

**7.45am & 9.30am**

‘Luke - The Doctor Is In’

**23 October 2016**

# Jesus’ Good News

Luke 4:14-30

## Prayer

“Almighty God, who called Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul: May it please you that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. (1662 Prayer Book)

## Introduction

### **The Importance of Context**

When it comes to reading the Bible, context is vitally important. Context is the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, which allow it to be fully understood.

You might have heard the story before, but it’s told that a man was looking in the Bible for some guidance. Not knowing where to look, he simply opened the Bible randomly and pointed his finger at a passage. Wherever his finger landed, he took as advice.

Here's the first verse he found, Acts 1:18: “*(Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness, and falling headlong he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.)*” (Acts 1:18 ESV)

Not knowing what to make out of that, he tried again.

This time it was Luke 10:37: *“And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.””* (Luke 10:37 ESV)

Completely baffled, he tried a third time. This time he got John 13:27: *“Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.””* (John 13:27 ESV)

The story might be church legend, but it does highlight the importance of context when it comes to reading the Bible. The Bible isn't a collection of magic phrases and statements; at its heart, it's a story, a story about God's plan to glorify himself by saving his people from the curse of sin through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ.

But it is also written in history, and in culture, and so we need to take note of context whenever we read the Bible, to help us fully understand it.

I had a lecturer at Bible college who used to say that three most important things when studying the Bible were: “Context, context, and context.”

## Context

### **Luke and his gospel**

Now, we're diving into Luke's gospel in the middle of the fourth chapter. We're missing a whole lot of context leading up to today's reading that will play a role in our understanding of it.

For a start, we need to be aware of a few things about Luke's gospel. What is it about? Why did he write it? Who is Luke, anyway?

Well, if we start right back at the beginning of Luke's Gospel, we'll find the first four verse very helpful. Luke opens his book with **these words**:

“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught.”

(Luke 1:1–4 ESV)

Luke is writing a “narrative” of Jesus’ life and ministry. But it’s not just bare history. He realises the significance of who Jesus is and what he came to do, so he refers to the record of what Jesus said and did as “the things that were accomplished among us.” He realises that Jesus’ words and actions have eternal significance: fulfilling things spoken of in the past, and confirming things that have been promised for the future.

He’s writing this with a very specific purpose in mind. He is writing his book for a man named “Theophilus”, whom he calls “most excellent.” Best guess is he was someone high up in Roman society who had become a Christian. He’s writing his book as an “orderly account”, so that Theophilus may have certainty about the things he’d been taught about Jesus. At the beginning of Acts, Luke greets the same Theophilus once more, indicating that the book of Acts is a continuation of his work after Jesus ascended to heaven.

And so Luke has written an orderly account, carefully researched, using the narratives that people had written before, perhaps like Mark’s gospel. He also interviewed those who had been eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life and ministry, and who had taken up that ministry after his ascension (remember Luke was writing about 30 years after Jesus’ ascension). His conclusion? That the good news about Jesus Christ, which fulfils God’s eternal plan, is a gospel for all people.

As for Luke himself, it seems he became a travelling companion of Paul around the time of Paul's mission into Macedonia in Acts 16. That's where Luke starts writing in Acts with the second person pronoun, **saying**, "...we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (Acts 16:10 ESV)

Luke himself also appears to have been a medical doctor, which fits well with the educated style of the language and structure of his writing. In Colossians 4:14, Paul calls Luke "**the beloved physician**".

He was also a very loyal and stable companion of Paul, remaining with him when he was in prison in **Philemon 24**. And finally, after it seems that everyone else had deserted Paul when he was in prison towards the end of his life, Luke alone remained faithful. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:9:

"Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me."

(2 Timothy 4:9–11 ESV)

### **Luke 1:1 - 4:13**

The next bit of context we need to have is from Luke's gospel itself. The first two chapters of Luke's gospel cover Jesus' birth and childhood. Chapter three covers his baptism by John the baptist, and then his family tree.

