

God's Favor Practicum**A Sermon by Chris Hensley****Based on Luke 4:14 – 21****Presented to Sardis Baptist Church****January 26, 2025**

Throughout my theological education I have had the privilege to sit in several practicums. These were always my favorite classes. From highly specific pastoral care in the parish to more generalized ministry practicums. I fancy myself a more practical theologian anyway and have always enjoyed taking what I have learned in the classroom setting and putting it into practice in the real world. Practicality is important for followers of Christ. While having a working understanding of the various theories of atonement is great and knowing which of those theories resonates with you the most is important, the greater importance is putting our faith or spirituality or belief system into practice. The subversive work of Christ highlighting the cruelty of the powers that be in this world and pointing out the victory of Christ over the powers of evil and cruelty in this world through his resurrection. We can explore the various atonement theories at another time in greater detail, though.

Our texts for this morning, provide two instances in both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Testament which highlight the importance of the people of God drawing on the texts to highlight their roles within the world around them. In the Hebrew text, Ezra reads the Law to the gathered people. Texts which set the people of God apart through their actions within the world and their behaviors in their interpersonal relationships and their relationship with the Divine. Remember that Jesus summarizes the Law as love of others as the self and love of God above all things. Shifting to the Christian Testament, we have Jesus beginning his ministry in earnest in the Gospel according to Luke where he too reads from a portion of the Hebrew scriptures and makes connections.

The stage is set in that Jesus is placed in the synagogue of Nazareth and is given a scroll from Isaiah from which to read and then interpret. It is unlikely that the meeting place in Nazareth had all that Luke describes here from a historical standpoint. Nazareth was home to somewhere between 200-400 people in the first century and likely would not have had the funds to have a scroll or a specific minister involved in synagogue worship who would tend to the scrolls and other responsibilities. That, though could be that Luke was more familiar with the more densely populated regions of the time. The point

that we should glean from this passage is not the historical location but Jesus' interpretation of the passage which he read.

Jesus makes six declarations in our reading in v.18 specifically. This summary is our focus as it is the practical work of Jesus which Luke summarizes in this speech which Jesus gives in Nazareth. These speeches are how historians of Greek influence would highlight the important messages of the subjects of their studies and histories in the first century. The declarations are: the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me, to preach the gospel to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to preach the favorable year of the Lord.

The Spirit of the Lord rests upon Jesus, the figure of Jesus making this declaration which the narrator of the account has already stated. An awareness of this is important for Jesus as this paints a picture that Jesus is being led by the Spirit of God. Essentially this is to say that Jesus has been declared a prophet. Further, this harkens back to Mary's song in chapter 2 and sets the tone for the work which Jesus sets about doing as being work which is supported and endorsed by God the Creator.

The Hebrew word Messiah and Greek word Christ both mean anointed one. The idea within the Hebrew bible of the Messiah is that this figure or these figures will continue in the line of David as God's choice to restore that line and bring salvation to the people of God in Israel – the Hebrew Bible people group, not the modern nation-state. Specifics about this messianic figure were debated even in Jesus' day. Was this person or angelic? Were they to be a priest ? a king? Mortal or immortal? Or some combination of these categories or something entirely different? Luke throws Jesus' hat into the ring and further states Jesus' case by stating that Jesus is Messiah because of the work which he sets about doing, specifically preaching the gospel to the poor.

This moves us into the next statement of preaching good news to the poor. This, for Jesus is not only a theory but also a practice which the followers in the larger narrative of Luke-Acts lean into heavily. There is good work done for the poor. Preaching the Gospel to the poor is not just something which is done in word, but it is done in practice, too. "Share your second coat, share your food." Jesus follows in the straightforward teaching of his cousin, John the Baptist. This is salvation for the poor, practically caring for those who struggle in the here and now, full stop. The Kingdom or Kin-dom of God is now not some far off and distant, ill-conceived fever dream of golden streets and

pearly gates. Our greatest sin, as the Church in this society, has been buying into the belief that the life to come is of greater importance than the life that is now.

We will conclude a more in-depth look at these statements with the fourth, release of the captives. The Greek word translated as release can also be translated as forgiveness. The idea here seems to be that humanity is held captive by our sin. Hear it this way – it is not some anthropomorphized devil or demon which stalks the dark places and whispers in our ears to sin. It is our own selfishness, our own lack of love for others, ourselves, and God which is sin in this life. This sin manifests itself as cruelty, marginalization, mistreatment of others, hoarding wealth, building walls to prevent care for those who need and yet lack resources.

In our passage for this morning, Jesus reads from this Isaiah text to set the tone of his ministry which will follow in the Gospel according to Luke. This also sets the tone for the work which we who claim to follow this Jesus in the here and now should be doing in this life. This life holds the Kin-dom of God. It is here and now that the poor should receive good news, where they should be cared for by those with more resources. Where those with power and

influence should seek to bring the marginalized into the margins. This is the Gospel, this is the work to which we are called. This is the work of Jesus throughout the Gospel accounts. Here Jesus draws from the Hebrew Bible and provides a template for his followers to follow within the local ministry and congregational contexts. Let us find our voice and put our faith into action in practical ways.