

The Spirit of the LORD is On Me

Luke 4: 16-30

DIG: What was so different about what Jesus did that Shabbat? What did **the Good News** mean to Messiah? In what ways did He **proclaim freedom for the prisoners and renew sight for the blind**? What was **a year of the favor of ADONAI**? What was the significance of the Lord stopping in the middle of Isaiah 61:2? How did the people respond? Why? Why did Yeshua use the examples of **Elijah and Elisha**? What was He trying to say? Why did that turn their amazement into rage? What did they do?

REFLECT: Saint Francis of Assisi once said, "Preach **the Gospel** at all times . . . and if necessary, use words." How are you "doing" **the Good News**? Is **the Spirit of ADONAI** on you? Is the Lord on your lips? Would your family, your relatives, your neighbors, or your coworkers say you are **Good News**, or "Bad News?" Why or why not? What "Gentiles" are you ministering to this week?

As the lengthening shadows of Friday's sun closed around the quiet valley, **Jesus** would hear the familiar double blast of the trumpet from the roof of the **synagogue**-leader's house, proclaiming the arrival of the holy **day**. It was **the Sabbath**. Once more it sounded through the still summer air, to tell all that work must be put aside.

As **Shabbat** morning dawned, **Jesus** returned to that **synagogue** where, as a child, a youth, and a man, **He** had so often worshiped in all humility, sitting, not up front among the elders and the honored, but far back. The old well-known faces surrounded **Him**. **Yeshua** heard the familiar words of the service, but how different they had always been to **Him** than to them, with whom **He** had mingled in common worship. It had only been a few months since **He** had left **Nazareth**, but now **He** was home again, truly a stranger among them. It was the first time, so far as we know, that **the Anointed One** taught in a **synagogue**, and non-coincidentally it was in **His** hometown of **Nazareth**.³⁸¹

The men of the small **synagogue** lifted their voices blending as one chanting the **Sh'ma** (**Deuteronomy 6:4**) and singing the words of **the Psalms**. The room was small and square, with wooden benches pressed against each wall. The Temple in Jerusalem, with its priests and animal sacrifices, was the center of Jewish life. The local **synagogue**, however, was, and still is, the lifeblood of Judaism. In the first century **the synagogue** was an intimate place that allowed the righteous of the TaNaKh to gather in a less formal setting than the Temple itself. There were no high priests, no Levites, nor any standard liturgy. Anyone was allowed to get up and read from the sacred scrolls.³⁸²

Jesus went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom of any good Jew. And He stood up to read publically from a scroll (Luke 4:16). The reader stood; the rabbi sat. To this day in a synagogue, you stand to read the Torah. This is called the *aliyah* (calling up to the *bema* or platform at synagogue). On this *bema* stood the pulpit, or lectern, the *migdal ez*, the wooden tower of Nehemiah 8:4, where the Torah and the prophets were read.³⁸³

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Yeshua. Unrolling it, He found the place (Isaiah 61:1-2a) where it is written: **The Spirit of ADONAI is on Me, because:**

(1) **He has anointed Me to announce Good News to the poor** in spirit. Although only Jesus is said to have been anointed by the Ruach HaKodesh (Luke 3:22; Acts 4:26-27, 10:38), He serves here as a model for Spirit-filled preachers and teachers today.

(2) **He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners.** This is understood metaphorically, and refers to the forgiveness of sins (Luke 1:77, 3:3, 24:47; Acts 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38 and 26:18).

(3) **And renewed sight for the blind.** This may be a reference to **the blind** that the Lord healed during His ministry: see Ek - **The Second Messianic Miracle: Jesus Heals a Deaf Mute**; Fi **Jesus Heals the Blind and Mute**; Fw - **The Yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees**; Gt - **The Third Messianic Miracle: Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**; see In - **Bartimaeus Receives His Sight**. In another sense, however, it can also refer metaphorically to those who are spiritually **blind** (Luke 1:78-79, 2:30-32, 3:6, 6:39; Acts 9:8-18, 13:47, 22:11-13 and 26:17-18).