In the first half of chapter four, Luke records Jesus' temptation in the desert by Satan, from which he emerges undefeated. But Luke finishes his section with these ominous words in **Luke 4:13**

"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time."

(Luke 4:13 ESV)

This is important, because it tells us that everything that happens from here on happens under shadow of Satan's watchful eye, biding his time until he can make an attack at the heart of God's plan.

### A Spirit-filled Mission (Luke 4:14-17)

But, we need not worry. Though Satan is watching and waiting for his opportunity to attack Jesus once again, Jesus has the Spirit of God upon him. And strengthened by that Spirit, he begins his ministry, teaching in the synagogues of Galilee. As we read:

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.”

(Luke 4:14–16 ESV)

### **Galilee**

Galilee was a province in northern Palestine. This is where Jesus grew up, it's where he spent most of his ministry, and it's where he called his disciples from. Galilee was an interesting place, because during the Old Testament times, invading armies had attacked this northern corner of the former Promised Land and carried off a whole lot of people, replacing them with other conquered people. This was different to Judea in the south, where Jerusalem was, and where the temple was.

And so there was a bit of a north-south divide between Galilee and Judea. It's a bit like the NSW/Queensland divide. Those down south thought they were true blue, the real deal, but those up north knew better.

This is important to note because of what Jesus would go on to say. Quite simply, if you had a message that was going to rock the world, you would say it Jerusalem in Judea, there capital city, and definitely not in any little backwater town in Galilee.

### **Synagogue**

Just a note on the synagogue, too, where Jesus started his teaching ministry. The synagogue was a meeting place for Jewish worship that was established during the time of the exile in Babylon, which began about 600 years before Jesus was born. Because the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and because the reading and teaching of God's Word was so central to the life of God's people, as it should be, these little assemblies were set up all over the known world so that Jews could continue to read and teach God's Word. Some sources say that wherever ten Jewish men gathered, a synagogue could be established.

Because priests went with the temple in Jerusalem. the synagogue was presided over by an elected Synagogue Ruler, with the buildings and equipment cared for by an attendant. On the Sabbath day, families went to synagogue to worship. Men sat on one side and women on the other.

There was a clear order of service, which included a reading from the Law, and then from the prophets. The synagogue was a freer place than the temple, so anyone could do the reading, even children. Sometimes the reader could choose for themselves what was read.

The reading from the prophets was followed by a sermon, in which the preacher sat down to give the message. Again the message could be given by any competent man in the synagogue. The service was then concluded by a prayer or a blessing.

This will help us to understand why Jesus does what he does in the next section.

## A Prophecy Fulfilled (Luke 4:17-20)

So Jesus is in the synagogue, and he either volunteers or is chosen to bring the reading from the prophets that Sabbath day.

Whether it was given to him or whether he chose it is not clear, but he turns to some particular verses in Isaiah to read. We pick up the story in v17:

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me 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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.”

(Luke 4:17–20 ESV)

He sits down to bring the sermon. And everyone’s waiting with bated breath to hear what he has to say. Remember, we read back in v14 and 15 that Jesus has quite a reputation around Galilee.

The section of Isaiah that he reads is from Isaiah 61:1-2, and it seems there’s a little added in from Isaiah 58 too.

### **Isaiah**

Again, context is important here to understand where this section fits in Isaiah, before we can understand why Jesus chooses it specifically as his sermon text.

Isaiah himself prophesied about six hundred years before Jesus was born, before and during the exile of God’s people in Babylon. His prophesy highlights the inability

of God's people to keep their side of God's covenant, but it also reveals great hope that God will fulfil his covenant for his own glory. The exiles will return, but more than that, his salvation will go to the ends of the earth. This is important, because it means that God will save not just ethnic Israel, but people from every nation, tribe and tongue. **Isaiah 66:18**

“...the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,”

(Isaiah 66:18 ESV)

The section that Jesus reads from is right near the end of the book, when Isaiah prophesies the great and glorious future of God's eternal kingdom.

