

Luke 4:14-44 (1984 NIV)
Jesus' Ministry as Our Model

Introduction

It is believed that Luke wrote his Gospel not only to introduce Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, but also to tell the Gentile people that they too can have a place in the Kingdom of God. And Luke built on this theme of the Gospel for the Gentiles later on in his second book—the Book of Acts.

I believe there is more to the Gospel of Luke than just telling the Gentile people that Jesus is also their Messiah. I believe what we read about Jesus saying and doing in the Gospel of Luke is also meant as examples for Jesus' people to follow (both in His time then and our time today).

Every Christian has been given gifts and is called to use them in ministering to others in and outside the Church.

If this is true, what should our ministries look like? Obviously, they will not all look the same. Some will focus on certain needs or certain groups of people. Some will be behind the scene while others will be more upfront. Some will be done inside the Church while others will be done outside the Church. But all is ministry and all is needed.

As we begin to look at the early ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, I want us to pay close attention to how Jesus ministered. Of course, we are not Jesus and our ministries will not look exactly like His (e.g. you and I are not called to die on the Cross for the salvation of people).

Yet, they should not be too dissimilar. We want to teach the things that Jesus taught; we want to do the things that Jesus did (except those unique to Jesus). We want to serve those He served. We want our ministries to look like His as much as possible.

In our passage this morning, Luke introduces the early ministry of Jesus in some other places of Galilee, a region with a high Gentile population, just before He came to Nazareth. We see that it was a ministry done in the power of the Holy Spirit, which is a first lesson for our own ministries as well. Whatever we do for the Lord, we can only do it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What then is Jesus' ministry model for us to consider?

I. Jesus' Teaching, Deliverance and Healing (vv. 14-21, 36)

A close study of Jesus' ministry timeline based on the four Gospels will reveal to us that He did not appear at the synagogue in Nazareth immediately after His baptism and temptation. Actually, nearly a year had passed since our Lord was first presented by John the Baptist as "the Lamb who will take away the

sins of the world”. Our Lord’s ministry in Galilee resulted in His growing popularity. The people of Nazareth had heard the reports of His preaching and power, and were eager to see what He could do when He came into their midst (cf. Luke 4:23).

Verses 14 and 15 of our text are a very concise summary of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee and its impact.

14 Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

Luke emphasized the Lord’s ministry in Galilee this way in v. 15—“He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” Reports of our Lord’s ministry and popularity thus reached the people of Nazareth even before He did reach them. When He finally arrived, the level of anticipation and excitement was understandably high.

Jesus’ arrival at the synagogue in Nazareth seems to be His first public appearance as Messiah there. However, this is certainly not Jesus’ first visit to this synagogue. Remember, it was in this town that He grew up. It was this synagogue that Jesus must have frequented in the years He and His parents lived in Nazareth. Thus, Jesus would have been a very familiar face. The question, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” may very well reflect the sense of recognition of Him as one whom the people there had seen so much in the past.

At one point while He was in the synagogue, the Lord stood to read the scroll of Isaiah handed to Him in vv. 18-19:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

This is largely a quotation of Isaiah 61:1 and 2a. The essence of these words points to the Messiah to come.

Now, the Lord not only read this text, but He went on to identify Himself as the Messiah prophesied in the text.

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 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Notice that Jesus deliberately left out reading the 2nd part of Isa. 61:2 concerning the “day of vengeance of our God”. This is because at this

instance, Jesus' emphasis was on His coming as the Messiah who would save, not the Judge who would avenge. But our Lord understood that His role as Messiah was to come ... first to reveal God to men and to provide a way of salvation ... and later to come again to gather His people and to destroy His enemies.

Now, what do we see as Jesus' primary way of ministering to people so far? He taught. In particular, we read that it was His regular practice to teach in the synagogues, which was the Jewish centre of worship and learning. It was His custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Jesus came to teach and proclaim God's Word. In fact, when He was in Capernaum later on, the people there wanted to keep Him with them. But Jesus told them that He had to go teach elsewhere. Jesus came to teach; to proclaim what God said in His Word.

31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people.

32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

Not only did Jesus teach and proclaim the Scripture, but He also displayed authority as well. In fact, His authority was evident in His teaching. Jesus did not teach like the other rabbis who quoted one another for their authority. Jesus taught with His own authority.

Again, Luke continues to give us certainty about who Jesus is. He is the One who has authority when He teaches. Not only that, He is also the One who has authority over demons and sickness (vv. 33-41).

