

Luke 4:14-30

"Living as People of Hope in 2011"

Introduction:

During the past financial year, 2010, South Africans spent close to R 216 billion (R215,825,917,451) on all forms of gambling-horse racing, lottery, casinos etc. This is more than the education budget of the state which was a total of R 165 billion. It is clear from the statistics that South Africans love to gamble and the figures testify to this fact. I am not here to comment on people's gambling habits nor the money that is spent on this wasteful lifestyle. Gambling in its simplest definition simply means to take a risk in the hope of gaining an advantage or a benefit. I simply want to highlight the fact that many South Africans gamble and many times transfer that gambling mentality to their lives as well.

As we stand on the threshold of another year, I am convinced that many people have adopted an attitude of gambling when it comes to the eternal destination. When faced with the decisions for eternity, they place their trust on things where the eternal outcome is uncertain. Jesus, on the threshold of his earthly ministry is confronting a crowd who were willing to gamble away their eternal destination.

I want us to look at this incident to see why we can live as people of hope in a society that who are willing to gamble away their eternal destination.

I. WE CAN LIVE AS PEOPLE OF HOPE BECAUSE OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS (VV.18-21)

Jesus' citation comes from Isa. 61:1-2 and, probably from Isa. 58:6. Luke appears to be summarizing the textual materials used by Jesus in the synagogue address. The normal synagogue reading will not mix the passages like this.

Jesus' citation of these two passages underlines three things about the ministry of Jesus: (a) Jesus is the bearer of the Holy Spirit; (b) Jesus the eschatological prophet who declares good news; and (c) Jesus is the one who brings release, as messianic function.

The OT of this passage is significant, as is the history of the interpretation of Isa. 61. This Servant Song-like passage describes the prophet's role in

terms used of the Servant of Isaiah especially in 42:1 and 49:1-11. The figure of Isa.61 brings a message of God's deliverance to exiles. The deliverance imagery parallels the description of the Jubilee year (Lev.25:8-17), when debts were cancelled and slaves set free every 50th year. It is picture of forgiveness and spiritual liberation which at the centre Jesus' message.

Isaiah 58 contains a prophetic rebuke of the nation Israel for denying justice to those who are in need. God declares in Isa. 58 that the fast he prefers is one that treats one's neighbour properly. Isa. 61 proclaims a time like that envisioned but not carried out by the nation in Isa.58. The two passages belong together because the release pictured in Isa.58 has Jubilee overtones and also describes in Sabbath terms, an event much like the year of the Jubilee. When Jesus applies the passage to himself, he saying that the present time is like the message of comfort that Isaiah brought to the nation. In fact, the totality of the deliverance described in now put into motion with Jesus' coming. He is the Servant par excellence.

When Isaiah prophesied in chapter 61, the people of Israel was in captivity in a foreign land. They were oppressed and wanted release from their hardship. God promised that a time is coming when the servant of Yahweh will come to deliver the people. The deliverance that this prophet will bring will be complete and bring comfort to the people. When Jesus read this passage, he is saying that with his coming, this deliverance that was centuries ago, has now been put into motion. The outcome of that deliverance will be like the year of the Jubilee.

(a) He is anointed by the Holy Spirit

Whenever the prophet of God in the Old Testament, anointed a king, it was for a special task which God has set aside for him to do. It was a task that only the individual can complete. The placement of the Holy Spirit on Jesus points to a special anointing for a very unique task. It is an election to do God's business on behalf of the people.

(b) He is Anointed for a Special Task

So the question that naturally arises is "What is this job that God has given Him? Luke uses four infinitives phrases to mark out the task that God placed on Jesus:

(1) To Preach the good news to the poor

This task is fundamental to the calling of Jesus. Who is the poor in this passage. The term operates on two levels: It refers to those who are physically poor. It is often the poor who sensed the need for God and not the wealthy. Their material deprivation often translates into spiritual sensitivity to God. The message of hope is offered to them and they are most responsive to it. On another level, it refers to those who realize that they, even though, they are not physically poor, they are spiritually impoverished. It is those of who sense their need for the Saviour because they are spiritually bankrupt. It is for the forgotten people that Jesus came and are the focus of his ministry.

(2) To proclaim release to the Captives:

Jesus' message involved proclaiming release to the captives. The original prophecy was aimed at those who were in physical captivity. The Babylonians came in the 7th century to take Israel captive and took them into exile. These people were captives but they landed there because of their sin and rebellion. God is calling everyone who is held captive because of sin to come to him and accept his forgiveness as provided in Jesus, who sets free the oppressed.

