

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. 17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

*18 “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME,
BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO
THE POOR.*

*HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE
CAPTIVES,
AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND,
TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,*

19 TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.”

20 And He closed the book, 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.”

On 27th June 1976 an AirFrance A300 Airbus with 248 passengers was hijacked by terrorists and taken to Entebbe Intl. Airport in Uganda where Idi Amin was the President.

After landing the passengers were taken to an adjacent building that had once been the main terminal and separated into 2 groups. Ultimately there were 106, including the 12 Airbus captain and staff, 84 Israeli citizens and 10 other people closely associated with being Jewish who were detained while the rest were sent on to Paris.

Seven hi-jackers who were welcomed by Idi Amin demanded that 53 Palestinian terrorists held by Israel along with 12 other terrorists held in other places be released along with 5 million dollars, or the captives would begin to be executed on July 1st.

Of course, diplomacy ensued for days trying to come to some solution. In Israel, top leaders dis-agreed about whether to give in to the terrorists and give them their demands, which of course leads only to more terrorism.

A week went by with deadlines for executions arriving and the diplomats getting a few days extension. Meanwhile Israeli special forces gathered intelligence, built a working model of Entebbe airport, and formulated a bold plan.

Six C130 Aircraft flew the 2500 miles, refueling in Kenya which would be retaliated on by the wicked Idi Amin, landed at Entebbe with 100 Israeli Commando's who stormed the building where the prisoners were held, killed the 7 hijackers, engaged the Ugandan military forces killing 45 of them, destroyed 11 Soviet Mig aircraft that were on the ground at Entebbe, got the captives loaded on the waiting C130 aircraft, and flew to Ben Gurion airport in Israel.

You might say that the rescuers took captivity captive. Bursting on the scene and recapturing those who were captives and leading them to freedom. There are many parallels for us this morning in what Jesus will claim about Himself. He claims to be on a similar operation, on a much larger scale, with a much more fierce and powerful enemy;

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Let's begin this morning in vs. 16;

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

Synagogue is a greek word that simply means a meeting place. In the old testament there is nothing in the Law of Moses about the function and design of synagogues. We don't see them until the New Testament.

But James the apostle, in Acts 15 says this at the first Jerusalem church council v21 *“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”*

In old testament ancient Israel, worship centered around the Temple in Jerusalem. But when the children of Israel were taken captive and brought to Babylon, they began to meet on the sabbath day and the meetings over time were organized into local groups or synagogues.

When that dispersion ended and the jews came back into the land, synagogues were set up in every region, every town for the purpose of coming together for worship. Very much like out local churches are now.

They would begin by reciting the Shema. Deut.6 4 *“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.*

Then a period of prayers was read and recited. And after that someone would be given a scroll, the scrolls were honored things, stored in linen in a case, and there would be an attendant whose job was to properly store and protect the scrolls, and also to give out the scrolls to those who would stand and read.

The person who would read and then teach expositively was often known as the ruler of the synagogue. We see that several times in the New Testament, but there was also a custom called "the freedom of the synagogue" where a visiting rabbi or scholar could be the one who would read and teach from the reading.

It took a minimum of 10 people in order to organize a synagogue. So even in tiny settlements, when ten or more men wanted a local meeting place, a synagogue could be formed. Thus we see Jesus and Paul in different towns and villages, and they begin at the synagogue.

Very similar to what we still have today. Our Christian churches are set up very like the Jewish synagogues. We meet on the first day of the week because of the resurrection of Jesus on the first day, He having completed the Sabbath in every way.

We sing praises to God, as best we can, we have prayers, and then we settle in for a reading of God's word, accompanied by exposition on the portion of scripture read.

The Jews survived intact for centuries amidst other cultures because of synagogues where God's revelation was revered, God was worshipped, and His book taught.