While Jesus was teaching in Capernaum, a man possessed by a demon approached Him and cried out. Jesus simply rebuked the demon and delivered the man. Notice what the people say about Jesus in v. 36 - "What words these are! With authority and power he gives orders to impure spirits and they come out!"

These acts of deliverance and healing validate Jesus' claim—that He's indeed the promised Messiah. Jesus is indeed the One who has come to proclaim good news to the poor and set the captives free. Jesus spoke with words of power and authority in His teaching and proclamation of Scripture. Jesus responded with words of power and authority in His deliverance of those under demonic bondage and healing of those stricken with sickness.

Put in another way, we can say that Jesus' ministry model for us is this: Let our words match our works so that there is authenticity and authority in what we are saying and doing in Jesus' name.

The ancient sage, Confucius, once said it well, "The superior man acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions."

Jesus' ministry teaches us that we must match what we say with what we do. This is His ministry example for us to follow. But very often, this becomes an issue in our ministry. Why so? We'll now move on to answer this.

II. Favour and Fury of the Jews in Nazareth (vv. 22-30, 43-44)

Initially, the Lord was warmly received when He spoke in the synagogue at Nazareth. Listen to Luke's description of the people's response in v. 22:

22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Several things to bear in mind in order to fully understand the people's response here:

- One, the people respond very positively to Jesus' claim. There were no objections and no resistance. They spoke well of Jesus.
- Two, there was no clear understanding of what His words meant. Luke informs us that these people wondered what Jesus meant by what He said.
- Three, the warm response to Jesus' words was the result of their mistaken concept of the Messiah and His ministry.

The people seemed to have some grandiose thoughts of what Jesus would do for them. They might have thought that since Jesus was their hometown boy, He would do even greater things for them than what He had done in the other places in Galilee. I mean, they viewed Jesus as one of their own.

But Jesus said to them:

23 "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

The proverb, "Physician, heal yourself", is somewhat interesting. It implies that a doctor who is all ready to heal others must first not neglect healing himself and those close to him if need be. Today, we will say something like this: "Charity begins with first taking care of your own self and your own home."

In the context of what Jesus was expecting the Jews in Nazareth to say to Him, the meaning would be like this—Jesus expected to hear this proverb said to Him in Nazareth because the people there would expect Him to do even more and greater miracles in His own hometown of Nazareth than those He had done in other places. "Jesus, if you can do such mighty things in other places, even among the Gentiles in Galilee, surely you can do even more and greater things among your fellow Jews in your hometown of Nazareth."

But in anticipation of what they would say to Him, Jesus said to them:

24 - "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

Jesus knew that a prophet is never honoured in his own country, by his own people, if he was to be true to God. Such a prophet would not be received with open arms but with rejection, like all of the other prophets in the Old Testament.

Thus, Jesus was telling His hometown folks that the reason why they were warmly and positively receiving Him now was because they did not really understand what He said—they did not really understand the kind of Messiah He would be.

Jesus would not receive misguided praise and therefore He set out to correct their misconceptions of His messianic identity and mission.

25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

These words were intended to spell out what His messianic ministry would mean. This was no fresh revelation, in the sense of informing the Jews in Nazareth something entirely new and unknown. The truth of the matter is that the prophets of old had always been declaring God's redemptive blessings upon both the Jews AND the Gentiles (e.g. the Abrahamic Covenant in Gen. 12:1-3).

Thus, Jesus pointed out that if His ministry was correctly understood, He would be rejected like all the other prophets in Israel's history. Jesus not only cited the fact that Israel's prophets were never honoured by their own people, but also illustrated the fact that the prophets were often more kindly treated by the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles even received blessings at their hands. E.g.:

- Elijah's being hosted by the Gentile widow at Zerephath who fed him with her last piece of bread, and how she was blessed with daily supply of bread and later with her dead son brought back to life (1 Kings 17).
- Elisha's healing of Naaman, the leader of the Syrian army attacking Israel (2 Kings 5).

In both cases, not only did the prophets Elijah and Elisha bring blessings to the Gentiles, but also warn the people of Israel of divine judgment upon them.

Jesus thus reminded His audience that He, like the other prophets of Israel, had come to bring blessing not exclusively to the Jews, their own people, but

to the Gentiles as well. Of course, this incurred the fury of the Jews in Nazareth.

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.
29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.

