



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 4:14-30

To understand Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

“Opening Day”

Growing up in the Dallas/Fort Worth area for all of my childhood significantly shaped my love for specific sports teams. I’m (unfortunately) a die-hard Dallas Cowboys fan. I remember the 90’s, the Super Bowls, the relevance, the... winning. I’m a Dallas Stars fan as well. I remember the Stanley Cup win well. I’m also a long time Texas Rangers fan, and while I have loved the team and followed them for a number of years, I’ve never been to an opening day game in the ballpark. It’s one of the few bucket list items I have yet to cross off. There is something magical about a new season, the new possibilities, and the overall excitement that permeates the metroplex. Just like every season ultimately comes to an end, every season has a beginning point as well.

Luke 4:14 records what is essentially “opening day” for Jesus’ ministry. This is the first time we see His public ministry in action. Having been baptized, and then successfully warding off Satan’s temptation, verses 14-15 says, “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.” From this point on in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus will be under the public eye, and He will be met with mixed review.

Hometown Hero to Zero

Verse 16 tells us that Jesus “came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up.” Luke has already recorded Jesus’ connection to Nazareth, and so it is fitting that Jesus would begin His ministry there. Below is a breakdown of the events that followed.

JESUS STANDS UP

As was the custom, Jesus “went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read” (Lk. 4:16). There is here implied an impressive command over Scripture. Jesus stood up to read and expound upon Scripture, having no idea what would even be given to Him to read. Verse 17 continues: “And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.” In the ancient world, they didn’t have Bibles like we have today. They had individual scrolls with no verses or chapter numbers at all. In fact, the ancient languages that we have uncovered in unearthed scrolls and parchments reveal the lack of spacing and even grammatical markers such as commas and periods. With this in mind, the latter part of verse 17 becomes far more interesting: “He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written.” Having no chapter or verses, knowing where to find specific passages required tremendous familiarity and command over the text. This is all the more surprising when one considers the lack of formal training that Jesus had and the fact that He probably didn’t have regular access to the scroll of Isaiah since He was not a formally trained rabbi. However, as the second person of the Trinity, He is ultimately the author of all Scripture, and therefore has command over it; they are His words!

ISAIAH’S WORDS

Jesus read Isaiah 58:6d, as well as 61:1-2 (although certain phrases were not included): “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 favor.” The reason for the inclusion of Isaiah 58:6d and the omission of some of the phrases in Isaiah 61:1-2 is not explicitly given but many explanations have been attempted. The most likely reason is that Jesus was declaring two things: 1. What His ministry was going to entail, but more important, 2. That the words of Isaiah, a messianic expectation, were being fulfilled in Christ. In fact, Jesus explicitly tells us this: “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. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk. 4:20-21).

THE CROWD’S CONFUSION

Bearing in mind that at this point the crowd did not understand the full identity of Jesus, this was a confusing moment. For one, how could Jesus know the Scripture that well, and how could He speak with such authority? Second, how could this messianic expectation be fulfilled in “Joseph’s son” (Lk. 4:22)? It was a strange departure from what they expected of a carpenter’s son from Nazareth!

JESUS’ RESPONSE

Jesus’ response to the crowd’s confusion clarifies some details for us as to the order of Jesus’ ministry. What we learn is that after “opening day” in Galilee, Jesus likely traveled to Capernaum where he performed miracles and gained a reputation for teaching. This is likely why he was given invitation to come and speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath in His home town. Luke switches the order here likely to establish that while Jesus was not welcomed in His hometown, He will be received more readily in other cities. This is why Jesus repeats back to the crowds what some had been saying: “What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well” (Lk. 4:23).

The point of this transaction is clarified in the following statement regarding Elijah. Jesus is making the point that while prophets are not welcomed in their hometown, they are received by outsiders. This is predictive of the kind of treatment will receive in His three and a half year ministry. Gentiles, sinners, and unclean people, and even demons will rightly recognize the Son of God, but the Jews will not; they will wrongly condemn and crucify instead.