In the context of Isaiah, the speaker of these verses is a character who is never quite fully revealed in Isaiah's prophecy. He is the Spirit-anointed descendant of King David from Isaiah 11 and the suffering servant Isaiah 53. He is the promised Messiah.

### **The Poor**

Another key to understanding what is meant in this passage in Isaiah is understanding what is meant by “the poor”.

We usually understand ‘poor’ to mean material poverty. Someone is poor if they don't have enough money to live on. Is this all that Isaiah, and Jesus, mean when they talk about “the poor”?

You probably remember a few years ago that a movie version of the famous music *Les Miserables* came out, starring Hugh Jackman. It's one of the greatest stories of all time. When we lived in London, Melissa and I were fortunate enough to watch it live on stage in the West End, and I was completely captivated by the story and performance.



Of course, the musical and the movie are based on a 19th century French novel by novelist Victor Hugo, set in post-Revolution France. The title is interesting, because it's hard to translate accurately into English. Various alternatives have been suggested, such as *The Wretched*, *The Victims*, *The Wretched Poor*, *The Dispossessed*, or *The Downtrodden*.

Hugo himself **wrote in the book:**

“Certainly they appeared utterly depraved, corrupt, vile and odious; but it is rare for those who have sunk so low not to be degraded in the process, and there comes a point, moreover, where the unfortunate and the infamous are grouped together, merged in a single, fateful word. They are les misérables – the outcasts, the underdogs. And who is to blame? Is it not the most fallen who have most need of charity?”<sup>1</sup>

Reflecting on this might put us in a better position to understand what is meant by “the poor” in Isaiah 61, because it certainly bears more resemblance to Hugo’s *les misérables* than what we usually mean when we talk about being poor.

It’s a state of total poverty, of spiritual degradation. It is those who are dispossessed not just of their wealth, but of their relationship with their Creator, and their place in his world. It is those who are helpless and hopeless to change their situation.

It should come as no surprise then that the Exiles to whom Isaiah spoke identified easily with “the poor”. They had been removed not just from their homes but from the Promised Land. They had lost not just a religious meeting place, but the Temple where their God dwelt among them. And the loss of these things led them to believe that they also been dispossessed of God’s wonderful promised for his chosen people.

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<sup>1</sup> 3.8.5.5, *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo, from <http://www.shmoop.com/les-miserables/title.html> (Accessed: 22 October 2016)

That's a clearer picture of "the poor" of Isaiah 61, and it should also inform what we understand by the terms "the captives", "the blind" and "the oppressed".

## A Shocking Sermon (Luke 4:21-30)

Jesus then sits down to preach, and we read that everyone is waiting eagerly to hear what he has to say. To Jews living in Galilee, under the thumb of Roman rule and oppression, thoughts of liberty and freedom must have been very exciting and inspiring.

What is Jesus going to say about these words? Well, Jesus begins his sermon with some shocking words, words that suggest the victorious end of Isaiah's prophecy is coming true before their very eyes. But the response is not exactly positive.

"And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke well of him and marvelled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?""

(Luke 4:21-22 ESV)

*"All spoke well of him"* is probably better translated as "all witnessed him", or "all spoke about him". And they "*marvelled*", or "were astonished" not at the content of Jesus' words, but more at their gracious delivery, i.e. Jesus spoke gracefully.

However, when they realised Jesus was claiming himself to be the Spirit-empowered anointed one of Isaiah 61, they began to have doubts. He'd lived among them for thirty years - this was the local carpenter's son!

Someone suggested a thought that might have crossed their minds, "Yeah right. If Jesus is the 'Anointed One', then I'm the prophet Isaiah!"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> p. 143, R. Kent Hughes, *Luke Volume 1: That You May Know the Truth* (Preaching the Word; Accordance electronic ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998)

Of course, being who he is, Jesus understood what was in their hearts and minds. So he continued his sermon:

“And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”

(Luke 4:23–24 ESV)

Jesus knows what they’re thinking.

“If you’re supposed to be the Messiah, prove it! Do a miracle, show us a trick!”

