***Jesus and the Good News***

**Lent: Journey to the Cross #3 March 20, 2022**

***At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place.  
The people were looking for him and when they came to place where he was,  
they tried to keep him from leaving them.   
But he said, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God  
to other towns also, because this is why I was sent.”  
And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*Luke 4:42-44**

**Next step on the journey: Galilee**

*14 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.”*

Luke 4:14-21 (see Mark’s version in Mark 1:21-38)

1. This journey is still Spirit led (and notice how much happens on the Sabbath and in solitude)

2. Luke’s “preach good news” is one word in Hebrew and in Greek (see Psalm 40:9)

3. Jesus’ listeners would have expected the rest of Isaiah 61:2-3

4. Key question: What changes between 4:22 and 4:28?

5. Luke reveals that he is an outsider, but the Holy Spirit makes sure Luke gets the story right!

**The gospel comes with authority**

*31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. 32 They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.*

*33 In the synagogue there was a man possessed by a demon, an evil spirit. He cried out at the top of his voice, 34 “Ha! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!”*

*35 “Be quiet!” Jesus said sternly. “Come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down before them all and came out without injuring him.*

*36 All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!” 37 And the news about him spread throughout the surrounding area.*

Luke 4:31-37

1. Jesus continues to reveal his authority over the Principalities and Powers

2. Doug’s question: How can the demons be so right and yet so wrong?

3. Jesus’ authority comes from the source of his teaching, from God not from men (see John 17:1-4)

**The gospel comes with mercy**

*38 Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. 39 So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.*

*40 When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ.*

*42 At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, “I must preach 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.*

Luke 4:38-44 (see Mark’s addition in Mark 1:14-15, 21-34)

1. Jesus exercises the same authority over the natural order that he does over the spiritual order

2. Jesus silences the demons because he controlled the timing of the cross

3. Jesus’ commitment to the gospel keeps him on the journey to the cross

**Jesus and the gospel**

1) The gospel before the cross: The gospel points me to the Christ who will come

*14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.   
15 “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”*

Mark 1

*35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

John 6

2) The gospel after the cross: What am I going to do with Jesus?

*It’s news I’m most proud to proclaim, this extraordinary Message of God’s powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him, starting with Jews and then right on to everyone else! God’s way of putting people right shows up in the acts of faith, confirming what Scripture has said all along: “The person in right standing before God by trusting him really lives.”*

Romans 1 in *The Message*, Eugene Peterson’s definition of the gospel

*15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

1 Timothy 1:15

*20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

1 Corinthians 1

This is the Greatest Story not merely because of its infinitely high stakes and the endless wonder of its resolution but also because of its transforming power. How different is the Bible’s story from the dominant one told in the Western world today—that we are accidents, here for no purpose other than what we create for ourselves, living in a world marked by one operative principle: the survival of the strong over the weak? Just as MacIntyre’s response to the incident at the bus stop will be completely determined by what he discovers the story to be about, how we respond to suffering, death, sex, money, and power will be profoundly influenced by whether we understand and believe the story of the Bible about Jesus—or not.*”*

Tim Keller’s conclusion from “How the Good News about Jesus is Essential”

**Resources for our Lenten journey 2022**

*Bible.org* has some wonderful resources at [*https://bible.org/book/Luke*](https://bible.org/book/Luke)

I. Howard Marshall’s Greek commentary is my go to help (Eerdmans, 1978)

J. C. Ryle has an interesting commentary (Sections 22-24 attached below) at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l04.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l04.htm)

Martin Luther has an interesting commentary at [*https://www.monergism.com/fast-and-temptation-christ-matthew-41-11*](https://www.monergism.com/fast-and-temptation-christ-matthew-41-11)

John Piper has a wonderful introduction to the temptation themes and the work of the Spirit at [*https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/christ-in-combat-defense-by-the-spirit*](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/christ-in-combat-defense-by-the-spirit)

