doesn't tell us the content of what Jesus taught that won him universal praise, until he comes to his hometown in Nazareth. You can imagine the anticipation when Jesus' townspeople heard that their native son was coming home after being so highly acclaimed throughout Galilee. It was standing room only in the synagogue that Sabbath.

Homecomings are often dense with emotion. Jesus' was no different. Kenneth Bailey explains that though Galilee was "Galilee of the Gentiles," the Maccabean rulers of the second century sought to conquer the area by moving Jewish settlers from Judea onto the land in Galilee. Nazareth became one of the all-Jewish settlements. "Colonial enclaves, be they Greek, Roman, British, American or Jewish have a strong tendency, in any age, to be politically, culturally and religiously self-conscious and intensely nationalistic."¹ How will Jesus' teaching be received in such a setting? Your task today is to discover where you fit in the story.

II. The Isaiah Scroll in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21)

A. "As was his custom, he went to the synagogue" (Luke 4:16)

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.

Luke tells us that Jesus made it his habit not only to attend synagogue services regularly, but he also took on the role of one who read and expounded the meaning of the Scriptures. The reading and exposition of Scripture was the major focus of synagogue worship, and remained so for the apostles (1 Tim 4:13). Jesus' example is a rebuke to those who choose not to attend church because they "don't get anything out of it." The godly imitate their master not only by faithfully gathering with other believers for weekly worship, but also by contributing however they are gifted.

Synagogue liturgy of the first century was probably not much different than you might experience in an orthodox synagogue today. The service opened with the recitation of **blessings** in connection with

the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut 6:4-6). The *Shema* was followed by prayer and then readings from the Scriptures (in Hebrew, followed by translation in Aramaic) – first from the Pentateuch and then a related passage from the Prophets. They did not have regular paid teachers to deliver a sermon or word of exhortation, but a layperson (called a “synagogue ruler”) led the liturgy and called anyone he considered worthy to deliver the sermon or give a word of exhortation. At the conclusion of the sermon a benediction was given.

B. Today is the DAY! (Luke 4:17; 20-21)

Luke invites us into the service at the moment when Jesus stood up to read from the prophets. Luke frames this historic moment in a chiasmic structure that is designed to cast a spotlight on the center, the text of Isaiah – Jesus’ divine mandate.

- a he stood up to read
- b the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him
- c he unrolled the scroll
- x Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6 – Messiah’s mandate
- c’ he rolled up the scroll
- b’ and gave it back to the attendant
- a’ and sat down

Jesus is given the Isaiah scroll. He carefully unrolls the scroll (almost all 24 feet of it!) and finds the place where the Spirit had inspired Isaiah centuries earlier to give voice to the “anointed” one who was to come (Isa 61:1-2). Now the Spirit brings those words to life through the breath of the one about whom they were written. After Jesus reads the text, he methodically rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant and sits down. A hush falls over the crowd and all eyes remain fixed on Jesus as they wait for the sermon. What will Jesus say? His sermon is incredibly short, yet every word is charged with meaning and emotion.

“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The implications of that statement are mind-blowing. To state it simply, the future has rushed into the present and every prophetic promise regarding the age to come finds a resounding “yes” in Jesus. When you begin to grasp that truth, your heart will burn like those of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. No longer will the Hebrew Scriptures seem like dusty dregs from an ancient archaeological dig but as God’s voice, alive, fresh and as penetrating as if the person you cared about the most was right in front of you.

The one who was endowed with the Holy Spirit pours out that Spirit upon you who believe, giving you a part in God’s renewal that will one day transform the whole creation. When we become followers of Jesus we not only receive the gift of forgiveness but also the gifts of the Holy Spirit that equips us with divine gift for ministry (1 Cor 12:4-7).

The text from Isaiah gives us the divine mandate and reveals what God is doing in the present age.

III. The Divine Mandate (Luke 4:18-19)

- The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
- because he has anointed me
- a to proclaim good news to the poor.
- b He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
- x and recovering of sight to the blind,
- b’ to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
- a’ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

The text is taken primarily from Isaiah 61:1-2 with some minor editing. Jesus inserts “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (a line

from Isaiah 58:6) before “the year of the Lord’s favor,” and omits “the day of vengeance of our God,” immediately after. Jesus’ careful editing creates a chiasmic structure that helps us interpret Jesus’ mission, not as a list containing five different objectives, but as two cohesive pairs that move in sequence toward the supreme goal (at the center).

A. A ministry of proclamation

- a to proclaim good news to the poor
- a’ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor

The ministry of the Messiah will be one where proclamation is paramount. He is both an evangelist (one who “proclaims the good news”), and a preacher (one who “announces or proclaims an official announcement). The content of the good news is amplified in the last line as “the year of the Lord’s favor.” The language is taken from the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25. Every fifty years debts were to be cancelled, slaves set free, even the land was given a year to lay fallow. If any land had been lost through unpaid debts, it was to be returned to the original clan. Because of God’s outrageous generosity and grace, individuals in Israel were given the opportunity to start over with a clean slate at least once in their lifetime.