As they say, familiarity breeds contempt. As it so happens, familiarity with God, or his Son, is no exception.

Jesus knows that religious, ethnic, and even geographical pride is keeping them from truly understanding the words he has read from Isaiah, and the statements he has made about their present fulfilment.

So Jesus goes straight for the heart of the matter, using two examples from the Old Testament to make a provocative point.

### **Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17)**

The first example is of the prophet Elijah, from 1 Kings 17. Israel under the rule of Ahab, an evil king, whom the Bible describes as doing

“...evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. ... Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.”

(1 Kings 16:30–33 ESV)

Because of the wickedness of Ahab, and because of the wickedness that he allowed to spread unchecked in Israel, and even encouraged, God judged Israel with a severe famine.

Elijah delivered this message of judgement and famine to Ahab, and then ran for his life, because it's not the kind of thing you said to Ahab lightly. Elijah hid by a creek for a while, and God fed him there despite the famine.

Then God told him to go to a little town called Zarephath, and find a widow who lived there. God said that the widow would feed him, despite the famine. The significance of Zarephath is that wasn't actually in Israel, it was in neighbouring Phoenicia. The capital city of Phoenicia, Sidon, was known as a hotbed of idolatry. King Ahab's infamous wife, Jezebel, came from there.

When Elijah gets there, he discovers that the widow actually has nothing at all, except a handful of flour and some oil. When he meets her, she's gathering sticks to make a fire so she and her son can cook the last of their food and then wait to starve to death.

But then something remarkable happens. Elijah tells her to make him a little food first from their meagre provisions, and then make something for her and her son. And then Elijah tells her, *“For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’”* (1 Kings 17:14 ESV)

And we're told that that's exactly what happened. Though all of Israel was suffering from the famine, God provided specifically for an insignificant widow in a foreign town. A little later, Elijah even raised the woman's son from the dead.

### **Elisha and Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5)**

The next example Jesus uses is from 2 Kings, during the ministry of Elijah's successor, Elisha.

Naaman was the commander of the army of Syria. Syria was a dominant world power at the time, and had the relationship between Israel and Syria was tense, characterised by frequent attempted invasions and border skirmishes.

We're told that Naaman "*was a great man with his master and in high favour*", and that "*he was a mighty man of valour*" (2 Kings 5:1 ESV). But there was a problem. Naaman also suffered from a skin disease that some identify as leprosy.

In Bible times, from the Old Testament onwards, skin diseases were something to be especially careful of. Those who had them were considered unclean, especially according to God's Law. To be a leper, was to be an outcast.

Long story short, Elisha heals Naaman of his leprosy. And we're told that "*his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*" (2 Kings 5:14 ESV)

What's Jesus' point? Well, look with me at Luke 4:25:

"But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."

(Luke 4:25–26 ESV)

And at v27:

"And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

(Luke 4:27 ESV)

Israel had lots of widows, lots of starving people, lots of lepers. But who does God have a special concern for? His chosen people, who had taken their relationship with God for granted? No. He has special concern for an impoverished widow in a foreign, pagan town, and an enemy of Israel, an idolater, who suffers from leprosy.

If we read a bit further, we'll see that the people finally understood Jesus' message, but they didn't like it.

“When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.”

(Luke 4:28–30 ESV)

What upset Jesus' hearers so much that they wanted to kill him?

Well, it was simply the suggestion that they, the respectable, pious, Israelites of Nazareth, part of God's chosen nation, attending synagogue on the Sabbath, were no better off than a Phoenician widow or a Syrian leper when it came to their relationship with God. These were people who, to them, were on the periphery of God's concern, compared to Israel, which was in the centre. The implication was that these Jews too were the blind, the captive, the blind and the oppressed, and in need of God's favour, his liberty and his healing as much as anyone else.

This suggestion incensed them so much, they abandoned the synagogue service, skipped the blessing and benediction, and were perfectly willing to chuck Jesus off a cliff - on the Sabbath! Pride, keeping them from hearing and believing the news they'd been waiting for all along.

