

*We Aussies love a winner.*

*We probably don't give 2-hoots about the ordinary worker, or an ordinary sports person or whatever,, But as soon as a person:*

- *becomes famous;*
- *have that big win*
- *they're recognised for something great,*

*— They're an Australian; They're one of ours; And we want the world to know how wonderful we Australians are for spawning such a famous achiever.*

*Even if they happen to be a Kiwi, as long as they did something in Australia, we'll claim them too... And if a foreign sports star has great potential, we'll bend over backwards to make sure they get a visa and expedited citizenship so we can call them ours as well...*

*Am I being cynical? Or is that the way it is???*

*But then, as soon as a person is no longer a winner, we forget about them so quick. Once again, they're a nobody... That is, unless they've got some other reason to be famous... We love the famous; We love a winner...*

As I read the today's bible reading, I realised, this is not unique to Australia.

When Jesus grew up in Nazareth, He was most probably a nobody – merely the son of a carpenter, and that Mary girl, who got herself pregnant before she was married...

And we know that Jesus **did** go unnoticed. One day He went missing for a whole day and His parents didn't even notice. (We talked about that a few weeks ago when He stayed behind in Jerusalem).

But when Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, everything changed. When He began His ministry (in the **power** of the Holy Spirit), He became famous. He kicked-off His ministry in the region of Galilee. And we're told that a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. That means the report made it to His home-town of Galilee.

Now, the Greek word that our Bible translates as "report" is φήμη (phēmē) from which we do get our word "fame". It is saying, "Jesus became famous"....

As Jesus went through the region, He taught in their synagogues (the synagogues were like local Jewish churches/gathering places. [There was only one temple, and it was in Jerusalem. But most towns had a synagogue, where the locals could meet to hear God's word and pray and worship.]])

And Jesus taught in these places, and He was **being glorified by all.**

Alright, so even as Jesus' ministry first begins, people are lapping it up, and they are glorifying Him.

We live in a culture that glorifies:

- sports champions;
- movie stars;
- singers and bands;
- eco-warriors;
- folk who are famous for no apparent reason – they're just famous or even "insta-famous"...

And **our** culture tends to glorify such people to such an extent, they are worshipped. But for us (as Disciples of Jesus), we glorify Him and Him alone.

Alright so Jesus has become famous, and obviously the Nazarenes are ready to get their share of their new home-town-hero. (He's one of us, you know. He's famous)... It doesn't actually say this, but reading between the lines, we can see hints of their expectations of what their home-town hero is going to do, when He comes home.

What are the hints?

1. Firstly, Jesus is given the opportunity to read the Scriptures at the synagogue.
2. And then He's expected to teach at the Synagogue. They don't give these opportunities to everybody.

So, on the Sabbath day, He went to the synagogue, and He stood up to read. And they handed Him the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah. And apparently **He** chose which bit He was

going to read (which isn't easy to find BTW – no chapter & verse numbers). But He found the spot in the Scroll. And He read from Isaiah 61.

And this is what He read:

**18 "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,**

**19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."**

**20** 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.

When the Prophet Isaiah wrote that, it was prophecy – it was something that was yet to happen. It was a message that had been given to Judah, who were in captivity in Babylon. And it set forward a great vision, of not only a return to Jerusalem for them (preceding chapters), but something **greater** than that – Isaiah set forth the vision of the whole world finding their hope in Jerusalem...

But when Jesus read it, once again it was prophecy, only it was prophecy that was currently being fulfilled in Him, even as He read it.

After Jesus had read it, His home-town-crowd were on the edge of their seats, “What’s He going to say?” ... And we’re not told everything He said, but:

<sup>21</sup> ... he began to say to them, “**Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.**”

That’s a pretty big call (a bold statement)...

So, let’s go back to what Jesus read, to understand “What was fulfilled in their hearing?”

<sup>18</sup> “**The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,**

Yes, we know this. When Jesus was baptised, the Spirit of God came upon Him.

