

January 25, 2004

Epiphany 3

"The Timeless Ministry of Jesus"

LUKE 4:14-21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, ²¹ and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Last December the National Institute of Standards and Technology placed into service an atomic clock that will not lose or gain one second of time in 20 million years. The clock, located in Boulder, Colorado, has the distinction of being the most accurate clock in the world. Imagine that. Not losing one second of time in 20 million years. This wall clock that I am holding in my hand has a tiny receiver built into it that accesses this time clock once a day. Every day this clock gets adjusted to a clock that never loses a second of time in 20 million years. There are even watches you can hold up, push a button, and they set themselves to this clock.

This morning we want to look at something even better that never loses time or never changes with time. That is the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry that Jesus began in Galilee and his hometown of Nazareth continues until the end of time. Ephesians 4 tells us how Jesus raises up people to carry on his ministry. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service that the body of Christ might be built up."

This morning we want to look at this "**Timeless Ministry of Jesus**" that we see beginning in Nazareth. If we look at this ministry of Jesus we will have the answer to how we need to carry out our ministry here in this congregation and in personal lives.

1) Trust in the Holy Spirit

To follow in the footsteps of Jesus and have a successful ministry in these last days, we need to trust the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in the Lord's work. That was certainly true of Jesus. "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and the news about him spread through the whole countryside." It was the Holy Spirit who anointed Jesus at his baptism. Jesus read the words from Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor." Jesus barely stepped out of the

Jordan River after his baptism and the Holy Spirit led him out in the desert for forty days to battle Satan and win the victory over temptation. It was the Holy Spirit who wanted Jesus to live the perfect life you and I could never live, so that Jesus might credit us with his righteousness. Not only does Jesus remove your sin and declare you forgiven, he also credits you with his righteousness. That same Holy Spirit led Jesus to his hometown of Nazareth, to preach to the people in the synagogue and tell the world what his ministry is all about.

The night before he died Jesus promised the disciples that he would give them the Holy Spirit who would teach them all things and bring everything into their memory. Shortly before ascending into heaven, Jesus told the disciples to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit to fill them with power. Just as this glove I am holding has no power to work in the yard, unless a hand enters into it, the disciples would be powerless unless the Holy Spirit filled them and enabled them to speak the Word with great boldness.

If we adjust our ministry to the way Jesus carried out his timeless ministry in Galilee, we find that we need a whole lot more waiting on the Holy Spirit for help, and a whole lot less jumping into things on our own. Jesus set aside his power as God and depended on the Holy Spirit for power and guidance. He told the people, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." If Jesus needed the help of the Holy Spirit in his position as the Son of Man, how much more do we not need to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

What a blessing it is to trust that the Lord Jesus will send us his Holy Spirit to help us grow in the word, to open our eyes to see opportunities that exist to reach people, and bless that Word of God when it is planted into the hearts of the people. Jesus told his disciples "I will not leave you as orphans. I will not leave you alone. I will send the Counselor or the Comforter to be with you. The Greek word for "Counselor" or "Comforter" has the thought of someone walking alongside of you and encouraging you and putting you in the right direction. Jesus had the Holy Spirit with him in his ministry. He has promised to bless us with the same Holy Spirit in the last days. Let's set our clocks for ministry to be guided and led more by the Holy Spirit.

2) Open the Scriptures

And if we are going to adjust our ministry to be like that of Jesus, let's also look this morning at the way he opened the Scriptures to people. We are told in our text, "He taught in the synagogues and everyone praised him." Jesus loved helping people with their problems and performing miracles that allowed the blind to see and the lame to walk, but even more important Jesus longed and yearned to teach people the true Word of God. "He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him." They said to each other, "No one ever taught us like this before."

When Jesus came back to his hometown he went into the synagogue "according to his custom." The people knew Jesus. They had watched him grow up from a little boy, to a young man, and now he has become famous because of the miracles that are being performed and John the Baptist who said, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." He stood up to read. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He read the verses that we just read to you a few minutes ago. He read these words

as the Word of God, and applied them to himself. It was Jesus who said, "The Scriptures cannot be broken." It was Jesus who talked to the disciples on the night of Easter and verse by verse from the Old Testament showed them he was the Messiah. Later they said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn with us as he talked with us along the way?" Jesus loved the Scriptures. He honored them. He fulfilled them. When dying on the cross, he purposely refused something to drink because he wanted to fulfill the Scripture that said he would suffer terrible thirst.

If we are going to carry on a successful ministry here in this congregation, and if you are going to minister to people in your personal life the way Jesus did, then love the Scriptures the way Jesus loved them. Jesus had the custom of going to the synagogue. He was there all the time as a child. He loved being in his Father's house, the temple in Jerusalem, at the age of twelve, and loved unfolding the Scriptures to the learned scholars who were there. We love the Scriptures because they come to us from God himself. "Holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." We believe every word is true when it speaks on subjects such as the creation of the world, marriage as the union of one man and one woman, the ten commandments, the fact that Jesus Christ is the only way back to God. Everything in our culture tells us that we can take the Bible and mold and shape it to our way of thinking. The popular word, "Whatever" is applied also to the Bible. "Whatever works for you."

Jesus went to people, performed miracles, talked with them, walked among them, got to know them, attended weddings, ate meals with them, because Jesus was always looking for ways to unfold the Scriptures to people and show them from the Old Testament who he was, and why he had come to this earth. That same Jesus wants to come to you in your personal life, and speak to you as you open the Bible and read. Nothing is more important in these last days for you personally and for this congregation than reading your Bible, even if it is only a little each day.

3) Focus on Jesus

The Bible is so important because it takes our focus off ourselves and directs our attention to Jesus. Listen to what Jesus read to the people. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus read these words. Then he sat down and shocked the people of his hometown by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Everything they needed was found in Jesus, and only in Jesus.

Freedom. That's what Jesus means to me this morning and to you. We were born prisoners, locked up by our sin, beaten every day by Satan who loves to make our lives miserable. So many people all around us have no joy and peace in their lives, because they are being beaten up so badly by sin. They are angry at the world, angry at their family members. They open themselves up to sinful behavior patterns with sex, greed, pride, rebellion and hatred for God. Satan has them in his prison cell, devising every torture possible for them, and if he must suffer in the lake of fire, he wants them with him. Jesus gives us freedom. If it were not for the grace of God you and I would still be in that prison, without God and without hope. The Revelation says, "'To him who loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests.'" That's

the ultimate freedom. We were poor, but now are rich. We were blind but now we see Jesus for who he truly is.

There is a lot of talk these days about the Mel Gibson film, "The Passion." It is about the suffering and death of Jesus. From what I have heard those in Hollywood are trying to block the film from showing in studios. Christians who have seen the film have been deeply moved, because it portrays what Jesus did to win our freedom for us, to make us rich, to open our eyes to see that we are saved by his suffering, death, resurrection, and perfect life he lived. What upsets the critics is the fact that it is a true account of what Jesus went through for us. That's what Jesus wanted the people to see when he began his ministry in Nazareth. That's what he wants us to see. Jesus promised us that as long as this world stands "the gospel of the kingdom will preached" and then the end will come. That's something timeless and never changes. Lord Jesus keep us faithful to your ministry. Amen