Bob Deffinbaugh has two sermons on this text at [*https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles*](https://bible.org/series/luke-gospel-gentiles)*.*

I appreciate J.C. Ryle’s commentary on Luke at [*https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l13.htm*](https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/l13.htm)

Spurgeon has a helpful commentary on the Nazareth story at <https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/nazareth-or-jesus-rejected-by-his-friends/#flipbook/>

Tim Keller has wonderful summary of the gospel at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/)

The CRC has an



**Luke’s chronology**

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J. C. Ryle’s commentary on Luke 4

**Section 22. Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth, Luke 4:14-22**

*And 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. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "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." 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." And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph’s son?"*

These verses relate events which are only recorded in the Gospel of Luke.They describe the first visit which our Lord paid — after entering on His public ministry — to the city of Nazareth, where He had been brought up. Taken together with the two verses which immediately follow, they furnish an solemnly striking proof that "the carnal mind is enmity against God." (Romans 8:7.)

**We should observe, in these verses — what marked honor our Lord Jesus Christ gave to public means of grace.** We are told that "He went into the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read" the Scriptures. In the days when our Lord was on earth, the Scribes and Pharisees were the chief teachers of the Jews. We can hardly suppose that a Jewish synagogue enjoyed much of the Spirit's presence and blessing under such teaching. Yet even then we find our Lord visiting a synagogue, and reading and preaching in it. It was the place where His Father's day and word were publicly recognized — and, as such, He thought it good to do it honor.

We need not doubt that there is a *practical lesson* for us in this part of our Lord's conduct. He would have us know that we are not lightly to forsake any assembly of worshipers which professes to respect the name, the day, and the book of God. There may be many things in such an assembly which might be done better. There may be a deficiency of fullness, clearness, and distinctness in the doctrine preached. There may be a lack of unction and devoutness in the manner in which the worship is conducted. But so long as no positive error is taught, and there is no choice between worshiping with such an assembly, and having no public worship at all — it befits a Christian to think much before he stays away. If there are but two or three in the congregation who meet in the name of Jesus — there is a special blessing promised. But there is no like blessing promised to him who tarries alone at home.

**We should observe, for another thing, in these verses — what a striking account our Lord gave to the congregation at Nazareth, of His own office and ministry.** We are told that He chose a passage from the book of Isaiah, in which the prophet foretold the nature of the *work* Messiah was to do when He came into the world. He read how it was foretold that He would "preach the Gospel to the poor" — how He would be sent to "heal the broken hearted" — how He would "preach deliverance to the captives, give sight to the blind, and liberty to the oppressed" — and how He would "proclaim that a year of jubilee to all the world had come." And when our Lord had read this prophecy, He told the listening crowd around Him, that He Himself was the Messiah of whom these words were written — and that in Him and in His Gospel, the marvelous figures of the passage were about to be fulfilled.

We may well believe that there was a deep meaning in our Lord's selection of this special passage of Isaiah. He desired to impress on His Jewish hearers — the *true character of the Messiah*, whom He knew all Israel were then expecting. He well knew that they were looking for a mere *temporal earthly* king, who would deliver them from Roman dominion, and make them once more, foremost among the nations. Such expectations, He would have them understand, were premature and wrong.

Messiah's kingdom at His first coming was to be a *spiritual* kingdom over hearts. His victories were not to be over worldly enemies — but over sin. His redemption was not to be from the power of Rome — but from the power of the devil and the world. It was in this way, and in no other way at present — that they must expect to see the words of Isaiah fulfilled.

Let us take care that we know for ourselves in what light we ought chiefly to regard Christ. It is right and good to reverence Him as very God. It is well to know Him as Head over all things — the mighty *Prophet* — the *Judge* of all — the *King* of kings. But we must not rest here, if we hope to be saved. We must know Jesus as the Friend of the poor in spirit — the Physician of the diseased heart — the deliverer of the soul in bondage. These are the principal offices He came on earth to fulfill. It is in this light we must learn to know Him — and to know Him by inward experience, as well as by the hearing of the ear. Without such knowledge, we shall die in our sins.

