

Jesus gives an Epiphany sermon.

Text: Luke 4:14-21 for 1/27/2019 by Pastor Bolwerk

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding area. ¹⁵He was teaching in their synagogues and being honored by everyone. ¹⁶He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. ¹⁷The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. ²⁰He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. ²¹He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

During the Church Year season of Epiphany we focus on the different ways Jesus revealed himself as the world's Lord and Savior. Yet sometimes people use the word epiphany in a different way. People will speak of "having an epiphany." What do they mean by that? An epiphany is similar to a revelation, but there is a little more involved. In a revelation something is revealed or made know. Information is given about something previously unknown. Yet that information may have no effect on the person receiving it. That new knowledge may not cause any change. With an epiphany something is revealed that does have an effect on people. It is information, or a new point of view, that causes people to change the way they think and life.

Think of the three Wise Men who visited Jesus. When God revealed that star to them, they gained a new understanding that a king had been born into the world. That new knowledge changed them. It motivated them to the point where they left their homes and traveled hundreds of miles to find and worship this new king. People sometimes speak of an epiphany as having an "ah-ha" moment, or an "eye-opening" experience. Regardless of what you call it, an epiphany is that moment when you suddenly understand some truth, and that truth affect who you are and how you live.

Epiphany moments can happen at any time, yet when they happen epiphanies are something special. They have the power to change the way we view ourselves and the world around us. They have the power to challenge us, causing us to reexamine our priorities, and helping us focus on what is truly important in life.

In this portion of God's word before us today, Jesus is challenging the people of his hometown of Nazareth to have "an epiphany moment." As Christ proclaims himself the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, he is challenging his audience to rethink and reexamine what they know about themselves and their relationship with God. Our Lord is challenging us to do the same. This is why ...

Theme: Jesus gives an Epiphany sermon.

1. To help us see the truth about ourselves.
2. To help us see the truth about our Savior.

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As we look at this portion of Jesus' life he is still in the very early stages of his ministry. Christ has just recently begun preaching and performing miracles. The Gospel writer Luke tells us that **"Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through all the surrounding area. He was teaching in their synagogues and being honored by everyone"** (vs. 14-15). Initially Jesus did his preaching in worship services at Jewish synagogues.

Worship in the synagogue involved singing from the Psalms, and hearing lessons read from the Scriptures, similar to our own worship services. And like our sermons today, someone in the synagogue would be asked to speak about one of the lessons that was read from the Bible. The person would be asked to talk about what the reading meant and how it applied to people's lives. It was also common practice in Jesus' day to ask a visiting Rabbi to serve as a "guest preacher" at the service.

When Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth, it's not surprising to find him reading a lesson and explaining it to the people. Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah to read from. The section of Isaiah's prophecy Jesus read was originally written to Israelites who would one day be exiled in Babylon. The words Jesus read speak of a servant of the Lord who would be anointed to bring good news to those who were in exile. This servant would bring the good news of freedom to those who had been taken prisoner. He would give sight to the blind, and release those who were oppressed. It's a beautiful passage of Scripture, one that certainly brought hope to the people of Israel who were in exile.

Yet, what is truly amazing here isn't the Scripture passage that Jesus read, but the epiphany sermon he gave. We read, **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. He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"** (vs. 20, 21). Jesus words were challenging his hearers to have an epiphany moment. The poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed that are spoken of by the prophet Isaiah are not just the Israelites who were carried into exile centuries before. No, Jesus says, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"** (v. 21).

That day, at that moment, the Scripture Jesus read was fulfilled. This means that the poor, the prisoners, the blind and oppressed were the people sitting right there in that synagogue. Jesus had come to rescue them. Not people with physical problems, but people who were *spiritually* poor, *spiritually* prisoners, *spiritually* blind, and *spiritually* oppressed. Jesus is challenging his listeners to have that epiphany moment, so he can help them see the truth about themselves. Christ is challenging them to realize that they are the people Isaiah is prophesying about. They are the ones in need of divine rescue.