They might have been God's people, but they had forgotten their utter helplessness and hopelessness before God.

The truth is, those who are materially poor, or physically suffering, or socially oppressed often find it easier to admit their helplessness and hopelessness before God than those who are rich, or influential, or well-off.

Listen to this **quote**, and see if you agree:

"It is not scientific doubt, not atheism, not pantheism, not agnosticism, that in our day and in this land is likely to quench the light of the gospel. It is a proud, sensuous, selfish, luxurious, church-going, hollow-hearted prosperity."<sup>3</sup>

Does it surprise you to know that this quote was written over a **hundred years ago?**

## The Big Idea

I'd like to finish our time this morning by suggesting a big idea that we can take away from this text, followed by two points of application.

I'd like to suggest that the big idea behind Jesus reading from the book of Isaiah, and his sermon, is this:

**The gospel is good news for those who *know* they have nothing to offer God in return.**

## Application

There are two things I think we can take away with us this morning from this part of God's Word.

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<sup>3</sup> Frederic D. Huntington, *in* Francis Chan. "Crazy Love." iBooks.

## **1. Admit our own poverty and need for Jesus**

Firstly, we need to pray for God's help to avoid the error of Jesus hearers in Nazareth. We need God's help to recognise that we indeed are those who have nothing to offer God but a bottomless pit of sin.

You might remember the words of that old hymn:

“Nothing in my hand I bring,  
simply to the cross I cling;  
naked, come to thee for dress;  
helpless, look to thee for grace;  
foul, I to the fountain fly;  
wash me, Saviour, or I die.”

Not our church attendance, not the ministries we did, not the Bible knowledge we have, not how much people like us, not how well we sang in church, not how much coin we put in the collection bag, not what a 'good' person we are - none of those things changes the fact that we are the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed . None of these things changes the fact that we are spiritually bereft and in desperate need of God's grace, expressed in the death of his Son Jesus on the cross.

And if we find that we are trusting in anything than Jesus alone for acceptance before God, now is the time to pray and repent of that before God, repent of that pride, and ask him to give you liberty and sight.

## **2. Love like Jesus loves**

The second thing I'd like us to take away from this passage today is to ask God to help us love like Jesus loves. As we move through the gospel of Luke, we'll see that Jesus doesn't seek out the religious leaders, or the rich, or the influential.



He seeks out those that can offer him nothing in return. Widows, blind beggars, lepers, paralytics, the demon-possessed, social outcasts, people in the grip of their own poor life-choices. These are the poor he loves, and often they are the ones who respond to his message with more faith than anyone else.

Brennan Manning, in his book *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, makes a good point:

“The kingdom is not an exclusive, well-trimmed suburb with snobbish rules about who can live there. No, it is for a larger, homelier, less self-conscious caste of people who understand they are sinners because they have experienced the yaw and pitch of moral struggle.”

We can struggle to love the unloveable. We find it much easier to love people who can offer us something on return, who can love us in return, who can satisfy some need in us.

Who would you find it hardest not just to share the good news with, but to reflect the heart of that good news through your love for them?

To love to eternity those who truly are the poor, the blind, the captive and the oppressed in every sense of those words, that takes a selflessness that only God can give, and which we see so perfectly demonstrated

It's a selflessness that we can cultivate through a reflection on the gospel. If we have come to that point where we ourselves have cried out to God for mercy in the midst of hopelessness and helplessness, and offering God nothing have been given everything - then what have we got to lose?

Once we have been saved through Jesus Christ, our future is sealed. We are on the winning side. And real reflection on this, and taking of this to heart,

should help us to deny ourselves, and love those who aren't loved in the world with that very gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ for the worst of sinners.

Can you imagine the impact on our world of a church which is full, not only of people who know an utter but joyful dependance on the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation, but instead of leaving it there, love those around them in the community the same way that Jesus has loved them, living out the gospel they proclaim?

Remember: the Jesus' Good News is for everyone.

Why don't we pray and ask God to write these things upon our hearts, and for his Spirit to help us obey them.