And He’s been anointed to do what? **to proclaim good news to the poor.**

What’s so special about the poor? Why is it good news for them???

*Well, usually when an announcement is made, it’s generally **not** good news for the poor. Usually if the Government makes an announcement, it’s the majority or the well-to-do who are going to do a bit better, and everybody else has to pay more fees to fund it.*

But when the **Gospel** was preached, the early church quickly discovered that the message was received mainly by the poor (not so much the rich), and those who weren’t very important (not so much the famous). And I suspect the reason for this is

because the poor are very aware of their need, while the rich are used to being self-sufficient and they're filled with pride, and they generally like to be self-sufficient, self-righteous **and self-determined** in every way.

## 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 (ESV)

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards (educated), not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

You see, on the Day of Judgment, wealth; education; fame,,, counts for nothing.

And this is why the Gospel is good news to the poor. God chooses those who are insignificant, and in Christ, the poor become rich... But let me clarify what I mean by that.

Sadly, (and this makes me angry), a false gospel is being preached today, that has changed the riches of the glory of Christ, into a promise of **earthly** riches and wealth. What an obscene twisting of what our Lord has taught and promised.

*e.g. In many churches, just before the offering is taken up, you'll get a message along the lines of: "If you put \$1000 into*

*the offering, God will give you \$2000 back”... What an obscene grab for money, dressed up as a spiritual get-rich-quick scheme...*

*And I'm going to say to you today, do not ever donate money to BD if your hope and your aim is to get material blessings back... We want no part in that. But if you love Jesus and you want to support the teaching of God's word in this place and other places, then give, and give sacrificially – that means give until you notice it's missing – give until it hurts,, expecting nothing in return.*

Jesus was sent **to proclaim good news to the poor.**

And yet some of us might notice, “But, the poor are mostly absent from churches today.” Why?

Is it because:

- the poor don't feel welcome in our churches;
- they don't feel good/worthy enough;
- we shut them out???
- we just relate to our circle of friends, and the poor are not our friends???

The two cohorts that are largely missing from Western churches today, are the very rich and the very poor. The Western church has become very middle class... and this is an anomaly.

**However**, if we were to look across the world, and to take a global perspective, we would very quickly realise that the

places where the Gospel **is** most received with gladness, and the Christian church is growing the **fastest**, is amongst the World's poor. Some of the poorest nations of Africa and Asia, is where the Gospel is bearing much fruit.

And that's why I encourage you to support missionaries who preach the good news of Jesus to the world's poor. It's not a very popular thing to say, but it's true: Even the poorest person in Australia, is well off by world standards.

Let's move on:

**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,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."**

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel would celebrate what's called "The year of jubilee". Every 50<sup>th</sup> year, there would be a jubilee.

- Every slave would be released. So in Israel, unlike other nations, you didn't own a slave forever – you were basically leasing them and the amount you would pay would be determined by the number of years of service were left until the year of Jubilee when the slave would once again be a free man.
- Every piece of land would revert to its ancestral ownership. *So, my mum & dad sold our farm. And from that point, it became highly unlikely that me or any of my*

*descendants could ever afford to buy into a workable-sized farm ever again.*

That wasn't a problem in Israel. When a person bought a farm, they weren't buying freehold – they were essentially buying a lease, and what they would pay, would depend on how many years until the next jubilee, when it would return to its ancestral owners...

Are you with me???

It was a marvellous system that God put in place, to give the poor a chance to climb out of inter-generational poverty. And the image that Isaiah is giving, and the image that Jesus is picking up here, is that of a jubilee...

Liberty to the captives;  
liberty for the oppressed;  
The jubilee...

The year of jubilee was a year of:

- hope;
- joy;
- promise for a better future;
- gave release and freedom...

And so Jesus read this, and then He sat down and He said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." and then went on to explain what He meant by that. What Jesus was doing, was proclaiming an era of salvation.