**We should observe, finally — what an instructive example we have in these verses of the manner in which religious teaching is often heard.** We are told that when our Lord had finished His sermon at Nazareth, His hearers "spoke well of Him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." They could not find any flaw in the exposition of Scripture they had heard. They could not deny the beauty of the well-chosen language to which they had listened. "Never has any man spoken like this man!"

But their *hearts* were utterly unmoved and unaffected. They were even full of envy and enmity against the Preacher. In short, there seems to have been no good effect produced on them — except a little temporary feeling of admiration.

It is vain to conceal from ourselves, that there are thousands of people in Christian churches, in little better state of mind than our Lord's hearers at Nazareth. There are thousands who listen regularly to the preaching of the Gospel, and admire it while they listen. They do not dispute the truth of what they hear. They even feel a kind of *intellectual pleasure* in hearing a good and powerful sermon. But their religion never goes beyond this point. Their sermon-hearing does not prevent them living a life of thoughtlessness, worldliness, and sin!

Let us often examine ourselves on this important point. Let us see what *practical effect* is produced on our hearts and lives — by the preaching which we profess to like. Does it lead us to true repentance towards God, and lively faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it excite us to regular efforts to cease from sin, and to resist the devil? These are the *fruits* which sermons ought to produce, if they are really doing us good. Without such fruit — a *mere barren admiration of preaching* is utterly worthless. It is no proof of grace. It will save no soul.

**Section 23. Jesus Rejected at Nazareth, Luke 4:23-32**

*And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." 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. But passing through their midst, he went away. And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.*

Three great lessons stand out on the face of this passage. Each deserves the close attention of all who desire spiritual wisdom.

**We learn for one thing — how apt men are to despise the highest privileges, when they are familiar with them.** We see it in the conduct of the men of Nazareth, when they had heard the Lord Jesus preach. They could find no fault in His sermon. They could point to no inconsistency in His past life. But because the preacher had dwelt among them thirty years, and His face, and voice, and appearance were familiar to them — they would not receive His doctrine. They said to one another, "Is not this Joseph's son?" Is it possible that one so well-known as this man, can be the Christ? And they drew from our Lord's lips the solemn saying, "No prophet is accepted in his own country."

We shall do well to remember this lesson, in the matter of ordinances and means of grace. We are always in danger of undervaluing them — when we have them in abundance. We are apt to think lightly of the privilege of an open Bible, a preached Gospel, and the liberty of meeting together for public worship. We grow up in the midst of these things, and are accustomed to have them without trouble. And the consequence is that we often hold them very cheap, and underrate the extent of our mercies.

Let us take heed to our own heart, in the *use of sacred things*. As often as we may read the Bible — let us never read it without deep reverence. As often as we hear the name of Christ — let us never forget that He is the One Mediator, in whom is life.

Even the *manna* that came down from Heaven was at length scorned by Israel, as "worthless food." (Numbers 21:5.) It is an evil day with our souls, when Christ is in the midst of us — and yet, because of our familiarity with His name, is lightly esteemed.

**We learn, for another thing — how bitterly human nature dislikes the doctrine of the *sovereignty of God*.** We see this in the conduct of the Jews of Nazareth — when our Lord reminded them that God was under no obligation to work miracles among them.   
  
Were there not many *widows* in Israel in the days of Elijah? No doubt there were.   
Yet to none of them was the prophet sent. All were passed over in favor of a GENTILE widow at Zarephath.  
  
Were there not many *lepers* in Israel in the days of Elisha? No doubt there were.   
Yet to none of them was the privilege of healing granted. Naaman the SYRIAN was the only one who was cleansed.   
  
