

“How Do We Know God is Working?”

Luke 4:14-30

The last two Sundays we have been in John 15 discerning how to bear fruit by ‘abiding in Jesus’, His Words and His love. So we were focusing on our individual maturing to be more like Jesus. Assuming that we are growing individually, then so must our church be growing and Lord-willing the broader body of Christ as a whole. What are the signs that the church is growing; ours specifically but also the body of Christ in our community, province, country and world? What should we be seeing? What does Jesus look for to see a growing church?

Right from the start of Jesus’ ministry, He stated clearly that the kingdom had arrived or was near and so He called on people to repent of their sins. The Jewish people had many preconceptions about the Kingdom – based on Scripture – that the kingdom would be a political entity with their Messiah defeating all Israel’s enemies and establishing an eternal reign of peace and prosperity. While the Bible still predicts that and Jesus affirmed its future coming many times, He established early on that the kingdom of God would first be a spiritual entity of God’s people who shared faith in Jesus who would save them from the penalty and power of their sins.

Instead of a visible, military and political powerhouse, the kingdom of God initially looks different as seen through His body, the church. What does Jesus anticipate this looking like? How do we know the power of His message is changing our towns, cities, countries and world now while we wait for His ultimate return to establish His Spiritual, political and literal rule from Jerusalem?

In one of His earliest teaching sessions in His hometown of Nazareth in Galilee recorded in Luke 4, Jesus shows us what He sees when the gospel is proclaimed and His Spirit works through us. Let’s let Luke set us up.

Luke alone records the birth announcements and accounts of Jesus and John the Baptist clearly showing how their ministries are linked; John the forerunner announcing the Messiah’s coming (as prophesied in Malachi 3 and Isaiah 40) with Jesus shortly following. In Ch. 3 John the Baptist’s ministry begins announcing that forgiveness of sins was available through repentance and faith in the Messiah, demonstrated by their decision to be baptized by John. Shortly after Jesus Himself requests John to baptize Him, commencing His ministry affirmed by the voice of God and the visible descending of the Spirit as a dove on Jesus. At this the Holy Spirit fills and leads Jesus into the wilderness where He fasts for 40 days and is tempted three times by Satan to sin and abdicate God’s plan for Him.

Jesus had been in the Judean wilderness and now makes His way back to Galilee in the north. We read in v.14,

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.

Jesus has been preaching and teaching in other synagogues and now He comes back home to the place where He grew up, where everyone knew Him as son of Joseph and Mary. He’s invited to speak. Whether Isaiah 61 was the assigned reading or He chose it, we’re not sure, He reads it and

drops a theological bomb on His family and friends and essentially says, 'I'm the One Isaiah wrote about. I'm the Messiah.' Initially proud to have one of their 'own' come home,

3

the people turn on Him and try to kill Him for saying these things. In telling them who He was and what He was doing, we understand what Jesus wants to see result from the sharing of the gospel. But everything begins with sharing the gospel. So if we want to know if God is working around us and through us we have to ask ourselves,

Are We as God's People Boldly Sharing God's Good News? **(4:14-18a)**

What do we learn from Jesus about sharing the 'gospel'? What is the gospel? The word 'gospel' meant 'a good news proclamation from a king'. It was usually an announcement from the emperor/king that was good news for the people to somehow improve their life. The New Testament writers took that term and applied it to the servants of King Jesus announcing His good news that would change people's lives now and forever. If we believe that then we will boldly share the gospel ourselves.

When Jesus stood up to read Is. 61:1-2 and then declared 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing' re-quired great boldness. While we could easily excuse this because we're talking about Jesus here, nevertheless He gives us a pattern to follow in sharing the gospel boldly. We share the gospel,

When we are led by the Spirit (vv.14-15)

The leading of the Holy Spirit is crucial to Luke's gospel and Acts. We need to think of His gospel and Acts as parts 1-2 on the life and ministry of Jesus. Part 1 being the Gospel, carried out by Jesus Himself. And part two being the continuation of His work carried out by His apostles and whoever else will be sent in the future (you and me). We mentioned that Jesus' baptism was signified by the visible presence of the Spirit and the audible voice of God. Then Jesus, full of the Spirit returned to the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and now here in v.14 Jesus returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. How do we know when the Spirit is leading us? When we are obeying the word of God. The more we obey God, the more we experience His power in our lives and we recognize the activity of the Spirit in us. Notice Jesus was filled with the Spirit when He obeyed God. Works the same for His disciples.