With his words Jesus is challenging us to recognize the same thing. So often we are spiritually blind to the sinful thoughts and feelings that creep around our heads and hearts. We do not recognize how spiritually poor we really are. We have nothing of any value to offer God. God is the Creator and owner of everything! On our own the only thing we create is sin, that which is evil and unwanted. Even the good things we do that other people praise us for –

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things that look so good on the outside – even those things are corrupted by sin. As the prophet Isaiah also wrote, “**All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags**” (Isaiah 64:6a). We come into this world spiritually slaves to sin and prisoners of Satan. Bound, blind, impoverished, and oppressed this is what our sin does to us; this is what our sin makes us look like to God: useless, worthless. This is the reality Jesus is working to open our eyes to see: The reality that we need help. This is why Jesus gives an epiphany sermon. To help us see the truth about ourselves.

That truth is not something nice to see. But without that truth we see no need for a Savior; we have no desire to be saved. Without that truth we prefer to continue blind, bound, enslaved, and oppressed. Why? Because in some warped way sin makes us feel good. Sin is where we are comfortable. Giving up our sinful habits? That seems too hard; it’s too difficult to change. The reality is we can’t change. We are dead in our sins. Dead things can’t change, so we could not change even if we wanted to. This is why Jesus gives an epiphany sermon. So we not only see the truth about ourselves, but so we can also see the truth about our Savior.

Jesus wants us to recognize the depths of our sin, and the absolute need we have for a Savior. And above all else, the Lord wants us to have an epiphany moment as we recognize that *he is the Savior we need!* Christ fulfilled what Isaiah proclaimed: **The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor** (vs. 18-19).

Christ is the divine rescuer anointed by God with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus was anointed to be our perfect substitute preaching God’s good news to us, the spiritually poor. Jesus bound himself to his holy law. Perfectly keeping God’s law for us he proclaims the freedom of God’s forgiveness to all who were held captive to sin. Jesus saving work gave sight to our spiritually blind eyes, opening the eyes of our heart to recognize our sinful poverty. Jesus worked to free us from the oppression of Satan. Our Savior’s sacrificial death removed everything that kept us spiritually separated from God, so that God could proclaim us fully and freely forgiven.

This is the good news that Jesus was anointed to proclaim: the good news that by his death and resurrection we are free from our bondage to sin and Satan. This saving proclamation of Jesus makes us spiritually alive. It opens spiritual eyes to see Jesus for who he truly is: the Son of God, and Savior of the world. With our spiritual eyes opened we see Jesus hanging on that cross. We see the perfect God-man making the perfect payment for all those times we surrendered to Satan and gave in to temptation. We hear Jesus declare his victory over sin’s power as he cries out, “**It is finished!**” (John 19:30). And we see proof of that victory in an empty tomb on Easter morning.

So what does all of this mean? What does it mean that Jesus fulfilled God’s promises? What does it mean that he has cured our spiritual blindness, unburdened us of our guilt, and set us free from our sins? It means that we can have an epiphany moment! Because of the saving faith Christ has worked in us we can be confident God no longer see us as poor, blind,

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worthless sinners. The Father now sees us as his treasured possessions. Because of Christ's fulfilling work we have peace with God and a place waiting for us in heaven. We have freedom!

But be careful not to lose your freedom. If you had been kidnapped and made a slave and someone came and set you free, what would you do with your newfound freedom? Would you go back to being a slave? We were born blind and bound in slavery to sin. Jesus has freed us from that blindness and slavery. Don't go back to that spiritually dead existence. Now, in Christ, you can really live! You now have the freedom to do what you could never do before you had faith, you can do what pleases God. Covered with Christ you have the power to live like Christ. Like Jesus you and I can show love and compassion to those who are oppressed. We can bring the good news of Christ to those who are poor in spirit, proclaiming the Lord's favor and forgiveness. And in our freedom, we can do more. We can give of ourselves by helping care for the needs of others. We can put others first, showing kindness to those who need it, and being patient with the people around us. In response to our Lord's love, we can love others because Christ first loved us. In Jesus epiphany sermon we see the truth about ourselves, and about our Savior.

Today our Savior is challenging us to have an epiphany moment. He challenges us to rethink the way we look at ourselves. To recognize our natural state for what it is: poor, blind, oppressed, and enslaved to sin. And Jesus also challenges us to see him for who he is: The anointed Savior who fulfilled God's word making us rich, giving us sight, and setting us free. Through faith in Jesus we are forgiven, free, and completely at peace with God. Jesus so beautifully shows us today, and every day, that every one of God's precious promises is completely fulfilled in him. Amen.