Such doctrine as this was intolerable to the Jews of Nazareth. It wounded their pride and self-conceit. It taught them that God was no man's debtor, and that if they themselves were passed over in the distribution of His mercies — they had no right to find fault. They could not bear His teaching. They were "filled with rage!" They thrust our Lord out of their city — and had it not been for an exercise of miraculous power on His part, they would doubtless have put Him to a violent death by hurling Him off the cliff!  
  
Of all the doctrines of the Bible, none is so offensive to human nature as the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Man can bear to be told that God is great, and just, and holy, and pure. But to be told that "He has mercy on whom He will have mercy" — that He "gives no account of His matters," that it is "not of him who wills, nor of him who runs — but of God who shows mercy" — these are truths that natural man cannot stand. They often call forth all his enmity against God, and fill him with wrath. Nothing, in short, will make him submit to them — but the humbling teaching of the Holy Spirit.  
  
Let us settle it in our minds that, whether we like it or not — *the sovereignty of God is a doctrine clearly revealed in the Bible*, and a fact clearly to be seen in the world. Upon no other principle can we ever explain why some members of a family are converted — and others live and die in sin; why some quarters of the earth are enlightened by Christianity — and others remain buried in heathenism. One account alone can be given of all this. All is ordered by the sovereign hand of God!   
  
Let us pray for humility in respect of this deep teaching. Let us never doubt that at the last day the whole world shall be convinced, that He who now "gives no account of His matters" has done all things well!

**We learn, lastly, from this passage — how diligently we ought to persevere in well doing, notwithstanding discouragements.** We are doubtless meant to draw this lesson from the conduct of our Lord, after His rejection at Nazareth. Not moved by the harsh treatment He received — He patiently works on. Thrust out of one place — He passes on to another. Cast forth from Nazareth — He comes to Capernaum, and there teaches on the Sabbath.

Such ought to be the conduct of all the people of Christ. Whatever the work they are called to do — they should patiently continue in it, and not give up for lack of success. Whether preachers, or teachers, or visitors, or missionaries — they must labor on and not faint. There is often more stirring in the hearts and consciences of people — than those who teach and preach to them are at all aware of. There is *preparatory work* to be done in many a part of God's vineyard — which is just as needful as any other work, though not so agreeable to flesh and blood. There must be *sowers* as well as *reapers*. There must be some to break up the ground and pick out the stones — as well as some to gather in the harvest.

Let each labor on in his own place. The day is coming when each shall be rewarded according to his work. The very discouragements we meet with, enable us to show the world that there are such things as *faith* and *patience*. When men see us working on, in spite of treatment like that which Jesus received at Nazareth — it makes them think. It convinces them that, at all events — we are persuaded that we have truth on our side.

**Section 24. Jesus Drives out an Evil Spirit, and Heals Many, Luke 4:33-44**

*And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God." But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm. And they were all amazed and said to one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!" And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon’s house. Now Simon’s mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ. And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose." And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

**We should notice, in this passage — the clear religious knowledge possessed by the devil and his agents.** Twice in these verses we have proof of this. "I know you who you are — the holy one of God!" was the language of an demon in one case. "You are Christ the son of God," was the language of many demons in another case. Yet this knowledge was a knowledge unaccompanied by faith, or hope, or charity. Those who possessed it were miserable evil beings — full of bitter hatred both against God and man.

Let us beware of an *unsanctified knowledge* of Christianity. It is a dangerous possession, but a fearfully common one in these latter days. We may know the Bible intellectually, and have no doubt about the truth of its contents. We may have our memories well stored with its leading texts — and be able to talk glibly about its leading doctrines. And all this time the Bible may have no influence over our hearts, and wills, and consciences. We may, in reality, be nothing better than the demons!

Let it never content us to know religion with our heads only. We may go on all our lives saying, "I know this — and I know that," and sink at last into Hell, with the words upon our lips. Let us see that our knowledge bears fruit in our lives. Does our knowledge of sin make us hate it? Does our knowledge of Christ make us trust and love Him? Does our knowledge of God's will make us strive to do it? Does our knowledge of the fruits of the Spirit make us labor to show them in our daily behavior? Knowledge of this kind is really profitable. Any other religious knowledge will only add to our condemnation at the last day.

