

## I. Intro:

### A. What a powerful story – you might even call it an entertaining story from early in Jesus' ministry ... let's review it:

#### 1. Jesus had just come from spiritual highs and spiritual lows ...

a) The spiritual high was a moment of special clarity and closeness with his heavenly Father ... He was down in Judea, out in the wilderness but closer to the capital city Jerusalem than to his home town

b) He blended in at first, following the crowds of spiritual seekers going out into the rugged, sparsely populated areas by the Jordan River to hear that wild preacher they called John the Baptizer

c) But when Jesus got to John at the water's edge, he could no longer blend in:

(1) This was because John recognized him as the One who was coming, whose sandals John wasn't worthy to untie

(2) It's also hard to blend in when you come up out of the water and people can see the Holy Spirit descending like a dove on you, and when people hear a voice from heaven saying, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased."

#### 2. And right after that spiritual high point came a very low point, a point at which the rest of us probably would have given in:

a) I'm talking about a time of spiritual discipline thru fasting and then deliberate testing by the devil out in the wilderness

(1) There was no one to help him ... for 40 days, no one to fetch him some water or food ... no one to advise him, console him or cheer him up

(2) When the devil was through with Jesus, that ancient deceiver left behind an exhausted & probably sunburnt man, famished & weak ... and yet still resolute in spirit

b) Weakened as he was from lack of food, Jesus did not give in to the evil one's attempts to derail him from his divine mission

### B. And somehow Jesus, unbowed in the face of the devil's clever temptations, found his way back up north to Galilee

#### 1. How did he do that?

a) Well one simple answer from our text in Luke is that he went "in the power of the Spirit" ...

b) Some divine power made it possible not only to travel but to also begin God's desired ministry of teaching & healing

2. How did Jesus find the strength to travel after fasting 40 days? In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark it also tells us that, before returning to Galilee, angels came & ministered to him. Nice!

## II. But here is where the really fascinating part of the early story of the grown up Jesus comes

### A. I'm not talking about when he's out on some solitary spiritual quest, setting the foundations for his coming ministry

1. That IS important spiritual stuff ... those foundations help the Gospel writers make the claim that this man is indeed the Messiah
2. But important as this background is, it's not very engaging, not very entertaining for us the average readers ... After all:
  - a) How well do YOU identify with someone leaving the comforts of the town or the city and joining a "movement", going out into the desert to hear some freaky preacher telling you to repent?
  - b) How many of you have ventured off into a wild and solitary place to spend a whole day alone in the wilderness?

(1) Actually, I have ... last September near Taos, New Mexico

(2) I spent 24 hours in a 30-foot diameter clearing on a hillside ... Rocks and pine trees, crows, chickadees and squirrels were my



companions, sleeping on the ground under a tarp. During that time I had water with me but no food, no books, very little to read and no one to talk to but myself and God.

(3) This is not the time for me to report on that experience, which was part of the whole week I spent with a group of men being challenged to radically follow Jesus in sustainable ways.

- c) Perhaps like Jesus, I did feel the Holy Spirit calling me to go on a wilderness venture ...

(1) but unlike Jesus I had Todd Wynward and other wonderful support people planning and preparing it all ...

(2) & unlike Jesus, I was only out there for one day, not 40!

3. The point I'm making is that most of us do not do such solitary spiritual quests, so we find it hard to personally relate to the baptism and temptation stories of Jesus ...

**B. But the next part of the story – back up in “civilization” where Jesus has ready food supplies and water, with a familiar house and a bed and family members living in a town where people know him – THAT is the more interesting part of this story**

1. When Jesus goes back among his own people where he grew up, that's entertaining

2. This is the big homecoming, the grand return for the local boy who has become a famous and respected teacher: now that's an easier story to relate to! We want to find out what happens to him

**C. In a way, I'd enjoy digging deeper and peeling back layers of this story**

1. There's plenty of material here to preach about what Jesus says in the synagogue, after he quotes from Isaiah 61

2. I could also explore why his hometown people are so upset with him that his adoring fans basically become a murderous mob!

3. But today I'm not focusing on those interesting aspects ... I'm focusing more on just one verse, and specifically just one word – the verse is #18, and the word is “anointed”

4. So let's look at that verse ...

**III. Specifically I want to ask 2 questions: What was anointing, back in the time leading up to Jesus? & why does Jesus claim he is fulfilling Isa. 61:1?**

**A. Let's explore the meaning of anointing first**

1. A little NT quiz: Who knows what it says in James 5:14? (*read*)

a) Because of this reference to anointing and prayers of healing, many Christians today only think of anointing as an action for healing.

b) And in Jesus' day there was that association, as in Mark 6:13 when Jesus' disciples anointed people with oil as part of healing in Jesus' name

2. But for most of biblical history, anointing was associated more with empowerment and with consecration, than it was with healing.

a) In the OT, the primary use of anointing with oil was for the kings of

Judah (like Saul & David & Solomon).

(1) Anointing invested them with power from God & gave them authority in the eyes of God's people.

(2) It could also be a way of showing divine approval on that person's kingship.

