

Exegesis of Luke 4:16-22

Luke chooses to record the event that would begin the controversial public ministry of Jesus. The tendency for many readers is to simply read this passage, but not reflect on what Luke is telling us. There is a reason Luke chose this event to be included in his account. There is also a reason why our Savior chose this particular venue to begin His public ministry. The Spirit of God would decide the passage which Jesus would read. As we will see, a great deal happened the Sabbath day that our Lord read in the Synagogue.

Historical Background

In chapter four Luke records for us the wilderness temptation of Jesus. Following this event we find Jesus returning to Galilee “*in the power of the Spirit*” (Luke 4:14 ESV). This is how Jesus began His public ministry. Luke records that the popularity of Jesus grew as He went throughout the area preaching in the synagogues. Synagogues were the perfect place to read and teach from God’s word. John MacArthur quotes the ancient Jewish historian, Philo, calling Synagogues, “*Houses of instruction*” (MacArthur 3).

Synagogues got their start during the time of the Jewish Babylonian Captivity. In 586 BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem along with the Temple of Solomon. This was the centerpiece of Jewish religion and worship of God. Along with this destruction, many of the Jews were taken away into captivity, the best of the best, like Daniel and his three friends, were taken to the city of Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar’s court. Others were taken to an internment camp created in the area of the Chebar canal in “*the land of the Chaldeans*” (Ezekiel 1:1-2 ESV).

The year that Ezekiel was taken from Jerusalem, he would have started serving in the temple filling the role traditionally held by men of his family. Therefore, it would be natural for people to look to him for guidance. Looking into the book of Ezekiel we see a few interesting passages. For example, “*...I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there*” (Ezekiel 8:1 ESV). In another place, “*Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me*” (Ezekiel 14:1-2; c.f.; 20:1-2).

We see in these passages the elders coming and sitting before him to hear the teaching he received from God. It appears this custom took root among the Jews during this time; MacArthur notes, “*Apparently during the time of captivity they began to develop these patterns and they would gather together in small groups on a regular basis, and increasingly regular basis, eventually on the Sabbath and they would recover the Word of God and read it and explain it*” (MacArthur 5).

When the captivity was over they came home to a temple in ruins. Until Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, the people were without a central location for worship and teaching. The Jews appear to have continued these small group gatherings creating the Synagogue system of teaching the word of God and worshipping God apart from, but not a replacement of, the temple. Thus, sitting at the feet of a teacher, they would hear and learn from God’s Word.

The term “Synagogue” is from the Greek word συναγωγή (*sunagōgē*) meaning “*gathering place, place of assembly*” (Arndt 782). The word was used in the LXX 137 times where the English translations use the word “*Congregation*” (i.e. Exodus 12:3, 6, 19, 47; 16:1, 2, 9, 10, 22, etc.). The term originally focused on the people gathered, but eventually it came to mean the building, much like English term church brings to mind the building not the assembled people.

The service in the Synagogue in Jesus day, especially on the Sabbath, looked every much like the services in churches today. Henry Ferguson goes into great detail as he lists the order of a Sabbath service, they prayed (Eulogy and call and response), sang (intonation), read scripture, preached from the chosen passage, and prayed (Ferguson 1-12). This provided Jesus with the perfect setting for reading and teaching the Word of God.

Grammatical Analysis

Three words I wish to parse come out of Luke 4:22, “*And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?”* (ESV). The first word is “marveled” from the Greek word θαυμάζον (hethaumazon) from the word θαυμάζω (*thaumazō*) which means to “wonder, marvel, be

astonished, to wonder at something" (Arndt 352). The verb is in the imperfect tense, "*The imperfect tense emphasizes action that is continuing in past time*" (Alfred 51). The specific imperfect is iterative, "*This was an act that was obviously continuously being repeated at various intervals. The idea of repeated action over a period of time, at various intervals in the past*" (Alfred 52). It is in the active voice, "*The active voice, merely reflects the person (or thing) as performing the action*" (Alfred 61). The Indicative mood of this verb is a statement of fact; this was the reality of the situation, this really happened (Alfred 62). The reality that day in the synagogue of Nazareth was the more Jesus spoke the more they marveled at the way he taught.

The next word is "words," which is the Greek word λόγοις (*logois*). Λόγοις (*logois*) is from the Greek word λόγος (*logos*), "*Word, utterance, speech, discourse, saying, the divine revelation through Christ*" (Arndt 478). The noun is in the dative case, which is the case of indirect object. Here in our verse, the word is specifically the dative of possession, "*In this usage the focus of interest is that of ownership by the person or persons who are indicated in the dative*" (Alfred 32). The focus then in the words that Jesus spoke were different from the words spoken by other teachers the people were used to hearing.

The final word is "gracious," which is the Greek word χάριτος (*charitos*). This word is from the Greek word χάρις (*charis*) which means "*preciousness, attractiveness*" (Arndt 877). This word is in the genitive case, that is the case of possession and description. The specific genitive is adverbial genitive of reference, "*Adverbial describes the type of action being expressed by the noun and genitive of reference allows an adjective to be applied in a way limited by the context*" (Alfred 74). "Gracious" is contrasting the difference in the words Jesus spoke when compared to other teachers, and they marveled at the way the words flowed from Jesus lips.

Critical Analysis of the Text

Jesus also did something that stands out as you take a careful look at the passage Jesus read from the scroll which He was given.

