

Luke 4: 14-30 – Church Vs World
“What is the place of the church in the world?”

● **III** – Freedom

David Hicks released – with a half million dollar jet ride.

Paris Hilton – released after 3 days of 23

Freedom is all about being released from captivity, being released from oppression. **How** we are released is important. And the **day** of that freedom is important.

Luke 4 is about a day of freedom. THE day of freedom. Luke 4 is a NOW moment. Turn to Luke 4. Jesus goes to his home town of Nazareth, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, to teach. And he picks up the scroll of Isaiah. From verse 17:

** 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 favour."

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."

A “NOW” moment. Today. The Israelites were waiting for that day when the Messiah would come and set them free from slavery and oppression. Isaiah the prophet spoke this prophecy around 700 years earlier. And when Jesus reads them, he says “**I am the one** that is going to bring freedom, **NOW!**”

III – This is like an alarm clock going off early in the morning. Sometimes I wake up before my alarm clock. Not very often, but sometimes! I might have set it to 7am and I wake up 10 minutes early. And I just can’t go back to sleep. So I lie there, with one eye open. Too tired to get up. Too awake to sleep. And I wait and wait until it goes off. And what happens then? I lean over, wack the snooze button and go back to sleep for 9 more minutes.

Well, imagine Israel is waiting for the alarm clock to go off. They’re waiting, after 350 odd years of silence for God to do something. They’re half asleep with one eye open. And suddenly Jesus, this kid they grew up with in Nazareth, says that the day they’ve been waiting for is here. HE is the Messiah. HE is the one who’s going to set the prisoners free, give the blind their sight and release the oppressed. HE has come to bring FREEDOM NOW. And they’re all AMAZED at his teaching. Then someone says what they’ve all been thinking: “*Isn’t this Joseph’s son?*” In other words, hang on a minute, isn’t this the son of the local carpenter? The guy we grew up with playing soccer. The kid who never got in trouble from the teacher at school. This is Jesus!” And Jesus is rejected.

It’s not uncommon for God’s message to be rejected. Jesus reminds them of two other times in the Scriptures:

*** (Scripture)** First, The Elijah story is about a time when there was a severe famine, yet God sent his prophet Elijah to help a widow in Sidon. A time of famine and God's prophet only helps a Sidonian widow. He doesn't help the Israelites at all.

The second story of Elisha is similar. Many in Israel had leprosy, but this time, God's prophet, Elisha, only healed a Syrian by the name of Naaman. No-one in Israel is healed at all.

*** ("Why...")** These two stories are about times of great need in Israel where **God did not help the Israelites, his own people**. Why not? Because Israel were rejecting God. So God helped a Sidonian and a Syrian. Why did he help them? Because they were open to receive God's message. They listened to God. The Israelites rejected God.

What Jesus is confronted with here is rejection. Rejection by his own people. Jesus is here to proclaim freedom. And when people decide not to listen, Jesus simply turns to those who **WILL** listen. In other words, Jesus says: "If *you're* not going to listen, I'll find people who *will*."

*** III** – Jesus is a bit like a clock in this way. How many of us here are wearing a watch? Could you go a day without your watch? What about going a day with no clocks at all? It would be difficult. Clocks tell us the time. From our alarm clock in the morning to our mobile phones, oven clocks and wall clocks, clocks constantly remind us what time it is.

Jesus is like a clock. He comes to tell people what time it is. He simply tells it as it is. He reads the scroll of the prophecy of Isaiah and says "that day of freedom is here **NOW**".

And the great thing for us is that those words are still ringing out today – "The time of God's freedom is **NOW**! Today!" **WE STILL LIVE IN THIS TIME that Jesus announced!**

*** III** – Have you ever thought about what's next for your life?

At the moment, the furthest our kids think ahead is "Daddy, what day is it tomorrow?"

But for us "grown ups", we're always thinking about what's next:

What's next after I finish school?