The point at which Jesus stopped reading from Isaiah, was mid-verse<sup>2</sup>. It is the dividing line between the coming era of

salvation, and the coming judgment. It's the dividing line between the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Jesus and the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus.

Isaiah 61:2 (ESV)

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, (This is where Jesus stopped)  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn;

And so at this point, Jesus wasn't taking up a theme of judgment. He taught about the grace of a jubilee-like era of salvation... And Luke doesn't tell us much of what Jesus taught that day, but we do know that it was well received. His home-town were rapt... Great message Jesus....

<sup>22</sup> ...all spoke well of him  
they marvelled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. (wonderful, wonderful stuff).  
They were amazed...

... "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Oh, what a message... We're living in an era of salvation...

Now, for **us**, we now understand He's talking about "spiritual blessings". Salvation in Jesus, is so much better than physical, worldly blessings.

- Why is it good news to the poor? Not because we get stuff, but because the poor are more mindful of their need for faith, and therefore they will be saved and enter the glories of heaven.
- How would the blind see? Well yes, Jesus would heal a few blind men. But **millions** would have their spiritual eyes opened, and they would see their need for a saviour, and yield to Jesus as their Lord.
- How are the captives set free? He wasn't talking about them being an occupied land, and the wicked Romans were going to go away and leave them alone... He was talking about how, by the grace of God, we are forgiven of our sins, and set free from sin and death...

We know that Jesus' message is about spiritual blessings, but His home-crowd, they did not. They were hanging out for the miracles.

And Jesus must've known this. He answered them before they even asked... And the mood changes, just like that. Wow, isn't this wonderful gracious teaching. Wonderful, wonderful stuff... Coming from Joseph's son...

And Jesus shoves a pin in the balloon:

**"Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb,  
'Physician, heal yourself.'"**

All of the miracles we've been hearing about, do them for us too...

It's like Jesus turns on them... and deliberately needles them... And all I can put it down to, is "Jesus knows the heart."...

Matthew and Mark tell us that they took offense at Jesus' words, but Luke sorta fills the gap in a bit. The reason they took offense at Him is because He told them, you're not going to get the miracles.

And Jesus gives 2 Old Testament examples of 2 prophets who did miracles for foreigners rather than their own people. And Jesus is saying, "I'm not putting on a miracle show for you lot, because that's all you want..." You just want the dose of fame.

And when they heard that, they were ropable. They tried to throw Him off a cliff. And probably the only miracle He did in Nazareth is He strolled through a crowd who were trying to kill Him, and went on His way.

They were happy with His gracious teaching (probably because they thought this was the prelude to the miracle show that would follow). What **upset** them, was He wasn't going to do the miracle show... They wanted to see their famous fellow Nazarene, do His stuff.

And next week, we're going to see how the miracles are not the main game. Jesus' purpose, was to **preach**.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “**An evil and adulterous generation looks for signs**” ... And His home town, were just that.

Now for us, as Disciples of Jesus, are we signs and wonders junkies – always needing the next ‘fix’ of miracles to keep us enthused? If so, we’ve missed the whole point.

What is the point???

We are living in the era of salvation. That’s the greatest blessing.

- To be set free from sin and death;
- To have our spiritual eyes opened, to see and know our Lord;
- No longer a captive,
- but living in our joyous new hope.

Let’s pray,

Lord Jesus Christ,  
we thank You that You came,  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
Lord, we are so aware,  
that we are needful of You.

To proclaim liberty to the captives.  
Lord,  
we have been held captive by sin and death.  
And we thank You that by Your death and resurrection,

You set us free.

You bring recovery of sight to the blind.

Open our eyes Lord,  
to things of the Spirit.

Shift our focus from worldly things,  
to the Kingdom of God.

You came

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Lord, what a blessing it is,  
to live in this era of salvation.

Lord, we thank You for Your grace,  
and your undeserved favour  
that saves.

We thank You,  
That You would save us who do not deserve it.

Thank You Jesus.  
Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Matthew 12:39