The Christian church, likewise has survived when it follows this simple pattern given us by the Jews and copied by the first Christians. We are not far this morning from the same simple pattern that Josephus describes as a first century synagogue of the Jews. If there is such a thing as high church and low church, the synagogue pattern of worship that sustained the Jews is low church.

And thus our picture this morning of Jesus himself participating in the Jewish synagogue in His home town of Nazareth, taking advantage of the "freedom of the synagogue" in order to stand up, read a passage, and

teach the people what that passage means.

Except Jesus teaching goes far beyond anything these folks had ever experienced in the past. The author of the book will give an exposition on what the book means. He speaks with the authority of author, and not as mere commentator.

Did Jesus tell the attendant which scroll to bring, or was this simply the providence of God that this portion of Isaiah was given to Him on that morning. Either way is equally possible. God has no problem with attendants and scrolls in order to give Jesus the words spoken over 700 years previously to the prophet, which are being fulfilled on that morning.

16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read

It was Jesus *custom*, wherever He was at, to enter the synagogue and join the worship of His Father, and to read from His book and teach. That was His custom.

17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

Jesus was the author of those words. Revealed by God to the prophet Isaiah, and written in a book.

Jesus doesn't need the book. The words in the book originated in Heaven, from Him. But there is something authoritative about the revelation from God, the fact that it was not just revealed to some prophet and forgotten, the Word of God, the revelation is written down.

And finding those words on that scroll has within it a dignity of our God

who has revealed Himself to us in words. Words that remain, generation upon generation written and re-written by scribes who considered their task of the importance of perfectly duplicating what God said, for the next generation and the next and the next.

We have thousands of these scrolls and fragments of scrolls to study even today. There is a whole science of comparing all of the remaining ancient scrolls.

I had the privilege of meeting one of those top scientists, a Jewish man. I was buying some photographic equipment he had advertised. He was neither artist or photographer. The reason he had the equipment was because the Jewish museum that owns the Dead Sea scrolls was going to allow, one time, for them to be photographed.

And the best technology the world had available at that time was 8X10 inch sheets of Kodak film with American lenses to photograph those ancient scrolls for future study. When digital technology surpassed film for duplication, he simply offered some of the film stuff for sale and I drove well south of Los Angeles down in the hills not far from Long Beach to pick a couple of pieces up.

And I asked him this question. How close is my 1963 New American Standard translation to what he found on scrolls that go back a couple of hundred years before Jesus was alive on earth. And he assured me that it is an exact duplicate translation of those original scrolls. 2000 years later, it's intact and quite perfect.

It was one thing that God revealed truth about Himself impossible for us to find out any other way. It's another thing that the truth has been written down and preserved intact. We believe God has overseen the transmission of His truth down through the ages, intact.

Now, I might add, some of the modern translations are horrid. And that

same God also gave us the sense to know it.

How gratifying and affirming it is to read these simple words. *17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,*

Buy a good translation. Depend upon it. It was the written word on the morning Jesus opened it up and found the words He was looking for, and it is the written Word of God this morning. Equal in power and fidelity as that morning almost 2000 years ago.

Matt. 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away. Psalm 119:89 Your word, O LORD, is everlasting; it is firmly fixed in the heavens. Matthew 5:18 For I tell you truly, until heaven and earth pass away, not a single jot, not a stroke of a pen, will disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Listen to the words Jesus read that morning. We have them intact in our ubiquitous Bibles. For them the word was precious, wrapped in linen by an attendant and protected. For us, you could go out to the dump, most any week, and find a copy of the Bible. Shameful how much they valued God's word, and how little we do.

He read from Isaiah 61:

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The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; Luke has just made a concerted effort regarding Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Spirit descends upon him in a visible bodily form at His baptism by John.

Then the Spirit leads Him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Then He comes in the dynamite, the power of the Spirit to Galilee. And the first thing recorded out of His mouth by Luke is concurrent.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me. Why? Why Jesus?

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Jesus is annointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to the poor.

