

EXEGETICAL PAPER: **Luke 4:16-30** (NIV based)
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In Luke chapters 1-4, the storyline is carefully crafted to bring the reader to the culmination in Luke 4:16-30. The story of Jesus' rejection in Nazareth is placed in this narrative and the story is related in a unique way to serve a very specific purpose. In the parallel account in Mark 6:1-6, the rejection is later in the timeline of his ministry and is missing key points of Luke's version. Mark focuses on Jesus' ministry while Luke focuses on Jesus' mission.

The first four chapters of Luke are highlighted by 5 main events: Jesus' birth; His dedication; His baptism; His temptation; and His rejection. In the first four events, the purpose of Jesus' ministry is hinted at through secondary characters such as Simeon (vv.2:25-32), John the Baptist (vv.3:15-17), and God the Father (v.3:22). In Luke 4:16-30, Jesus himself finally declares His purpose for ministry and the nature of His character. This is the main idea of the passage. In Luke 4:16-30 is revealed the messianic nature and mission of Jesus through His preaching and subsequent rejection in His hometown synagogue. This main idea is elaborated and focused on through each part in the narrative.

In verses 4:16-17, specific language is used to bring about a sense of purpose to the readers and to build the foundation for the response of the listeners in verse 22. The scene and context of Jesus' revelation is set by the writing, "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up" (v.16). This should immediately take the reader back to verses 2:39-51 when Jesus grew in knowledge and stature in his hometown of Nazareth. It is fascinating that in the middle of these verses, Jesus sits in the temple and amazes the teachers with His knowledge and speech. This prepares the reader for the positive reaction of Jesus' audience in verse 22. It also brings the extreme reaction of the audience in verse 28 into stark contrast. This serves to give further force to Jesus' revelation of His character.

A sense of tension and purpose to the narrative begins to be built by the writing, "He went to Nazareth... and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read" (v.4:16). The first phrase in the Greek, "erchomai" (Strong's #2064), is an important device that is used to move along the narrative and to show that Jesus had a purpose for His actions. The next phrase used is almost the exact same wording in the Greek: "eiserchomai" (Strong's #1525). "He went to" and "he went into" are the same construction in the Greek except for the prefix on the latter. This shows that Jesus went to Nazareth and went into the synagogue to serve a purpose. It was not a random set of events. Jesus went to reveal Himself as the prophesied Messiah who would fulfill the prophetic office.

It is important to look at the exact implications of the phrase "as was his custom" (v.16) before moving on in this exegesis. This phrase could mean two things: either the narrative to follow is typical of His teaching ministry or refers to His "normal custom since childhood" (Marshall 181). In light of the parallel use of this phrase in Acts 17:2, it is probable that it refers to Jesus' habit of speaking in synagogues; however, this habit does not mean that the events in Nazareth were atypical. Jesus purposefully reveals Himself, in a particular manner, to His hometown.

This idea of purpose is further emphasized when Jesus stands up to read in verse 17. "And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:" (vv.16d-17). Jesus specifically chooses a passage to make a point about Himself. The order of service described in

these verses was common in synagogues of that time, yet Jesus takes this ordinary circumstance to make an extraordinary revelation.

His revelation is focused on the text in Isaiah 61:1-2. There are several important points that are made from the portion of Scripture that Jesus chose to read. First, the passage that is recorded in Luke omits Isaiah 61:2b "and the day of vengeance of our God" and adds in language from Isaiah 58:6 "to set the oppressed free". The omission is very important to the main idea of this passage. Jesus' purpose and mission in His first coming did not include the vengeance and judgment of God; however, there will be a day where Jesus comes back and that last line will be fulfilled (see Revelation chapter 19).

The addition to the text makes perfect sense as well. As Joel Green points out in the *New International Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, the passage can be broken down into "theological features of his missionary program, particularly as they were developed elsewhere in the narrative in Luke" (Green 210). These themes include the poor, and the idea of release. The addition parallels the verse from the original passage. "...To proclaim freedom for the prisoners... to release the oppressed..." (Luke 4:18). The Greek noun "aphesis" (Strong's #0859), meaning liberty, freedom, or release, is used at the end of both phrases. A parallel is made between these two phrases to emphasize the mission of Jesus.

In verse 21, Jesus makes the bold claim that "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". This statement is the climax of the beginning chapters in the Book of Luke. Jesus finally declares who He is and what His mission is. The verses that Jesus quoted need to be dissected because they contain His character and mission. There are three aspects of Himself that Jesus reveals: His messianic nature, His prophetic fulfillment, and His ministry focus.

The first three phrases of the quote from Isaiah 61:1-2 end in the Greek personal pronoun "mé" (Strong's #3165), "me" in English. At first glance, this wording may seem to refer to the "self-consciousness of the prophet"; however, "the passage uses a language and style reminiscent of the earlier Servant passages - it may have been interpreted in terms of the Servant of Yahweh" (Marshall 183). In any case, Jesus recognized the messianic nature of the passage and applied it to Himself. He is the messiah that Israel has been awaiting.

In addition to the messianic nature of his declaration, Jesus shows that He is the fulfillment of the prophetic office; perhaps even looking back to the prophet that would be greater than Moses (Deuteronomy 19:9-12). "The functions of this Old Testament figure are now fulfilled in Jesus who has been anointed with the Spirit for this purpose" (Marshall 183). Jesus has the ultimate anointing of the Holy Spirit and proclaims the greatest news to all people. In addition, He proclaims ultimate liberty to the captives and literally gives sight to the blind.