Think of a time where you shared the gospel with someone? Did you sense God was with you in that? When we obey God He gives us the boldness to share the good news that can change someone's life. We don't 'muster up some courage' because then we do it in our own strength. When we're walking with God He will lead us to opportunities where we obey the Spirit's prompting and in obeying, He gives us the boldness to share.

And one of the hardest places to share the gospel is

Where we live (vv.16-18a, 22)

Jesus returns home and declares to His boyhood friends and neighbours, by the way I'm the Messiah. Isaiah 61 says so. At first they are 'Hey look, its Joseph's son' but then when He shares the gospel they want to kill Him. By the way, the harshness of their response shows the evidence of sin and unbelief. They of all people should have known Jesus was the Messiah. They knew about Mary's

pregnancy, the trip to Bethlehem, miraculous escape to Egypt and return home. They never saw or heard Jesus sin growing up. Jesus gives them the opportunity to accept Him but they don't.

Who are the hardest people to share the gospel with? Those who know you best. Family, friends, neighbours. To tell people good news that can change their life now and forever, implies they don't have nor do they know what the best life is. Which means at some point we have to bring up sin. Which everyone knows is a universal problem but they don't think it's a personal problem. They all know the world is bad, but they aren't. Nor is their family, nor are their friends and what's wrong with my religion? I remember having a conversation with my Father, a religious man, but unsaved. I shared with Him what Jesus said about narrow is the path to life and wide is the path to destruction. He immediately understand what I was saying. 'You mean everyone who belongs to my religion is going to hell?' 'Dad, I'm only telling you what Jesus Himself says in the Bible that your church reads.'" He wasn't a happy camper. Nor was Jesus' family and friends.

What does Jesus want to see from His church? Disciples enjoying living out the good news of a changed life, sensitive to the Spirit's leading to share this good news when he leads and where He leads us. So are many of us, even some of us boldly sharing God's good news? If we are that's a sign God is working in our church, community and world.

And what exactly does the good news do for people? In the book of Isaiah, the prophet proclaims that because of Judah's disobedience they are going to taken to Babylon. Exiled. Imprisoned. But, God gives them hope through Isaiah because there are many prophecies of their future return, enjoying the blessings of joy, peace and provision under the leading of the Messiah. Problem: Israel returned from exile in 536 BC but are still waiting to experience the blessings of joy, peace and provision. Correction: most Jewish people have yet to experience that, but those who have recognized Jesus as their Saviour are experiencing eternal joy, internal peace and having their needs met by the Messiah Jesus.

In quoting Isaiah 61 Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the Messiah, the One through whom people will hear the good news, be freed from bondage, finally see clearly and know that the year of the Lord's favour is always available.

So the next question we need to ask ourselves to know if God is working around us is, as we boldly share the good news

Are Some Finding Freedom through Faith in Jesus? **(4:18b-22)**

Jesus proclaims He is the fulfiller of this prophecy. That through Him alone people can find

Freedom from the sin that binds them (v.18b)

Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor. The poor in Scripture are not just those who are materially poor but those who because of their poverty recognize their inability to meet their needs and improve their life on their own. Listen to these verses from Isaiah

^{66:1} *This is what the LORD says; "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?"*

² *Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" declares the LORD. "These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word.*

Humble and contrite [poor] in spirit.

29:17 In a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field and the fertile field seem like a forest?

18 In that day the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and out of gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.

19 Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. 20 The ruthless will vanish, the mockers will disappear, and all who have an eye for evil will be cut down—

Who flocked to see Jesus? The poor. The hurting. The blind, lame and crippled. All of whom were oppressed by the heavy yoke of the religious leaders who said ‘Your infirmity proves you are a sinner and can’t enter God’s presence.’ Or the Romans who shoved anyone who got in their way because they could.

Why did Israel go into exile? Because they rebelled against God. Their sin resulted in their loss of freedom. People bind themselves because of sinful choices. They make bad decisions. They depend on the wrong things for happiness and the wrong people to meet their needs. Only Jesus frees us from our sin and its power over us.

When Israel was in exile they longed to return home. Some trusted God to get them back, as Daniel demonstrated in Daniel 9 when he realized the 70 years captivity were almost up so he prayed to God believing the promises of God were true. People who put their faith in Jesus

Find hope in spite of their circumstances (vv. 18c-20)

Why did God have Daniel and Ezekiel in Babylon? To remind the people of God’s Word and give them hope. Many people in Jesus’ day didn’t experience a change in their circumstances but through faith in Jesus they saw hope beyond their circumstances. That life is more than just surviving but to live for God’s purposes and know that we have a sure and better hope waiting for us when this life ends. Remember, our life is a vapour and lasts so briefly compared to eternity. Which means our trials are a vapour too.