What's the next job I will be working in?

When will I get married?

When will I have kids?

When will the kids leave home?

When will we pay off this mortgage?

When will I retire?

And we can live our lives going from one moment to the next.

But if we're thinking about that question: "What is the role of the church in our world?", then we have to be living **NOW**. And thinking about **NOW**. God is offering the world freedom **NOW**. The **NOW** moment of Luke 4 is still happening today. **NOW** is what matters.

*** We** live in a time, **NOW**, known as "the overlap of the ages" – the time after Jesus' first coming and before his second coming, where God's offer of freedom is on the table **NOW**. We are in a time of **waiting**. **NOW**. Jesus will come again any day for the final judgement, and we need to be ready. **NOW**.

Jesus came to preach the good news of the kingdom. He came to tell people that the time for freedom, the time for God's rule, was **NOW**. And our place in the world is to continue to do that.

*** Paul** says in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*" We appeal for people to come to God, because the time has come to make a decision - **NOW**.

We are time tellers – we tell people what time it is from God's perspective.

We tell them that he died on the cross for their sins.

We tell them that he rose again from the dead.

It's important to point people to the cross – to point them to **HOW HE PAID** for our freedom and what he's set us **FREE FROM**.

But we must also point people towards the day of JUDGEMENT – the day of resurrection. The second coming. People need to know the urgency. NOW. People need to know that NOW is the time to take up the offer of freedom God offers.

And as the church seeks to do that, there are two battlefields we face. Inside, and outside.

* **Battlefield One is outside** – We cannot sit here and expect the world to come in here. Look at what Jesus did. He went from town to town preaching the good news. The ministry of the church is as **ambassadors** of Christ. Making an appeal. Ambassadors take OUT the gospel. If we cannot do that, then we are sitting in a building that will soon become empty. Because the gospel is not being handed down in generations. The “church” is not the status quo that it was 50 years ago. People don't go to church as the done thing any more. The message that Jesus has is **good news** for the poor. Why do we think it's such a hard thing to do to share the gospel with someone?

III – Imagine you woke up in the morning and found that James Packer had deposited \$2 Billion in your bank account. He could do that. He's a rich man. And all you had to do was spend it. I don't think many of us would find that a difficult thing to do.

But what God has done by giving us the gospel is far more amazing than that. He's given us a message that sets prisoners free, that gives sight to the blind. **Spiritual** riches. **Spiritual** sight. **Spiritual** freedom. **Eternal freedom**. And people can have that spiritual freedom NOW. This is an **easy message to spend**. We need to spend that message of good news outside our walls.

* **Battlefield Two is inside**. Who rejected Jesus when he brought this great news? The people who knew him the most. The people he grew up with. His **own people** rejected him. His own people had him crucified. His own people disowned him. Familiarity breeds contempt. **They knew Jesus so well that they didn't know him at all**. And can't our churches be like that? Full of people who know everything **about** Jesus but have no personal relationship **with** Jesus. People who've listened to the teaching of God's word all their life, yet still think that they'll get into heaven by their good works. People who actually know more about the **LAW** of the church than they do about the **LORD** of the church. The very people that take the walls of the church and build them higher. And what does Jesus say to **those** people? What does Jesus say to those churches?

* **Goodbye**. “*And he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*”

We need to remove the walls. We need to find that walls that close us off to the world and take them down – take down the walls that separate our **inside church life** from our **outside church life**, so we can have a church that freely goes out to our world and freely lets the world in.

The greatest enemy of the church is complacency. That's what happens when we forget about the TIME. When we forget that we live in the NOW time of history. We're waiting for our Messiah to return again NOW.

* **What will you do with your Freedom?**

We see the **love** of God at the cross of Jesus. And we see the **mercy** of God in Him giving us the time NOW to respond to his love. Keep looking at the time. Keep reminding the world what time it is. God has only given the world NOW to respond to his offer of freedom.