**We should notice, secondly, in this passage — the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.** We see sicknesses and devils alike yielding to His command. He rebukes evil spirits — and they come forth from the unhappy people whom they had possessed. He rebukes a fever, and lays his hands on sick people — and at once their diseases depart, and the sick are healed.

We cannot fail to observe many similar cases in the four Gospels. They occur so frequently, that we are apt to read them with a thoughtless eye, and forget the mighty lesson which each one is meant to convey. They are all intended to fasten in our minds the great truth that Christ is the appointed *Healer of every evil* which sin has brought into the world. Christ is the *true antidote and remedy* for all the soul-ruining mischief which Satan has wrought on mankind. Christ is the *universal physician* to whom all the children of Adam must go — if they would be made whole. In Him is life, and health, and liberty.

This is the grand doctrine which every *miracle of mercy* in the Gospel is ordained and appointed to teach. Each is a plain witness to that mighty fact, which lies at the very foundation of the Gospel. The ability of Christ to supply every need of human nature to the uttermost — is the very corner-stone of Christianity. Christ, in one word, is "all." (Colossians 3:11.) Let the study of every miracle help to engrave this truth deeply on our hearts!

**We should notice, thirdly, in these verses — our Lord's practice of occasional retirement from public notice, into some solitary place.** We read, that after healing many that were sick and casting out many demons, "he departed and went into a desert place." His object in so doing, is shown by comparison with other places in the Gospels. He went aside from His work for a season — to hold communion with His Father in Heaven, and to pray. As holy and sinless as his human nature was — it was a nature kept sinless in the regular use of means of grace, and not in the neglect of them.

There is an example here which all who desire to grow in grace and walk closely with God, would do well to follow. We must make time for private meditation, and for being alone with God. We must not be content to merely pray daily and read the Scriptures, and to hear the Gospel regularly and to receive the Lord's Supper. All this is well. But something more is needed. We should set apart special seasons for solitary self-examination and meditation on the things of God. How often in a year this practice should be attempted — each Christian must judge for himself. But that the practice is most desirable — seems clear both from Scripture and experience.

We live in hurrying, bustling times. The excitement of daily business and constant engagements — keeps many men in a perpetual whirl, and entails great peril on souls. The neglect of this habit of withdrawing occasionally from worldly business — is the probable cause of many an inconsistency or backsliding which brings scandal on the cause of Christ. The more work we have to do — the more we ought to imitate our Master. If He, in the midst of His abundant labors, found time to retire from the world occasionally — then how much more may we? If the Master found the practice necessary — then it must surely be a thousand times more necessary for His disciples!

**We ought to notice, lastly, in these verses — the declaration of our Lord as to one of the objects of His coming into the world.** We read that He said, "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also — for that is why I was sent." An expression like this ought to silence forever the foolish remarks that are sometimes made against preaching. The mere fact that the eternal Son of God undertook the office of a preacher — should satisfy us that preaching is one of the most valuable means of grace. To speak of preaching, as some do, as a thing of less importance than reading public prayers or administering the sacraments — is, to say the least, to exhibit ignorance of Scripture. It is a striking circumstance in our Lord's history, that although He was almost incessantly preaching — we never read of His baptizing any person. The witness of John is distinct on this point — "Jesus Himself did not baptize." (John 4:2.)

Let us beware of *despising preaching*. In every age of the Church — preaching has been God's principal instrument for the awakening of sinners and the edifying of saints. The days when there has been little or no preaching — have been days when there has been little or no good done in the Church. Let us hear sermons in a prayerful and reverent frame of mind — and remember that they are the principal engines which Christ Himself employed, when He was upon earth. Not least, let us pray daily for a continual supply of *faithful preachers* of God's word. According to the state of the *pulpit* — will always be the state of a congregation and of a Church.