While Jesus did heal a number of blind people, He healed many more spiritually blind people. Everyone’s testimony can be abbreviated to ‘once I was blind but now I see’. Once we understand who Jesus is and what He’s done for us we find true hope. When Jesus ended His quote from Isaiah at ‘And to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour’, this was a reference to Israel’s once every 50 years Jubilee. Where all your debts were wiped out. Where everything you lost gets returned. Where everyone starts over again with a clean slate. Why did God institute the year of Jubilee? To demonstrate He’s a God of grace and wants to wipe out all your sins. So placing our faith in Jesus means we

Believe God wants to shower us with grace (vv.21-22)

Jesus announced to the people in His hometown, ‘You don’t have to wait for the 50th year to experience forgiveness and removal of debts, you can experience it today because ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’. The reason why the people got so mad was because they realized in saying this Jesus was declaring He had the authority of God to announce this – which He did – but they didn’t believe Him.

And millions of people struggle to accept the grace of having their sins paid for without any work on their part. There is no evidence in Israel’s history that they ever actually practiced the year of

Jubilee. Most likely because those who gained land and money from others had no desire to return it! But think of the powerful word picture God was telling them. That once in your lifetime you can experience all your debts wiped clean and all your losses restored. All because God said so.

Is God working around us? How are we doing at boldly sharing the good news that your life can be changed now and forever through Jesus and as a result are some finding this to be true? Yes, a little bit but not as much as we'd like to see. As we look at Jesus' two old testament illustrations to back up what he said and the response of the crowd, we need to continually ask ourselves this question:

Does our Community See We're Making a Difference? **(4:23-30)**

When Jesus quoted Is. 61:1-2 he stopped at a crucial point and did not finish v.2, which said,
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God,

Because, the prophets prophesied that when the Messiah came He would defeat Israel's enemies. And who are Israel's enemies? Gentiles. Jesus came the first time to remove spiritual blindness and heal broken hearts by dying on the cross for sins. He will return again and establish His rule and defeat all those who reject God. So when Jesus didn't say this

The proud got upset and spoke against Him (vv.23-24, 28-30)

First it was like, 'Hey look whose come home and is all growed up'. But when He tells them the truth they say 'Isn't this Joseph's son. He's only a carpenter, Who does He think He is?' It didn't help that when Jesus used two illustrations from the Old Testament to back up what He was saying, He made Gentiles the heroes of faith. Jesus said, 'Remember Elijah and Elisha, Israel's two greatest prophets? Do you also remember that they lived under wicked Jewish kings who wanted them dead? There were all kinds of widows who needed help from God in Israel. Why did God send Elijah to a Gentile widow in Sidon and meet her needs? Because she had faith. Why does God use a little girl to tell her master Namaan the Syrian, who has leprosy to Elisha in Israel? And why does God heal him? Because he demonstrated faith.

Jesus was saying I have come to proclaim freedom for all captives Gentiles and Jews, women and men because so many of you don't believe Me.

Here's something important to take away from this. Was Jesus led of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel on this occasion? Yes. So how come when we feel led of the Spirit to share the gospel and someone got mad at us we thought we missed the leading of the Spirit? People got upset at Jesus because they understood what He said, and they were convicted and responded in anger because they realized Jesus said they weren't right with God.

Now we do need to be careful that people don't get upset at us when we share the gospel because we did it arrogantly. That's different. But if people in our community get upset at us because they don't like that bible verse or biblical statement we posted on Facebook, or presented a biblical perspective on a socially charged issue, or politely declined our unsaved friend's invitation to do something with them Sunday morning because we were going to church or the kid's coaches that the kids will miss practicing Sunday morning – and they don't respond favourably, that's a sign that the community sees the difference we make and they don't like it. Because that convicts them since they don't do any of those things.

But our community should also admit that we are making a difference when

The humbled are helped and join us (vv.25-27)

The examples of the people who responded in faith to Elijah and Elisha were people who humbled themselves and trusted God by faith. Every time someone gets saved in our community, people notice and see the difference we're making.

Is God working around us? I believe He is because we are doing some of these things. Could God be doing more? Absolutely. But God only works as we obey Him and follow the leading of His Spirit.

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