(4) **To release those who have been crushed.** The same word translated **release** here is translated **freedom** earlier in this verse. Therefore, it is parallel with the preceding statements (especially Acts 26:18, where forgiveness of sins parallels with **release for those who have been crushed**).

(5) **To proclaim a year of the favor of ADONAI** (Luke 4:17-19 CJB). This is basically a synonym for **the Good News of the Kingdom of God** (Luke 4:43). Yeshua was claiming that **God's Kingdom** had come. In fulfillment of the prophets of the TaNaKh, salvation was now being offered to all.³⁸⁴

With each Torah portion there is also a corresponding portion of the prophets that is read. He may have read both the Torah portion and the prophetic portion, but only the prophetic portion is mentioned here. What Jesus does is He reads all of **verse 1**, but only the first half of **verse 2** (Isaiah 61:1-2a).

The reason that **Christ** stopped where **He** did was because the first half of the verse was to be fulfilled by **His** First Coming: **He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor (Isaiah 61:2a)**. And the second half of the verse will be fulfilled by **His** Second Coming: **And the day of vengeance of our God** (see my commentary on **Isaiah Ka - And the Day of Vengeance of Our God**), **to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:2b)**.

Then **He** rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and **He sat down (Luke 4:20a)**. The reader **stood**; the rabbi **sat**. Here **Jesus** assumed the position of a rabbi, sitting while teaching. They **stood up to read** the Torah, and they **sat down** to teach to Torah. So far everything was in accordance with Jewish practice at the time, except that **Jesus** did not meet the accepted number of verses required for the reading. A minimum of three verses was required and **He** read only one-and-a-half.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him (Luke 4:20b), because first, **He** read only half of what **He** was supposed to read, and secondly, what was **He** going to say? **The rabbis taught that these two verses were a messianic prophecy**. So when **He** began saying to them: **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:21)**, they understood that **He** was claiming to be the **Messiah**.

All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips. But quietly they whispered to each other: **Isn't this Joseph's son? They asked rhetorically (Luke 4:22)**. It's as if to say, "Who does this big shot think he is?" To them, **He** was the son of **Joseph** and nothing more. They were offended. Being two-faced, they instantly rejected both **Him** and **His** message. They had heard about **His** miracles throughout Galilee, but they had never seen any performed.

Jesus said to them: **Surely you will quote this proverb to Me: Physician heal yourself! Do the miracles (see Br - Jesus' First Stay in Capernaum, and Cg - Jesus Heals an Officials Son) here in your hometown that we have heard that You did in Capernaum (Luke 4:23)**. But **He** wouldn't satisfy their idle curiosity and didn't back down.

I tell you the truth (amen), no prophet is accepted in his hometown (Luke 4:24). In response to their unbelief, **Christ** reminded them that Isra'el had often responded to **the prophets** of **Ha'Shem** in unbelief. **Elijah** had appeared to an apostate nation with **God's** message of impending judgment to call **the people** to repentance. **I assure you that there were many widows in Isra'el in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon (Luke 4:24-26)**. This incident is described in **First Kings 17:1, 7, 9-24 and 18:1**. The people of Isra'el did not receive **the prophet's** message and therefore received no benefit from his ministry, but a **Gentile widow** believed **the prophet's** word and did receive benefit.

In similar fashion, **and there were many in Isra'el with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet (Second Kings 5:1-14), yet not one of them was cleansed - only Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27)**. At that time there were many lepers in **Isra'el**. But the Israelites did not believe the word of **the prophet** and turn to him for help. The only one who received help from **Elisha's** ministry was, again, a *Gentile*.³⁸⁵ **Here Jesus is already starting to hint that what the Jews will reject . . . the Gentiles will accept. Just as Isra'el was unworthy in the days of Elijah and Elisha, so they were unworthy in Christ's day.**

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard Yeshua say that God had dealt favorably with Gentiles in the past (Luke 4:28). There are those today who claim that nowhere in the New Covenant does **Jesus** specifically say "I AM God." Well, **the people of Nazareth** were not so confused about it. **They** understood exactly who **He** was claiming to be. **Their** response was that **they got up and drove Him out of town**, which foreshadowed the day of **His** crucifixion because executions were not carried out within city walls (**Leviticus 24:14**).