In order to ignite Israel’s imagination for a future hope, Isaiah used the language of Jubilee to describe the redemption that awaited Israel after her rescue from exile. Jesus is claiming that Israel’s hope for the Messianic age with all of God’s blessings of a new start and a clean slate is here. Talk about good news!

The recipients of this good news are the “poor.” Who are the poor? The vocabulary of the Old Testament combines two ideas. First it describes an individual who “doesn’t have enough to eat” as a result of being disadvantaged, marginalized or oppressed. These are the “outsiders” who are cut off from the community of blessing. Secondly, it speaks of an attitude of humility or meekness that seeks after God. The premier example comes from Isaiah 62:2:

**But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble (“poor”) and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.**

Joel Green writes:

By directing his good news to these people, Jesus indicates his refusal to recognize those socially determined boundaries asserting instead that even these “outsiders” are the object of divine grace. Others may regard such people as beyond the pale of salvation, but God has opened up a way for them to belong to God’s family.²

This is why a chief tax collector like Zacchaeus could be the recipient of Jesus’ costly love. As a wealthy warlord of injustice he was despised and hated by everyone in the community. Both he and his family were deemed unclean by the rabbis. But when Jesus comes to his town, he throws all dignity to wind and runs ahead of the crowd and climbs into a sycamore tree to get a look at the one who seemed to be renewing the world with life. Jesus spent the night at his home and the wealthy tax collector was so moved that he gave half his fortune to the poor and paid back everyone he had ever defrauded.

B. A Ministry of Liberation

- b He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
- b’ to set at liberty those who are oppressed

The second aspect of Jesus’ mission is highlighted by the repeated reference to “liberty” (*aphesis*), which is better translated as “release.” In the first instance “release” is announced “to the captives,” and in the second it is secured as “the oppressed” are sent away “in release.” In Luke-Acts *aphesis* is often used with the meaning of “forgiveness” – that is, “release from sins” and “debts.” A second connotation is

“liberty from bondage.” Jesus is the “strong man,” who does battle with Satan, in order “to release” those he has bound with sickness or demonic oppression (Luke 13:10-17). The year of Jubilee is here, let the trumpet be sounded, and “proclaim liberty throughout all the land” (Lev 25:10). As Hendriksen writes,

This is a symbol of the Messianic Age, for it is only by faith in Jesus Christ that true freedom is obtained: freedom from living in constant fear, from obligation to ever so many manmade ordinances, from guilt, pollution, Satan, sin and its results. “If the Son will make you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).³

Now we arrive at the center of the text and discover the goal of Jesus’ mission.

C. The goal of ministry: “Recovering of sight to the blind”

x and recovering of sight to the blind

The last miracle Jesus performs in the gospel of Luke is giving sight to a blind beggar on the outskirts of Jericho (Luke 18:35-43). As Jesus makes his approach to the city, he is escorted by a large crowd. The blind man, hearing the noise of the crowd, inquired what the commotion was about. Kenneth Bailey is supremely helpful filling in the cultural gaps. He writes,

In the Middle East, village people show honor to an important guest by walking some distance out of town to greet the guest and escort him or her into the village... This public attention signals to the reader that a banquet was prepared in Jericho, where the famous rabbi would be expected to spend the night.⁴

As Jesus makes his approach to the city the blind man, hearing the noise of the crowd, inquired what the commotion was about. When he heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he screamed “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” The crowd, embarrassed by such an outburst, tells him to shut up, but the harder they lean on him, the louder he cries, abbreviating Jesus’ name to “Son of David.” In sharp contrast to the crowd’s attempt to marginalize the beggar, Jesus stops the procession and commands the crowd to serve the beggar by escorting him to Jesus.

Jesus has just one question for him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man responds, “Lord, I want to regain my sight.”

And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God. (18:43)

Bailey notes a Christological progression of understanding in the story,⁵ for the blind man serves as a model for spiritual sight.

Crowd: Jesus of Nazareth

Beggar: Jesus, Son of David

Beggar: Son of David

Beggar: Lord

Crowd: Praise to God (for healing by Jesus)

This is the goal of Christ’s mission – for people to see clearly who Jesus is, for to see him is to see the Father, and to know and love him, is to know and love the Father who sent him.

D. The Hometown Reception

And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

The initial reaction of the hometown crowd was quite positive. Everyone was amazed, not just at the message, but at the grace that

surrounded his words, like a fresh water stream rushing into every crack. But as they continued their discussions and dialogue a different spirit became noticeable. Though they may have rejoiced to see the announcement of a new day dawning, they resented the fact that it was one of their own, “Joseph’s son.” Mark’s gospel gives a fuller description of their conversation:

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. (Mark 6:3)

Familiarity breeds contempt. If they took offense at his sermon, wait until he gives them a word of exhortation.

IV. Personal and Pointed Application (Luke 4:23-27)

A. Provocation With Proverbs

**And he said to them,
“Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb,
‘Physician, heal yourself.’
What we have heard you did at Capernaum,
do here in your hometown as well.”
And he said, “Truly, I say to you,
no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”**

As a prophet, Jesus perceives the underlying current of their disapproval, and he refuses to let it go unnoticed. Jesus mercilessly brings it all out into the light of day. If we are honest, his reaction seems severe, if not downright rude, and makes us very uncomfortable. But we need to understand that the narrow and provincial lens through which they view Jesus is one that will bar them from entering into the kingdom.