(3) To set Free the Oppressed

A preacher or a messenger from God could only proclaim the message of liberty for the oppressed. He could not deliver the oppressed. It is only a deliverer who could bring it to reality. Luke 3:15-18 spoke of the Stronger One to come who is greater than the prophet John. This coming One brings with him the Spirit's baptism, which represents salvation's presence and the covenant's arrival (Jer. 31:31). Thus, this passage describes a messianic function. It guarantees that Jesus' mission is seen in messianic terms. The healings by Jesus picture this deliverance and related to his authority, an authority that is greater than prophetic authority.

(4) To Proclaim the Year of Total forgiveness

This is an allusion to the OT year of the Jubilee. In Leviticus 25, Yahweh appointed a year of liberation among the people of Israel. The year of the Jubilee was held every 50 years and during the 50th year, the fields were not worked, workers and slaves return to their homes, debts were cancelled and slaves set free. The Jewish scholars who studied the book of Isaiah taught an eschatological Jubilee, which will be the dawn of God's new age. So the Jewish mind, the year of the Jubilee was a picture of freedom. Luke takes that same picture here to show what God was doing both spiritually and physically through Jesus Christ. Jesus is saying the age of total forgiveness and salvation (God's Jubilee) has come through Him.

II. WE CAN LIVE AS PEOPLE OF HOPE BECAUSE OF OUR RESPONSE (VV22-27.)The People's Response: Rejection

1. "Wrong background" "Is this not Joseph's son?" The congregation did not appreciate the point that Jesus was making. So they ask the question: "Is this not Joseph's son?" In other words, how can the son of a common carpenter make such claims that he is the Messiah?
2. "Wrong Evidence"
Jesus reading the people's minds, repeats a well known proverb which literally reads: 'Physician, heal your own limb.' What they are saying is that he should repeat the miracles that he did in Capernaum. The hometown folks were skeptical about the reports of Jesus' miraculous works outside their region and now they want him to prove his claims through miracles.

Jesus Response: A history lesson #1: Rejecting God's messenger is a gamble because he will go elsewhere and God's work will continue.

Jesus responded to the crowd by giving them a history lesson. He goes back to the darkest period in Israel's history to the time of Elijah and Elisha.

Jesus takes them back to 1 Kings 17-18. It was a dark time spiritually for Israel. After years of rebellion against the covenant of God, God finally brings down a severe famine in the land. The people of Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh and God judged them for this by bringing a famine over the whole of the land. So God's provision and prophetic signs were absent from the land.

There were a prophetic presence in the land through a prophet named Elijah but they did not received any positive benefits from him. The nation choose to reject God's messenger and they paid a heavy price.

During this period no Israelite received no positive benefits from the prophetic presence in this period. The choice was Israel's and it paid a heavy price in the past. By rejecting Jesus as God's anointed messenger, they are running the same risk. Jesus' challenge to them is the same as today, the people again must decide about God's messenger.

Jesus notes that there was not a single widow received blessing except for a Gentile woman in Zarephath, a town located north of Israel between Tyre and Sidon (I Kings 17:9). In the OT account, the widow is commended for her faith. This widow was a Gentile and an exception to the rule. The widow of Zarephath was the last person on earth to be blessed by the prophet.

During this dire period in Israel's history, Elijah had to go and minister outside Israel. The point of comparison is that while the homeland may reject the ministry of Jesus, others will respond and see God's work. Thus salvation is open to all kinds of people.

The comparison to this bleak, dark period in Israel warns of the results of rejecting Jesus. The lesson that Jesus wanted the people to grasp is that a rejection of Jesus equals to the rejection of God

History Lesson #2: Missed Opportunity of the people to experience God's work and blessing, but the work will still go on without them.

In 4:27; Jesus takes them back to 2 Kings 5:1-14, to Elijah's successor, Elisha. This is the only time when he is mentioned in the NT.

There was a man by the name of Naaman who was a leper, living in Syria. He was a Syrian and not a Jew. God chose to cleanse Naaman, the non-Israelite and not any Israelite leper.

Jesus underline that God was working outside Israel and with a second category of needy people, lepers. Jesus is underscoring the fact that God was working

with a second category of needy people who was also outside Israel: unclean lepers. The point of the comparison is that those hearing his message now risked an experience like Israel of old. Those seemingly near to God had better hear the warning.

The point of comparison is that while the homeland may reject the ministry of Jesus, others will respond and see God's work.

The Audience Response: Let's kill him and the saddest part of the episode is found in **Luke 4:30**

"But he passed through the crowd and went on his way."

Conclusion and Application

- I. When feeling overwhelmed by life and all its challenges, we should remember that Christ came to usher in an era of hope and renewal
- II. When we respond positively to the claims of Christ, we are assured that we are included in the blessings of God and his work in our lives.
- III. No matter how dark the situation may be, we can be confident that since we have placed our faith in the God's anointed Son, we can live as people of hope. This confidence insulates us from despair and motivates to keep on trusting Jesus Christ.

Summary and Appeal

