

Meditations of the Heart - Reflections on the Scriptures

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*

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Sermon Series: *The Mission of God* Sermon: *When Is The Mission of God Carried Out?*

Luke 4:14-21 *14 And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. 15 And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 16 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. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 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 favor." 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. 21 And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

This past week, we considered the WHEN of the mission of God – WHEN is the mission of God carried out? We best answer that question while considering the issue of control. The leaders of the early church learned that God was far more in control of the ultimate mission of the church than they were – and that's a good place to be. The church plays a vital role, to be sure, in carrying out the mission of God, but it is ultimately God who is in control of finishing His mission of reconciling the world to himself.

At the 2006 National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., Bono, the guest speaker, spoke on this very passage from Luke 4: *"This is how Jesus begins his ministry. Jesus is a young man; he's met with the rabbis; he's impressed everybody; people are talking. The elders say, 'he's a clever guy, this Jesus, but -- you know -- he hasn't done much public speaking.'"*

"When he does, his first words are from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he says, "because He has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor." And Jesus proclaims the year of the Lord's favor, the year of Jubilee..."

"What he was really talking about was an era of grace ... and we're still in it."

In other words, the ministry of Jesus continues and Luke confirms this as he begins his sequel to the Gospel of Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. The very first verse of Acts is:

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach... At this point in the story Luke is writing, Jesus has already been crucified, dead and buried, risen from the dead, and in just a few verses later in the first chapter of Acts, Luke is about to describe Jesus' ascension into heaven. And yet Luke introduces his book on the history of the early church by saying, **"I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach..."**

The implied point is that this is Jesus' mission... The explicit point is that Jesus is just getting started in carrying out this mission..! Jesus is still DOING, Jesus is still teaching and He is doing so through His Church. The promise that Jesus spoke of as fulfilled in the synagogue in Nazareth continues today. Which means that WE, the Church, are called to continue to carry out and carry on this ministry of Jesus to a hurting world that desperately needs him.

This is what Paul was alluding to in describing his ministry to the Corinthian church:

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (II Corinthians 5:18-21).

The problem for us arises in that we have a hard time believing that it is the very ministry of JESUS that is actually continuing through the Church. We have a hard time believing that God might actually use us in ways that are impossible for us to humanly accomplish but perfectly possible for God to accomplish through us.

Gary Haugen, of the International Justice Mission², said that he had found that the most difficult thing for many people around the world to believe is the idea that God is good – because they are in such abhorrent and nightmarish circumstances that have brought them such dire pain. Haugen asked the question, “What is God’s plan for making His goodness believable?” Jesus gives the answer in Matthew 5: “YOU are the light of the world.” (as opposed to ‘you COULD be the light of the world...; you MIGHT be the light of the world; I HOPE you will be the light of the world...’)

In other words, Jesus was not speaking of potential and possibility, but rather of what we ARE – that, as His redeemed, we ARE the light of the world – because we are living pictures of the mercy that Jesus brings. He has shown us mercy and love, and His plan – His only plan – is to show His mercy and love to others through us, as well.

So, what have we got thus far?

The WHO of the mission of God is ... God. It’s His mission. He starts it. He finishes it.

The HOW of the mission of God is that God works through the Church, albeit a weak vessel, but such weakness brings glory to God’s strength.

The WHEN of the mission of God is NOW. Jesus, in Luke 4:19, read from Isaiah that it was on Him *19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*. We are still in that ‘year’.

Our last look at the Mission of God will be looking at the WHAT... In preparation for this Sunday, I would encourage you to consider and meditate upon Micah 6:8:

8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

¹A Christian non-profit human rights organization focusing on matters of sex trafficking, police corruption, and unjust imprisonment around the world.