Masoretic Text	LXX	Greek New Testament
רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה עַל־ On me Yahweh Sovereign Spirit	πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ Spirit Lord upon me	πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ Spirit Lord upon me
יְעַן מַשְׁיחַ יְהוָה אָתָּה me Yahweh anointed because	οὐδὲ εἰνεκεν ἔχρισέν με Wherefore he anointed me	οὐδὲ εἰνεκεν ἔχρισέν με Wherefore he anointed me
לְבִשֵּׂר עֲנָוִים to preach good news poor ones	εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς evangelize poor	εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς evangelize poor
שֶׁלְחָנִי He has sent me	ἀπέσταλκέ με He has sent me (Note: the movable “ν”)	ἀπέσταλκέν με He has sent me
לְחַבֵּשׁ לְנַשְׁבֵּרִי לְבָבָן Heart The ones To bind being broken of up	ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμένος to heal the broken ones τὴν καρδίαν the hearted	Not quoted in Luke 4:18-19
לְקַרְאָה לְשִׁבּוּם דָּרוֹם freedom for ones to proclaim being captive	κηρῦξαι αἰχμαλώτοις to proclaim to captives ἀφεσιν release	κηρῦξαι αἰχμαλώτοις to proclaim to captives ἀφεσιν release
וְלֹא־סֻורִים קָמָן-קָמָן release and for ones being imprisoned	καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν and to blind ones sight	καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν and to blind ones sight
מָוֵת מִפְשִׁים וְכֹל יְמִינָה yoke every Free תַּנְתַּקְתָּה that you break	Isaiah 58:6 Same as New Testament	ἀποτεῖλαι τεθπαυσμένους ἐν to send away have been in ἀφέσει release
לְקַרְאָה שָׁנָת־רְצָוָה לְיְהוָה of Yahweh favor year to of proclaim	καλέσαι ἐνιαυτὸν to call a year κυρίου δεκτόν of [the] Lord acceptable	κηρῦξαι ἐνιαυτὸν to proclaim a year κυρίου δεκτόν of [the] Lord acceptable

A Theological Analysis

Earlier in the text, Luke introduced a custom of Jesus. Upon entering a town he would go to the local synagogue on the Sabbath to teach, thus establishing His reputation as a teacher. In our text of Luke 2:16-22 Jesus continues with this custom in His hometown. It is then no surprise that Jesus would be handed a scroll from which to read and teach. It is also obvious by the text selected for Him to read that it was providential. The text was the scroll of Isaiah 61, from which Jesus read a portion, our verses 1-2 in our Bibles, a text containing Messianic prophecy.

The above critical analyses reveals an addition by Jesus as read from the text. Jesus purposefully omits “*to heal the broken hearted*” and adds “*to set free those who are downtrodden*.” This addition is from another Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 58:6. The Scroll of Isaiah could not have been easily moved by Jesus to read Isaiah 58:6, so he clearly quotes from memory. Jesus did this to establish Himself as a “Rabbi” of the Law and the Prophets. One wonders what went through the minds of the Rabbis assembled to hear this new teacher, only to find that it was the young man they all knew as a boy growing up in the family of Joseph, a carpenter’s son.

Yet, Jesus is doing two things in their midst by His teaching. First he points out that He is the one fulfilling those words of Isaiah 61:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6, making Him the Messiah. Luke records the following statement of Jesus as He sits down, “*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*” (Luke 2:21 ESV). Second, Jesus is a Rabbi unlike any they have heard, “*all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth*” (Luke 2:22 ESV). This the point Luke was making by pointing they had observed the gracious way Jesus was speaking to them.

This is in contrast to the words spoken by the other teachers of the Law and the Prophets. We noted above that the verb is in the genitive of reference. This is Luke’s way of describing the kind of words Jesus is speaking. The teaching of the Pharisees was known as harsh and legalistic. Matthew records the words of Jesus against the teaching of the Pharisees, “*They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not*

willing to move them with their finger" (Matthew 23:4 ESV). Six times in Matthew 23 Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, and seven times pronounces woe upon them. However, the people of Jesus' hometown that Sabbath day "*marveled*" at the gracious words Jesus spoke in their midst. Theologically, who better to teach on what Isaiah meant in those passages than the very one who told Isaiah what to write? Jesus, after all, is the incarnate Word of God. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1:1). This is certainly implied in the word "*logos*" as it is in the dative of possession where the focus is ownership of the words spoken and read in our passage.

Practical Application

In the synagogue that day Jesus began His public teaching ministry. Luke records that this scene would end with the people wanting to stone Jesus. He taught them their view of the Messiah was all wrong. He came to help those whom most people would think were beyond saving. Jesus had read to them what Isaiah stated, "*...to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed*" (Luke 2:18-19 ESV). These are sinners, those not worth saving, according to the culture of the day. They had the theology of "*sin and you are punished, do good and God blesses you.*"

Yet it is the outcasts and sinners Jesus called to be his disciples: a zealot, a traitor, a tax collector, poor fishermen. These were men rejected by other rabbis as not worth teaching, no wonder all Jesus had to say was "*Come, follow me*" (c.f. Matthew 4:19; 9:9). Yet, these are who Jesus called and those whom He continues to call. "*Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance"*" (Luke 5:31 ESV). Jesus came for those who need healing, those who are broken and sitting, "*In the region and shadow of death*" (Matthew 4:16 ESV). Christ came to help people see and know God; that those who have never known love in their life, know they have been loved their whole life (c.f. John 3:16).

What is it about Jesus teaching that makes His words gracious, easy to listen to and apply? It is reflected in the invitation offered to those who want to be His disciples. “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matthew 11:28-30 ESV). It is no wonder people “marveled” at the teaching of the carpenter’s son.

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