(3) Sometimes God's prophets were also anointed for the same reason, such as in 1 Kings 19:16 when God told Elijah to anoint Elisha as his own successor

b) Another meaning of anointing in OT was consecration – the setting apart of someone or something for a holy purpose

(1) So in Exodus 29:7 Moses' brother Aaron was anointed, set apart to be a Jewish priest

(2) We also have Jacob anointing a stone pillar at Bethel, to be a house of God ... in Gen. 28:18

3. When Jesus reads the Isaiah 61 scroll, his listeners understand that passage to be referring to some unknown prophet in the future

a) This prophet would be anointed for his mission by God's own spirit.

b) This prophet would declare to God's suffering people the hopeful message of God's good news, of release from captivity, etc.

4. When this text from Luke 4 is read today, the punctuation usually sounds like this [*read 4:18a*]

a) Perhaps like me, you've sometimes wondered, "What does anointing with oil have to do with preaching good news to the poor?"

b) Well in fact, biblical scholars do not agree on the exact punctuation of this verse in Greek. So let me share what is the more likely way to translate the original Greek of this story of Jesus from Luke. See and hear the slight difference in how this reads:

**Luke 4:18-19** (alternate translation)

The Spirit of the Lord is on me

because He has **anointed** me.

To preach good news to the poor

He has sent me, as well as to ...

Proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind

To set at liberty the oppressed, and

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me.  
To preach good news to the poor He has sent me, as well as to ...  
Proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind  
To set at liberty the oppressed,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

c) In other words, God has not anointed this prophet just to preach good news to the poor.

(1) The prophet was anointed for an overall mission of preaching.

(2) And that preaching would include good news to the poor, release for captives and those other lovely images of freedom

(3) The anointing was granting power and divine approval for a broad prophetic calling

## **B. So with that understanding of Isa. 61, what does it mean that Jesus claims to fulfill that prophecy?**

1. In Jesus' day, respected rabbis did not stand up to teach. Instead rabbis taught from a seated position.

a) So when Jesus sits down, everyone's eyes are fixed on him expecting some great teaching from this hometown rising star.

b) And he doesn't disappoint ... but he does surprise them.

2. Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of the actions declared long ago that a special prophet would one day undertake.

3. This text from Luke 4 has often been called "the mission statement of Jesus".

a) This is where he launches his new public ministry. In essence this is the manifesto of God's prophet, Jesus of Nazareth

b) For our purposes today, with language that WE would more likely use, Jesus is expressing his most fundamental calling, couched in well-known words from an earlier prophet

c) It is to this calling of preaching, unbinding and healing that Jesus is anointed, directly by God.

4. In other words, this is the story of Jesus hearing and claiming his divine calling, and also being set apart and empowered for it.

## **IV. What about you and me? Do we have divine callings? Have we been set apart and empowered for our callings?**

### **A. (illustration)**

1. In recent months, in my early morning devotional time I have often used an app on my phone called Pray As You Go.

- a) It’s like a devotional podcast lasting 10 to 13 minutes long. It contains some reflective well-chosen music, a Scripture text and some guided focus questions, often very much in the form of lectio divina.
- b) For times when my own inner voices and restlessness distract me too much to sit in total silence, this contemplative practice is helpful to me.

2. Last Monday, the recording began with traditional chiming of cathedral bells, leading into a lovely chanting song of some Scottish Benedictine monks.

- a) The monks gently sang in Latin the following words, which are drawn from John 15:16 *I have chosen you out of the world, so that you might go out and bear fruit, fruit that will last.*
- b) Transitioning out of the musical chant, the narrator said this: *As I listen to this chant, I remind myself that God calls me, calls me by my name. However unsuitable or unworthy I may think I am, God has chosen me.*

<https://pray-as-you-go.org/player/prayer/2302>

3. For some reason, the music and these words were powerful to me. They stirred up surprising emotion.

- a) God is calling me? ... today? ... by name?
- b) At that moment I was in fact feeling quite unsuitable and unworthy, so the words cut through my little funk to reassure me that God has indeed called me by name! Chosen me!
- c) It was as if the church bells in the recording were a doorbell, getting my attention almost like the advertising slogan for Avon cosmetics which I remember from my childhood.



(1) The slogan went “Ding, Dong! Avon calling!” Anybody remember it, with a picture looking something like this?

(2) I think the message for me in that moment was more like, “Ding, Dong, Neil! Jesus calling!”

## **B. Has Jesus been ringing your doorbell lately? Is there a calling God has placed in front of you, asking for a response today?**

1. Sometimes the callings we hear are grand, high-level ones that may shape our whole lives (such as the call to serve the poor, or the call to be a medical professional)
2. At other times the calling is for a more immediate purpose (like the lifestyle you should be living in this season of life ... or a conversation you need to have with someone next week)

## **V. Conclusion**

### **A. This morning is a chance for you to respond to a new calling God has placed on your heart, or to renew an earlier calling**

1. Do you feel unsure of a calling that has been nudging at you for some time? Or maybe you're now doubtful of a calling that used to be clear? Come seek anointing for wisdom & clarity from God.
2. Does your body feel weak, maybe even stripped of the physical strength you need to carry out your calling? Perhaps your "spirit is willing but the flesh is weak"? Then be anointed for physical healing and renewal.
3. Are you one who knows exactly what God's call is, but you lack the courage and fortitude to obey it? Come seek the anointing of divine strength & courage to faithfully obey God's call, no matter the consequences.

**B.** As Elvina plays for a few moments, **I invite you to silently review the callings you've heard from God. Then consider for what you might want to be anointed today.**

**C.** After singing the song of response, we will offer the ritual of anointing with oil for any who want to receive it.