Tim Keller’s summary of the gospel from the introduction of the NIV Zondervan Study Bible at   
[*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-story-of-the-bible-how-the-good-news-about-jesus-is-essential-tim-kelle/)

**The Story of the Bible: How the Good News About Jesus Is Essential**

In [After Virtue](http://www.amazon.com/After-Virtue-Study-Moral-Theory/dp/0268035040/?tag=thegospcoal-20), Alasdair MacIntyre famously illustrates that stories are necessary if we are to assign meaning to anything. He imagines standing at a bus stop when a young man he doesn’t know comes up to him and says, “The name of the common wild duck is Histrionicus histrionicus histrionicus.” He knows what the sentence literally conveys, but he has no idea what the young man’s statement and action mean. The only way to know that is to know the story into which the incident fits. Perhaps, alas, the young man is mentally ill. That sad life story would explain it all. Or what if yesterday someone had approached the young man in the library and asked him the Latin word for the wild duck, and today the young man mistakes the man at the bus stop for that person in the library. That trivial story would explain it as well. Or perhaps the young man is a foreign spy “waiting at a prearranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact.” That dramatic story would make sense of the incident too. But without a story, there’s no meaning.

### ****All Fits Together****

The title of this article includes an all-important assumption: the Bible is not just a diverse assortment of stories and materials; it altogether comprises a master narrative. This is not to say the Bible is written like a novel with a tight, simple plotline—not at all. It contains many individual stories and a lot of nonnarrative material. But just as J. R. R. Tolkien produced thousands of pages of narratives, poetry, articles, maps, and even lexicons over the course of decades in order to tell one very sweeping story, so God, the author of every part of the Bible, is also telling one overarching story about the real world he created. There is a basic plotline to which all the parts relate and which makes sense of all the pieces.

The Bible begins with God making the world “very good” ([Gen. 1:31](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%201%3A31/))—without the corruption, decay, and death that now dominate the world ([Rom. 8:20–21](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A20%E2%80%9321/)). He placed human beings in the world as his masterpiece, made in his image to reflect his own glory ([Gen. 1:27](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%201%3A27/)). We were created to adore and serve God and to love others. If we had chosen to live like that, we would have enjoyed a completely happy life and a perfect world. But instead, we wanted God to serve us and do what we wanted because we made our will the sovereign measure of all things. Instead of living for God and loving our neighbor, we turned away to live self-centered lives ([Gen. 3:1–7](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%203%3A1%E2%80%937/)). And because our relationship with God has been broken, all other relationships—with other human beings, with our very selves, and with the created world—are also ruptured ([Gen. 3:8–19](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%203%3A8%E2%80%9319/)). The result is spiritual, psychological, social, and physical decay and breakdown. “Things fall apart; the center cannot hold / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming”)—that describes the world under sin now.

### God’s Response

How did God respond? Did he respond with wrath toward the human race or with love? The answer is yes—to both ([Rom. 1:18](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%201%3A18/); John 3:16). God insists on truth, demands that we do right, and threatens to punish all disobedience and evil. Nonetheless, he pursues the human race in love, declaring his intention to save and not allow all to perish in their sin. The Lord calls a people to himself in order to create a new human society—people who know his holy character and his law, his love and his grace. This community began as an extended family ([Gen. 12:1–8](https://www.esv.org/Gen.%2012%3A1%E2%80%938/)) out of which God created an entire nation: the people of Israel, whom God delivered from slavery and established under Moses. With this people God made a covenant in which he promised to be their loving God and they promised to be his faithful people ([Exod. 19:1–8](https://www.esv.org/Exod.%2019%3A1%E2%80%938/)). But the history of this covenant relationship is one of almost unrelieved failure of the people to be what God called them to be.