Gospel is very simply translated good news. Great news.

Now, back to our opening parallel. Entebbe. Consider yourself one of those 106 persons. You are being held captive against your will. You've been herded into a dark room. An inner room with no windows and no lights, its dark. And your captors are mis-treating you. They hate you and treat you roughly.

Suddenly a man kicks open the door and he says; you have regained your freedom. You can come out of the dark room. Soon you will be transported to a place where you are free again. Could there be any better news.

Isaiah says Messiah will do all of those things. But on a much grander scale than even the Israeli special forces.

Who are these captives? Who is this written to? Consider for a few moments some of the parallels to what Jesus said to a group of people gathered around in a natural theatre and stage up on a mountain slope one day;

3 *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

4 *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

5 *“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.*

6 *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

This is the same picture. The same group. Blessed are the spiritually bankrupt who know they are bankrupt. They mourn about their state. They are meek, helpless to do anything about it. They hunger and thirst to be free from the burden of sin and death.

It's the same group that Isaiah promised the release that the Messiah would bring. *HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR.*

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Here's what happened. Here's why this capture of the captives is

necessary. We spoke of it just last week.

The moment Eve sinned and Adam joined her in it, they were captured. Owned by Satan. He stands before God and accuses the brethren. Why? Because as soon as we sinned, we were captured by Him. We became prisoners of his.

God rejects sin. He casts sin out of His presence. He cannot tolerate sin, and all who sin are taken captive, by Satan. This sinful world, all of it's systems, all of it's dominions and rulers are under the control and dominion of the king of this world. Satan. Every sinner is a captive.

How many are sinners? All. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Every man, woman, child, born into this world, is born in sin, conceived in sin, seperated from a Holy God. We are captives.

But God has a plan to recapture the captives and take captivity captive and then set them free.

Little by little He reveals Himself, first to the patriarchs, Job, Noah, Abraham, then to a nation, He reveals more of Himself and His perfect righteousness by giving us a mirror to look at Him compared to us in the Law that He gave to Moses.

Then He sends prophets to tell of a day when everything that's upside down because of Satan is going to be judged and turned right side up. Captives will be freed. Some, not all. Most, sadly, love the darkness, love their sin, love being owned by the Devil.

But God has chosen His elect, His choice ones who are going to mourn over their sin and long for redemption and the freedom from the burden of sin. His prophet tells of a future time when Messiah will come and announce a day of the Lord's favor.

The doors will get kicked open. The announcement is made. Rush out of this dark room, across the runway to the waiting airplanes. Go quickly. Freedom has been purchased at an awful price. Soldiers are dying outside this building to purchase your freedom. Run to the airplanes.

A brave young commander, leading the group who would assault the tower and bring the charge against the Ugandan army's name was Jonathan Netanyahu. He was brother of Benjamin Netanyahu. Yoni, brother of Bibi.

Jesus is reading the words of Isaiah the prophet to the people of His hometown, in the synagogue that He worshipped in as a child and a young man.

Beautiful words about captives being set free. Blind people made to see. The poor, the oppressed, the blinded captives are set free. Beautiful words, lovely words that gave the people hope for the long centuries.

And He does something really weird. How often have they heard those words before in this synagogue. At least once a year. Familiar words. But Jesus stopped mid sentence. Very weird. Why? Why didn't he finish the reading like all the other priests and rabbi's and scribes and scholars who had read Isaiah's words to them before. Isaiah 61 vs. 2 says;

2 To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD; And the day of vengeance of our God;

Why did He stop mid sentence. Is that even allowed? No one else ever did that. Why didn't He finish Isaiah's words. Is He dis-honoring Isaiah!???

You know one time they accused Him of dis-honoring God's sabbath,

and He told them, He was Lord, even of the sabbath.

Well, likewise, He is Lord, even of the words of this book. He told them He did not come to alter one jot or one tittle. Never-th-less, He is Lord of the book, and He's about to tell them why He didn't finish Isaiah's words. Actually they're His words, He owns them, He gave them to Isaiah and told him to write them down.