THE CROWD'S IRE

Jesus' words did not please the hometown crowds. Verses 28 and 29 conclude: "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." This is an interesting detail that is often overlooked. The ultimate crucifixion is not the breaking point when the crowd and religious leaders finally decide *enough is enough*; they tried to kill Jesus several times, this time being one of them. However, Jesus has the ability to somehow evade large crowd. Verse 30 says, "But passing through their midst, he went away." We aren't told if he simply made His way out, or if there was a supernatural component to His escape, and Luke doesn't seem too interested in this question. The point is, Jesus made it out of the threat of the crowd.

The Timing Matters

The question then becomes, "Why did Jesus not allow His death to happen here, but He eventually does in the crucifixion?" It has everything to do with the unfolding plan of redemption on God's eschatological clock. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." God's timing was necessary to not only bring forth the Messiah, but for the Messiah to lay His life down that He might take it up again (Jn. 10:18). Similarly, it says in John 7:30, "So they were seeking to seize Him; and no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come." The Lord knew precisely when His hour would come to drink the cup of death that His Father had prepared for Him, and until that time came, He would not be captured and killed.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the fickleness of the human heart. The people in Jesus' hometown had heard of the works He had done in Capernaum, and likely even invited Him to come and speak in the synagogue. Upon hearing His words, however, and coming to terms with what Jesus came to do, they quickly and radically turned on Him and even attempted to kill Him. It illustrates how exceedingly wrong the human heart really is, and reminds us of our own tendency to reject Jesus when He doesn't meet our expectations. And this reality, as awful as it may be, is what ultimately draws out the beauty of the Gospel; Jesus died for us in spite of us.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 4:14-15. Where did Jesus return to, and where was He coming from (Hint: Go back to the previous verses)? In what way did He return, and how did this affect His reputation?

2. Read Luke 4:16-17. Where did He come to, and why was this location significant? What did He do on the Lord's Day, and why? What scroll was handed to Him to read?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 4:18-20. Now, read Isaiah 58:6 and 61:1-2. What are the similarities and what are the differences between what Jesus' and Isaiah's words? What did Jesus do after reading the scroll?
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2. Read Luke 4:21-22. How did people respond to Him? What did He say to their reaction?
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Day Three

1. Read Luke 4:23-24. In your own words, paraphrase what Jesus said to the crowds.
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2. Read Luke 4:25-26. In your own words, paraphrase what Jesus said to the crowds. How would you have responded to Him if you had been in the crowd?
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Day Four

1. Read Luke 4:27-28. What did Jesus say in verse 27, and how did the crowds respond to His words?
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2. Read Luke 4:29-30. What did the crowds attempt to do in their anger? How did Jesus handle it?
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Week 14 Discussion: Overcoming the Hometown Identity

One reality Jesus speaks to in this week's passage is that of the difficulty of a prophet returning to his/her hometown. It's difficult to speak powerfully and truthfully to a people who already have an idea of who you are and what you are and are not capable of. This happens today as well, in some manner of speaking. It's not uncommon for a person to grow in their faith and even into a position of leadership, and have a difficult time breaking away from their identity within that community that was formed so many years before. Talk as a group about the difficulty of growing into a position of leadership within a community (family, friends, church, etc.) and how to overcome those pre-loaded judgments and walk in the calling God has equipped you for.

1. Icebreaker: Are there certain communities where your identity hasn't caught up to who you are? (Example: You're an adult, but when you go home you're still, "Little Johnny.")
2. "Your growth will put pressure on people around you to grow as well." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
3. Is there anyone in your life who has grown out of their identity within your community?
4. Why do you think it's difficult to find respect among the people who have known you the longest?
5. Why do you think it's difficult to give respect to those you've known for a long time?

6. How can the church help people walk in their calling and overcome their “old identity?”

Takeaways:

1. Jesus came back to Nazareth after His baptism and temptation and taught in the synagogue.
2. The hometown crowd was offended by Him to the point that they tried to kill Him.