This incident in the life of Christ evidences how strongly the Jews felt about keeping the Gentiles from receiving God's blessings. They were furious and violently reacted to Jesus' words. Anyone who would speak of the blessing of the Gentiles instead of the Jews was a traitor! He deserved to die! They tried to push Him off a cliff to His death.

30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Just like the waters of the Red Sea parted to allow Moses and God's people to pass through, so the angry crowd strangely allowed Jesus to pass through them, unharmed and untouched. They wanted a miracle and this was the one and only "miracle" which they did witness—i.e. Jesus, as if protected by some divine power, walking through an angry and hostile crowd unharmed and untouched.

So then, how did the Jews in Nazareth respond to Jesus, His teaching and His ministry to them?

- First, they responded with favour because they were mistaken about Him and His mission.
- Second, they responded with fury when Jesus did not meet their expectation and were even corrected by Him.

One contrast you need to see is this.

- Jesus came to the Jews in Nazareth and they responded to His ministry by trying to kill Him (v. 29).
- When He left the angry Jews in Nazareth and came to Capernaum, the people there tried all they could to keep Him from leaving (v. 42).

One city wanted to throw Him out and even kill Him; another begged Him to stay. We will continue to see both of these responses towards Jesus throughout His life and ministry.

When Jesus came to Capernaum after leaving Nazareth, He responded to the people's appeals to stay in Capernaum by referring to His calling and priorities:

43 "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."
44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Jesus' ministry model for us is this: Human expectations will cause people to respond to us differently in different circumstances, but we are to remain true to the Lord in His work and season for us.

Conclusion

I met up with a group of old friends on time. The conversation then moved into a subject that's very important to all of us at this season of our lives—staying healthy.

Many of us expressed the need to watch our weight. I told the group, “I was at the polyclinic recently. Before I saw the doctor, I had my blood pressure taken, and my height and weight measured. This recent visit showed that though I had lost some weight, I can still lose more.”

Many others also expressed their need to work on reducing their weight ... except for one—a short person. He said, “According to a health guide, I am more concerned about my height than my weight.”

I asked him why and he lamented, “Well, for my weight, my ideal height should be 6 ft. (1.83 m.); not 5 ft. 5 (1.65 m.).”

I asked, “So, what's your weight?”

He answered, “Only 180 lbs. (82 kg.).”

He had placed his preferred choice (more height) over what should be his primary concern (less weight).

I believe the Jews that the Lord ministered to in His early ministry in Nazareth were also suffering from misplaced expectations. They wanted Jesus to do for them according to their preferred mission for Him to be a miracle worker, not according to God's primary mandate for Him to be the Messiah.

Let me suggest some practical outworking of Jesus' ministry model for us today.

- i. Jesus' ministry was a prophetic ministry in that He was calling people to identify with a Holy God. And Jesus passed on this prophetic ministry to those who came after Him. In this sense, the Great Commission is a prophetic commission. This means we first would have to stand apart from the world as pleasing to the Lord. If our words and works are no different from the world, then the world will not see the power of the Holy Spirit in and through our lives. Worst still, if our words do not match our works, then the world will consider us nothing more than great pretenders rather than Great Commissioners, and thus, will see no need of us and the message we bear.

For others to see God's power in and through our lives, we are to be real in our commitment to holy living and concern for healing lives.

As we follow Jesus' model in ministering to people, we are to be real in your commitment to holy living and concern for healing lives as reflected in our personal life, family life, work life, social life, and church life.

- ii. The Jews in Nazareth expected Jesus to identify with them, but they refused to identify themselves with the Gentiles though both groups share the same need for Jesus. The Gospel forbids that we should shun anyone because of our own biases and prejudices.

Jesus' ministry is ongoing in and through us because "God so loved the world", and this means we are to love more and judge less those who are lost without Jesus or in sin.

As we follow Jesus' model in ministering to people individually and as a church, we are to be welcoming of those who come to us, especially those we find different from us or difficult to accept.

- iii. The Jews in Nazareth also expected Jesus to identify with them by favouring them over others. But when He did not do things according to their expectations of Him, they rejected Him and even tried to kill Him.

There will be times when we may disappoint people because we choose to obey the Lord's call rather than to fulfil human expectations.

As we follow Jesus' model in ministering to people, we are to seek godly balance between remaining true to God in faithfulness and giving way to others in graciousness?

Let's seek the Lord to help us minister in His name and according to how He has modelled for us. Amen!