They took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him down the cliff (Luke 4:29). **The rabbis called this "death by the hand of God"** but, ironically, it was actually in the hands of **the people**, who might administer **"the rebels' beating"** on the spot without trial if anyone were caught openly defying of some positive teaching, whether from the Torah or the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**). **The rebels' beating** was until death.³⁸⁶

But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way (Luke 4:30). On two other occasions **the people** took up stones in the Temple to kill **Him** (**John 8:59** and **10:31**). The Adversary always tried to shortcut **God's** ordained plan for **His Son**. But **Jesus** was destined to die on a cross in Yerushalayim, not off a cliff in **Nazareth**. This was not **His** appointed time to die.

Nazareth is built in a little valley on a mountain overlooking the Valley of Jezreel. Catholic tradition teaches that **Mary**, the mother of **Jesus**, was present when **they** tried to kill **Him**. When her **Son** was led to the edge of **the cliff**, tradition says she was frightened. Therefore, there was a Catholic Church built there called, "The Chapel of Our Lady of Fright." Not stopping there, they also claim that **Jesus** leapt to Mount Tabor, which is about four miles away! Today Catholics call Mount Tabor the Mount of the Leap.

The Lord's pronouncement that **He** was indeed the long-promised **Meshiach** was meaningful because it was a microcosm that would play itself out as the Gospel unfolds. **Yeshua's** announcement that **no prophet is accepted in his hometown (Luke 4:24)** became a prediction of **His** own death in Jerusalem. Yet through **Christ's** resurrection, **He** provided deliverance for Jew and Gentile alike.

Jesus continues to **announce Good News to the poor** in spirit and **to proclaim freedom to those who have been crushed** today. But can you imagine yourself as one of those in the **synagogue in Nazareth**, hearing **the Lord** first announce that the prophecy of **Isaiah** was being fulfilled right before their eyes? You would have probably thought, "How can I really be **released** from sin, or be **freed** from guilt and hopelessness? When was the last time I felt favored by anyone, let alone **ADONAI**?"

To an Israelite in **Yeshua's** day, **a year of the favor of ADONAI** referred to the year of Jubilee in **Leviticus 25**. Every fiftieth year, all debts were to be forgiven and all slaves set free; everyone in Israel was called to celebrate and to rest, to enjoy the fruits of six years of harvest. Thanks to **Jesus Christ**, our debt of sin can be lifted from us every day; and slavery to old ways can be removed at any time by the power of **the Holy Spirit**. We can all rejoice as we hear these words!

The fact that **Messiah's** ministry was accepted for the most part by the outcasts of society, even by unbelieving **Gentiles**, threatened some Jews, and aroused murderous thoughts among them. Among **the Nazarenes**, the fact that **the maverick Rabbi** was so popular outside of **His** hometown was hard to accept. "Why should **Capernaum** get all the miracles (**Luke 4:23**)? Yet **their** response didn't faze **Him**. This would only be the beginning of the opposition **Jesus** would face as **He** made **His** way toward **His** destiny in Jerusalem.

Sometimes we may think **the renegade Rabbi** actually enjoyed stirring up controversy. **He** must have known **His** words would not always go down easily, but **He** never tried to soften them. But the fact is that **Jesus** *does* want to shake things up so that **He** can get our attention. **He** came to proclaim the **Good News** unlike anything we might expect, and if we are to listen properly, we will need to be made uncomfortable. How else will we want to part with sin and follow **Him** on the way to the cross?

*Lord **Jesus**, today **You** offer us a choice: to accept **Your** words, or to listen to the desires of our own fallen nature. Help us to be generous recipients of **Your** grace and instruments of **Your** peace. Amen. **He** is able.³⁸⁷*