



Jesus Brings Good News

Revelation of the Son of Man

About the Story

In today's story, Jesus reads a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah, a prophecy at least five hundred years old. Jesus claims that his reading and his presence in the synagogue brings that old prophecy to fruition, and continues right here and right now.

The Point:

Jesus brings good news for those in need.

His experience is a reminder to all his followers that words of grace are not always received with joy. Advocating for the outsider poses a big challenge to those on the inside.

Jesus then reaches even further back in Jewish tradition and recalls the stories of a widow in Zarephath and of Naaman in Syria. Both of these stories tell of Gentiles (non-Jewish people) who were visited by Jewish prophets. These prophets came not to condemn the outsiders but to offer miraculous salvation. Jesus references these stories in order to tell his Jewish hearers that he is not just sent to his own family, his own hometown, or even his own Jewish people. He is sent for the whole world—particularly for those who are outsiders, or oppressed.

This throws the synagogue at Nazareth into an uproar. They think they know exactly who Jesus is: the ordinary son of a carpenter, a hometown boy who is starting to act too smart for his own good. He is speaking like someone with long years of religious training and scriptural interpretation, and not only that but he is claiming to be anointed by God!

Prophecy is a tricky business. Throughout the Bible, whenever a prophetic word is preached, it makes people uncomfortable. There is a strong preference for religious leaders who say, "Don't worry! Everything is fine." But instead, God sends prophets to make radical changes—and it makes a lot of people anxious or even angry.

Jesus' "good news" is not good news for those who like the way the world is. His family and friends want God to come with a message of power, of destruction of the Gentiles, and of restoration of the Israelite kingdom. Instead, Jesus brings a message of God's kingdom: a place of healing, compassion, and grace.

Opening Prayer

Begin your time together with this, or another, prayer:

God of the cosmos, of every time and place, we give you thanks for today and for this space. We gather to hear your stories, to be transformed by your Word, to be shaken up by the work of your Son, and to be sent into the world bearing the good news of your mission. Amen.

Last Week/Next Week

In the last two weeks, we explored how the presentation of Jesus and the ministry of John the Baptist set the stage for who Jesus will become. Today's lesson tells the story of Jesus' mission statement: to bring good news to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed. Next week, Jesus will become the teacher and leader not of officials and religious students, but of simple fishermen.

Into the Story

When family and longtime neighbors get together, tensions can rise. Some topics of conversation are polite...and some just invite trouble. Order the following from 1–5 of what would be most comfortable (5) to least comfortable (1) saying to someone you have not seen in a while.

- _____ How is your dad?
- _____ How is work going?
- _____ Heard you had a devil of a time on your vacation in the desert.
- _____ God has given me a mission to bring good news to the poor and oppressed.
- _____ I am not doing any miracles for you today, sorry.

Discuss as a group. Is there anything on this list you would not say to anyone no matter how well you knew them?

Learning the Story

We continue in the season of Epiphany with Jesus' return from his battle with the devil in the wilderness. After forty days of testing, Jesus' mind and his mission are clear—and he comes back to Galilee ready to preach the good news. But are the people ready to hear it?

Read Luke 4:14-19 – Jesus Returns to Galilee

- ❓ Jesus is “full of the Holy Spirit,” just as he was when he went into the wilderness (Luke 4:1). What do you think it means to be full of the Spirit?
- ❓ Turn to Isaiah 61. What is Jesus quoting? Does he add to or change any of Isaiah's original prophecy?
- ❓ What is “the year of the Lord's favor”? Leviticus 25:10-17 outlines some of the principles. What do you think it would look like today?

Read Luke 4:20-24 – Today?!

- ❓ What do you think Jesus means when he says the Scripture is being fulfilled today?
- ❓ Is the Scripture that Jesus read still being fulfilled?
- ❓ Jesus likely did not have any training in interpretation or preaching—he was a carpenter's son! When has someone with no experience spoken some incredible wisdom?
- ❓ How would you feel if your child showed up in church and started saying strange things that threw everyone into excitement, amazement, and shock?