All stories have plot “tension” and, in the most gripping narratives, it’s intense. It comes from the clash of seemingly intractable forces in the struggle to restore things. And here we can see why the Bible is indeed a story. Through two-thirds of the Bible, the part we call the Old Testament (OT), an increasingly urgent, apparently insolvable problem drives the narrative forward. God is a God of holiness and is therefore implacably opposed to evil, injustice, and wrong, and yet he is a God of infinite love. He enters into a relationship with a people who are fatally self-centered. Will he bring down the curse he says must fall on sin and cut off his people, or will he forgive and love his people regardless of their sin? If he does either one or the other, sin and evil win! But it seems impossible to do both. Is the covenant relationship he established with his people conditional (so that failure is punished) or unconditional (so that the covenant is maintained despite the people’s failure)?

Again, the answer is yes—to both. This resolution is largely hidden from the reader through the OT, though Isaiah comes closest to unveiling it. The glorious King who brings God’s judgment in the first part of Isaiah is also the suffering servant who bears God’s judgment in the second part. It is Jesus. And in the New Testament (NT), Jesus Christ, the Son of God, comes as our substitute—living the life we should have lived and dying the death we should have died, in our place. By living a perfect life, he earns God’s blessing for obedience; by dying on the cross, he takes the curse for disobedience ([Gal. 3:10–14](https://www.esv.org/Gal.%203%3A10%E2%80%9314/)). When we believe in him, he receives the punishment we deserve and we receive eternal life as a gift (2 Cor. 5:21). And he does this in order to not only pardon our guilt but eventually free us from all sin and give us glorious new bodies and even a perfect, renewed world ([Rom. 8:18–39](https://www.esv.org/Rom.%208%3A18%E2%80%9339/)).

### ****The Greatest Story of All****

The best and most compelling stories have high stakes and astonishing, unexpected resolutions. If that is the case, there has never been a greater story than this. The stakes are literally cosmic: everyone and everything is at stake. It seems impossible that God could be true to himself—fully good and loving, fully righteous and just—and still save us. It seems impossible that after all we have done there should be any hope. But victory is achieved through one man’s infinite sacrifice on the cross, where God both punishes sin fully yet provides free salvation, where he is revealed as both just and justifier of those who believe ([Rom 3:26](https://www.esv.org/Rom%203%3A26/)). Jesus stands as the ultimate protagonist, the hero of heroes.

Because the Bible’s basic plotline is the tension between God’s justice and his grace and because it is all resolved in the person and work of Jesus Christ, Jesus could tell his followers after the resurrection that the OT—“the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” ([Luke 24:44](https://www.esv.org/Luke%2024%3A44/))—is really all about him ([Luke 24:27, 45](https://www.esv.org/Luke%2024%3A27%2C%2045/)). Paul says that all God’s promises throughout the Scripture find their fulfillment only in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20). So everything in the Bible—all its themes and patterns, main images and major figures—points to Jesus.

The Bible, then, is not a collection of Aesop-like fables, fictional stories that give us insights on how to find God and live right. Rather, it is both true history and a unified story about how God came to find us in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived and died in our place so we could be saved by grace through faith and live with him forever in a remade world, the Garden-City of God ([Rev. 21–22](https://www.esv.org/Rev.%2021%E2%80%9322/)). From this basic plot there emerge profound insights, principles, and directives on how to live. But the Bible is not primarily about us and what we should do. It is first and foremost about Jesus and what he has done.

This is the Greatest Story not merely because of its infinitely high stakes and the endless wonder of its resolution but also because of its transforming power. How different is the Bible’s story from the dominant one told in the Western world today—that we are accidents, here for no purpose other than what we create for ourselves, living in a world marked by one operative principle: the survival of the strong over the weak? Just as MacIntyre’s response to the incident at the bus stop will be completely determined by what he discovers the story to be about, how we respond to suffering, death, sex, money, and power will be profoundly influenced by whether we understand and believe the story of the Bible about Jesus—or not.