And with that same authority, the authority of author of the book, owner of the words, He gives them the best news any human ears ever got to receive. Ever! This is it. No better news, anywhere, ever than what He will tell these folks in Nazareth synagogue.

20 And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

You could have heard a pin drop. I don't know if they had pins. OK, you could have heard a mustard seed drop. Silence. Every eye on Him in anticipation. What will He say? We know He stopped mid verse for a reason. What is it. What will He say.

He rolls up the scroll, carefully. He hands it back to the attendant who will put the linen back around it and store it in it's chest, safely. He sat down to teach. That was their custom. It isn't mine. I love hiding behind this pulpit.

Jesus sits down and every eye is focused on Him, waiting to hear what He will say about Isaiah's words, cut short, mid sentence.... What will He say?

Jesus had perfect timing. Every eye is on Him. This room is His. And Luke, the brilliant story teller has us on the edge of our seats with the same anticipation they felt over 2000 years ago. Perfect timing.

It reminds me of Tex Williams line in his 1947 song. I have the record, by the way;

Now at a game of chance the other night
Ol' Dame Fortune was doin' me right
Them kings and queens just kept on comin' round
Well I got a full and I bet it high
But my plug didn't work on a certain guy
He just kept a raisin' and a layin' that money down
He'd raise me and I'd raise him
I sweated blood . . had to sink or swim
He finally called and he didn't raise the bet
I said "aces full pal how about you?"
He said "I'll tell you in a minute or two
But I just gotta have another cigarette"

Perfect tension. Perfect timing. He hands back the scroll. He sits down to teach. Every eye in the place is trained like a laser on Him.

Vs. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

Since Genesis 3, when God tells Adam, because you have done this, cursed is the ground, Adams seed has been waiting for the words which will undo that curse. Words, recorded words began the curse, and words will end the curse. Jesus has just said the words that un-curse the curse. *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

That, my friends, is the most astonishing moment in history. Up until that day, this moment and these words out of Jesus mouth, commenting on what the prophet Isaiah said and what he meant are the most astonishing words ever uttered. *"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

Messiah will come and rescue the captives. He'll open the eyes of the blind and He'll release the oppressed, and He will announce the day of God's favor.

Jesus tells these folks, Messiah is here. The day of God's favor is here. The enemy is neutralized. You can follow me to safety. The day that creation has been waiting for for 4000 years is here.

Why did Jesus stop mid-sentence? Because that day of God's favor has a beginning, and an end. This day Jesus announces the door to blessing has been thrown open. You folks get to witness the opening up of God's favor with men.

That door is still open. That year of favor has lasted 2000 years. But a day is coming when Jesus will Himself return and bring the day of vengeance.

I'm going to close this morning with 3 verses. Paul quoted them in Ephesians. Hopefully, after this mornings teaching, they will make perfect sense.

Proverbs 30:4

Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His hands? Who has bound up the waters in His cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is the name of His Son--surely you know!

Psalm 68:18

You have ascended on high; You have led captives away. You have received gifts from men, even from the rebellious, that the LORD God may dwell there.

Eph. 4:8 Therefore it says,

“WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,

*HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."*

Jesus came to lead captivity captive. He came to recapture those who had been taken captive by sin and Satan, and to lead them ultimately to safety, with Him, in heaven.

He opens spiritual eyes. He takes the spiritually bankrupt and makes them rich. He defeats the one who was holding them captive and mistreating them and leads them to freedom.

But, we could push our illustration to insanity. What happens when the Israeli commander kicks open the doors, neutralizes the hijackers who were holding the people hostage, orders them to run for the waiting airplanes and they say;

"We don't want to go. We like this dark room. We like our captors and our mis-treatment. We were doing weird stuff in here in the dark until you showed up." Insanity, right?