Read Luke 4:25-27 – History Repeats Itself

- 🔗 Read 1 Kings 17:8-16, when Elijah visits the widow at Zarephath. What makes this widow different from anyone else in the land? Why was Elijah sent to her?
- 🔗 Read 2 Kings 5:1-14, when Elisha heals Naaman the Syrian. What is special about Naaman? Why is this healing so unusual?
- 🔗 Why would the stories of this Gentile widow and Gentile commander be so important to Jesus?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Matthew's account of Jesus' return from the wilderness (Matthew 4:12-17).
- ✚ Another story of God's welcome to the outsider (Ruth 1-4).
- ✚ Jesus' disciples debate the inclusion of Gentiles (non-Jewish believers) in their midst (Acts 10-11).

Read Luke 4:28-30 – How Dare He!

- 🔗 What is the crowd's objection to Jesus' words?
- 🔗 How do you think Jesus got away?
- 🔗 On a scale of 1 to 10, how shocked are you that people who heard words from Jesus' own mouth were so ready to kill him?

Living the Story: Worship

Work through the promises of Jesus' mission to create a litany recognizing where you may not have participated in the mission, giving praise for forgiveness, and asking for God's guidance. Start with these lines or create your own:

Reader: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

All: We confess to you, O God, that we have not seen the pain of those who hunger. We have not brought joy to those whose lives are trapped in the sorrow of poverty. We see where we have fallen short, O God, and we ask your forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

Reader: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

All: We praise you, O God, that you have looked with favor on those who hunger. You do not turn your eyes away from pain and want, but hunger for the food of mercy and kindness. We give you thanks for all the hungry who, at long last, will today or one day be fed.

Reader: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

All: We ask you, O God, to give us wisdom and courage in your world. Open our eyes that we may see the need that surrounds us.

Let us be your hands for those who hunger and thirst, and bring them to a table filled with good food, and let us work each day for justice and peace for all.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: The Kingdom of God

Although the word "kingdom" brings to mind a specific place and time, it is clear from Jesus' stories that he was speaking instead of a way of living, and a transformative reality of God's work. Jesus does not establish rules to follow for this kingdom, but rather tells stories to illustrate how it can be recognized. In this kingdom, God's powerful hopes for us are at the center of all law and life. We are able to live not in fear but in love and justice. God's kingdom is both already here and still to come.

Closing Prayer

Stand as a group, with one person saying a line of the following prayer, then the next, and so on. Repeat the prayer as many times as necessary for all to participate.

Send us with your promises, O God, to bring good news to the poor.

Send us out to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind.

Send us out to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Together say: Amen.

At Home

- ✝ Challenge yourself to pray for someone (either an individual or a group) with whom you feel at odds. Offer a prayer for their wellbeing each morning.
- ✝ Take some time this week to explore the stories of 1 and 2 Kings. Notice the contrast of Solomon's wealthy rule that eventually oppresses and tears apart the people, versus the ministry of Elijah and Elisha.
- ✝ Talk with your small group and your church leaders about a one-time fundraising event for a local food shelf or other outreach program.

Daily Readings

Sunday—Read Luke 4:14-30

Jesus' bold proclamation in the synagogue offends those around him. Think of someone you have wanted to exclude, and make amends (apologizing, inviting them into a gathering, etc.).

Monday—Read Isaiah 58:6-12

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah to lift up justice and mercy over sacrifice and fasting. Make a small donation of canned goods or funds to a food shelf.

Tuesday—Read 1 Kings 17:8-14

The prophet Elijah is sent to a forgotten and starving widow, saving her and her son from death. When has someone in your life shown up at exactly the right time?

Wednesday—Read 2 Kings 5:1-17

Naaman, commander of the enemy army, asks for and receives healing from the prophet Elisha. When have you recognized that your own biases, anger, and fear kept you from receiving something you needed?

Thursday—Read Luke 4:31-37

Jesus continues to heal, as more and more people see that he is the Messiah. What do you think this passage teaches us about who Jesus is, and about what is important to Jesus?

Friday—Read Luke 4:38-41

Jesus heals many in Capernaum, overwhelming the crowds and silencing the demons. Do something nice for someone else, but do not let anyone know it was you.

Saturday—Read Luke 4:42-44

Jesus' listeners want him to stay with them. What would change about your life if Jesus were living in your town?