The third and final revelation in Jesus' statement is His ministry focus. In His ministry, Jesus focused on the poor, blind, and the proclamation of His coming. He made a point to visit and minister to the ostracized of that society. These are the ones that needed the most help. A broader Christological understanding can also be brought to this passage from all of Scripture. From other passages it is clear that mankind is spiritually blind, captive, and oppressed. It is only through the saving work of Christ that anyone is able to be spiritually freed and given spiritual sight to see the truth. The year of the Lord's favor is truly at hand. He has brought salvation to the Jew and Gentile alike.

Unfortunately, Jesus' audience in the synagogue did not grasp even a small fraction of what Jesus claimed. They only saw the manner in which He spoke. "The eyes of

everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him," "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips" (Luke 4:20,22). It is saddening that they only saw the surface level of what Jesus said. They only saw a young rabbi that spoke the Scriptures with authority. "They were impressed by his gracious words, in other words, his attractive way of speaking. Notice that the text speaks of astonishment, not admiration or appreciation. They wondered at his preaching, but they did not take it to heart" (Morris 117).

Some scholars see a tension in, what they see as, the startling switch in the attitude of the crowd in verse 22a and 22b (Marshall 179). In verse 22a the crowd was "amazed at the gracious words" but in verse 22b they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" The scholars take the same reaction of the crowd in Mark 6:2-3 and import that into the crowd's reaction in Luke. Because of this, they think that it may refer to two different instances or the different halves of the verse come from different manuscripts. It is a mistake to put a tension in the text when there does not need to be one. The crowd's reaction in Luke is one of awe, not disgust. This is a small distinction but a crucial one. It also makes the crowd's terrible reaction in just a few verses much stronger.

A large emphasis is put on the crowd's reaction to Jesus' statement because it reinforces the revelation that Jesus makes. Jesus is not just a man who spoke well and did a few miraculous things. He claimed to be the Son and Messiah of God who came to fulfill God's plan for mankind. The people in the crowd did not comprehend it at first and it shows how important the nature of Jesus is to the Scriptures in Luke. Throughout the book, the reactions of people are used to show the character and nature of Jesus: Peter (v.5:8), Levi (v.5:28), Mary (v.10:39).

Jesus exposes and confronts them on their unbelief in verse 4:23, "'Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum'". This saying refers to the idea that, in the first century, patients would want proof that the remedy the doctor was proposing would work. In other words, "Before you touch my body, or make me drink something nasty, let me see you try it first!" The people in the audience required something more for them to understand and put their faith in what Jesus was claiming. Unfortunately for them, Jesus does not give in to the requirements that they put on Him; rather, He goes to those who will accept His mission (Ryken 182-183).

Jesus, and in extension the writings in the Book of Luke, uses His audience and the two following examples to illustrate the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people. This is important for two reasons. First, it foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the people of Israel as a whole. It was not just limited to his hometown. Second, it adds a somewhat double-edged credibility to Jesus' revelation and ministry. "'I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown'" (v.24). In the same way that the Old Testament prophets were rejected for their teaching, Jesus is too. So in a sense, the rejection of Jesus' message partially shows His credibility.

In verses 24-27, Jesus shifts His point slightly and uses the two examples of Elijah and Elisha to show that God sometimes calls His prophets to ignore the mass populace of the nation of Israel and focus on the outsiders and the downcast. In the example of Elijah, God sent Elijah during the famine to help Zarephath who was from Sidon, which is outside of Israel. In the second example, Elisha healed the leper Naaman from Syria even though there were many lepers in Israel. Without the background of these metaphors it would be hard to understand the intense reaction of the crowd. "All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this" (v.28). They realized something very important about the ministry of Jesus. They realized that His ministry,

and in extension God's ministry, would not be focused on them but rather on the Gentiles. "Jesus' audience is becoming more and more enraged as they realize that they will receive no special favors from Him and that He considers Himself above home ties and traditions" (Garland 107). Jesus' audience finally realized to a greater extent what Jesus was claiming. They were enraged that He claimed to be an extraordinary servant of God and that God was going to leave them out of His plan. The writings in Luke show that the ministry of Jesus, and the gospel, were going to be for all people and not immediately for the nation of Israel.

The wrath of the crowd became so great that they drove Him out of the town and attempted to throw Him over a cliff (vv.28-29). The Greek word "poreuomai" (Strong's #4198, v.30) is used to bookend the narrative. In the same way that Jesus came to Nazareth, Jesus 'went out' (v.30). His purpose for coming to Nazareth had been accomplished. He had revealed Himself as the one true Messiah and prophet. It is not clear if He ghosted out of the crowd or simply left. "But it was not yet His time to die, and by some unexplained means He made His way out" (Garland 107).

In conclusion, the story of Jesus' sermon is placed in Nazareth in Luke chapter 4 to reveal the messianic nature and mission of Jesus Christ. Throughout the narrative, Jesus' actions, teaching, and the crowd's reaction are used to explain and give substance to the mission and nature of Jesus. This message in Luke must drive us to ask, "Who do we think Jesus was?" Our answer to this question will change our lives in a radical way. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse."

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