Jesus addresses his townspeople with two proverbs that are designed to expose not only their contentious thoughts, but also their guilt. “Physician, heal yourself,” was a well-known maxim in antiquity. It implied that “one must not benefit others, while refusing the same benefits to one’s own relations.”⁶ Jesus’ answer is that his inability to benefit his hometown is not due to his neglect of family, but due to their rejection of who he is. The second proverb implicates them further. Jesus states that rejection by one’s family, though painful, in no way negates his divine calling. In fact it is the established norm for all of Israel’s prophets (a hint of the violence that awaits him both at home and in Jerusalem). To substantiate his claim he gives two examples from the days of Elijah and Elisha.

B. Politically Incorrect Illustrations

**“But in truth, I tell you,
there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah,
when the heavens were shut up three years and six months,
and a great famine came over all the land,
and Elijah was sent to none of them
but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman
who was a widow.
And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the
prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but
only Naaman the Syrian.”**

Jesus is adding fuel to the fire. One doesn’t exactly make friends by comparing the spiritual life of your contemporaries to that of the days of Elijah and Elisha. Those were the days Baal religion had become the state religion in Israel through the hideous influence of the “queen of sin,” Jezebel. God judged the land with a severe famine, and though there were many widows in Israel suffering from lack of food, Elijah was sent to none of them. He is sent to a non-Jew, a person of no status, marginalized outside the community of blessing. Even more

extreme is the example of Naaman, a Syrian general, whose disease of leprosy made him an outcast in the extreme, to say nothing of his political and military affiliations. Yet it is Naaman, an unclean, diseased Gentile and implacable enemy of Israel, who is cleansed. This is Jesus' radical definition of "good news for the poor." Jesus' audience would have preferred he proclaim "the day of vengeance of our God" upon their enemies.

With that things quickly turn ugly. Rejection turns to rage.

IV. A Benediction of Rage (Luke 4:28-30)

When they heard these things,
all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.
And they rose up and drove him out of the town
and brought him to the brow of the hill
on which their town was built,
so that they could throw him down the cliff.
But passing through their midst,
he went on his way (TNIV).

By now the real mission of Jesus comes to light and his townspeople want to stone him as if his outrageous claims made him out to be a false prophet. Luke's placement of this scene is critical in shaping our expectations for the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. Rejection, especially from those closest to us, is part of the process that God uses to further his kingdom. And yet, Jesus is miraculously protected from being thrown over the cliff. Somehow I think angels were at work, turning the tables on the devil's ploy in the wilderness (4:11). The rescue prefigures Jesus' ultimate rescue through death to resurrection. Luke's final words, though understated, give new meaning to the phrase "in the power of the Spirit." Green comments, "Having passed through the crowds, Jesus, 'went on his way' – that is, the path of obedience to God's purpose in fulfillment for which he was anointed."

The question remains, is his way our way?

After a month of focused prayer, the PBCC elders wrote a vision statement for our church for the coming year. We felt the Spirit calling us to address two areas:

vitality – make space in your life to encounter the living Jesus, and

hospitality – reach out and cultivate new relationships (i.e. cross social, economic, geographic, ethnic and gender barriers and take relational risks, to go into territory you would normally avoid and find ways to build relationships).

...*make his name known*. The final clause is intentionally left ambiguous; it is up to you to figure out whether that applies to vitality, to hospitality, to both or whether it might stand on its own!

What intrigues me is that before the elders came up with this, Terry Bloom took our young adults on a retreat and they were touched by City Impact, a ministry started a few years ago by Francis Chan.

In the early 90's Francis and his wife started Cornerstone Community Church in Simi Valley. The church grew rapidly to become one of the largest churches in Ventura County, but Chan felt he needed to address more of the Lord's mandate. So, in 2011 he left Cornerstone and planted himself in San Francisco without a plan. He quickly learned about the Tenderloin – home to 37,000 impoverished people living in 586 apartment buildings all in one square mile. Francis and a friend went into the worst building they could find and encountered squalid, inhuman living conditions. The lock on the main door was broken, walls were filthy and crumbling, people had defecated in the hallways, and the building was being used for drug dealing (even though families lived there). Chan and his friend knocked on every door in the building and asked the residents each two questions:

1. What is your greatest physical need?
2. How can we pray for you?

They started to pray and to provide as they could for the needs of the people they met, and things began to change. At the end of that first year, there were secure locks on the doors, the hallways had been cleaned up for good, there were no more drug dealers and Bible studies were happening within the building. The results were so incredible that the landlord asked City Impact to work out of the building.

Over this past year, City Impact has adopted 16 buildings and plans to adopt 50 more this year, until every single building has a church.

That's the Lord's way.

1. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, Cultural Studies in the Gospels (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 152.
2. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 211.
3. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke* (N.T.C.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 254.
4. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 172.
5. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 172.
6. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 216-17.