

“Jesus Was a Preacher”

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Luke 4:16–21

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. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. 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 favor.”*

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.”¹*

Put on your thinking caps with me. I want us to imagine three different scenarios.

Imagine you have been feeling ill for some time, and you’re now at the doctor’s office. After undergoing an examination and some tests, he has some bad news to deliver. You have a certain condition, and unless you change your ways—unless you start taking medication, eating a special diet, and getting proper exercise—you will die within months. The doctor delivers this news with the utmost seriousness and urgency. You know he attended a prominent medical school and has years of training and experience behind him. Do you trust the doctor, or do you say, “Well, doctor, I appreciate your opinion. But I feel like I’m fine. I think we should just keep dialoguing for a while”? No, you wouldn’t say that because the doctor knows more than you do. He is an authority and you’re not. Now, you may want to get a second opinion, but you probably don’t believe the doctor is a fool. You’re very likely to listen to him.

Now imagine something different: you’re driving in your car when you notice a police car’s lights flashing in your rear-view mirror. You pull over and the officer approaches your car. You roll down the window and he asks, “Do you know why I pulled you over?” Now, you have a suspicion it’s either that you were speeding, swerving in your lane, or doing something else.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

You can't be sure because you were texting at the time. The officer says he has to give you a ticket. Do you argue with him? Of course, some people do argue with police officers in that type of situation, but it never ends well for them. Most likely, you apologize, take the ticket, and pay it. Why? Because there are laws that have been written and the police officer caught you breaking the law and he has the authority to give you a ticket.

One more scenario: imagine you're meeting someone new. Perhaps a stranger comes to church. Meeting new people can be a bit awkward. And, let's admit it, a lot of us can be awkward. But imagine someone new comes to church and we want to get to know him. Let's say we're having some kind of fellowship time after the service and instead of talking to this visitor and allowing him to talk to us, we put him in a corner and talk about him. We guess where he's from, what he does for work and for fun, and what he likes and dislikes. But we never allow him to talk. Is that a way to get to know someone? Of course not! To know a person, you have to let that person talk. You have to hear his words. We can study physical objects in the world without hearing from them because they're impersonal, but to know a person requires hearing from that person.

What do these scenarios have to do with anything? It seems that when it comes to our knowledge of God, we don't want to allow him to speak to us. We don't allow him to speak with the authority that he possesses. And we don't admit that he is omniscient, all-knowing, and that we are in the wrong and have a fatal condition that only he can fix. When I say "we," I don't mean all of us, *per se*, but I mean our society in general. And I think that is why preaching isn't very popular. Michael Green, a British theologian, wrote these words over thirty years ago: "The standard of preaching in the modern world is deplorable. There are few great preachers. Many clergy do not seem to believe in it any more as a powerful way in which to proclaim the gospel and change the life. This is the age of the sermonette: and sermonettes make Christianettes."² It seems to me that if you look around, you find a lot of Christianettes. If Green is right, that means there have been a lot of sermonettes, too. John Stott, a long-time pastor, wrote, "Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor."³

² Preface to John R. W. Stott's *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 83.

I think part of the reason preaching is so poor and so unpopular is because preaching is meant to be authoritative. Preaching is the proclamation of something that is true. In Christian preaching, it is the proclamation of God's Word. It includes the reading of God's Word, an explanation of it, and ways that it should affect our lives. Preaching is not telling stories. It's not sharing opinions. It's not making people feel happy, or maintaining a comfortable tradition.

No, Christian pastors should preach the Bible. And the Bible is not a dusty old book. We preach the living words of the living God,⁴ and God acts through his words.⁵ God created the universe by his word (Genesis 1; Heb. 11:3). God upholds the universe by his word (Heb. 1:3). God makes promises and covenants with people by means of his word.⁶ God saves people with his word.⁷ When I preach, I preach God's Word, by presenting the intent of God's Word, as expressed in a certain passage or a group of passages.

However, preaching has become rather unpopular. I have heard pastors give sermons that didn't quote the Bible even once. And there are a growing number of people who call themselves Christians yet who seem to reject all authority. Instead of listening to faithful preachers and theologians who, like the doctor in the first scenario, tell them of mankind's sin sickness, they want endless dialogue. They think that everyone is entitled to an opinion. They assume that everyone's views are legitimate and equal. They call for an open mind and they don't seem to have firm convictions. But we can't keep having open-ended dialogues. We must arrive at truth. G. K. Chesterton, a Catholic writer, once said, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."⁸

Unfortunately, there are some people who treat pastors who warn them that they're breaking God's law like rent-a-cops at the mall, not state troopers. They don't respect any authority other than themselves. And, worst of all, though they say they want a relationship with God, they refuse to let him speak. Instead, they insert whatever they want into his mouth. He's

⁴ Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

⁵ One excellent book that deals with this thought is Timothy Ward, *Words of Life: Scripture as the Living and Active Word of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

⁶ Such is the case with Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3; 15; 17; Israel at Sinai in Exod. 19-24; and David in 2 Sam. 7.

⁷ This concept is all over the New Testament. Salvation is equivalent to receiving new life. When Jesus raises a dead person to life, he does it with his word, as in the case of Lazarus (John 11:43-44). Preaching of the gospel is also connected to salvation, as in Rom. 10:9-15; 1 Cor. 1:21-24; 1 Thess. 1:4-5; 2:13.

⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *The Autobiography*, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998), 212, quoted in D. A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 165.

like the visitor to the church that is stuck in the corner. He's made to be like a ventriloquist's dummy, saying whatever the itching ears of the people want to hear. This is the heart of idolatry, to make God something other than he is.

To know God rightly, we must hear his Word, which is the Bible. The Bible is God's self-revelation. He has revealed things that we could never figure out by ourselves in the Bible. He has told us about the meaning and purpose of life, why things are so wrong in this world and in our lives, and how we can be saved. God knows everything, including the condition of our hearts, so we would do well to listen to him. And God is authoritative: he has the power to rescue us from death and hell. No one else has that power. For all of those reasons, I must preach God's Word. But I also must preach because Jesus was a preacher. As a pastor, I must do as Jesus did. I must preach.

This morning, I want to talk about Jesus as a preacher. I'll cover four basic points. First, I'll show that Jesus was a preacher. I'll also talk a bit about why Jesus preached, though I think it should be clear by now why he did so. Second, I'll show how Jesus preached. Third, I'll show what Jesus preached. And then I'll show how all of this affects our lives.

First, Jesus was a preacher. When Jesus starts his ministry, he starts preaching. We find this in Mark 1:14-15: ¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!’” Jesus proclaimed a message concerning the gospel, which means “good news,” and the kingdom of God. The Greek word translated there as “proclaiming” means “to announce, to make known, to proclaim aloud, to declare” much like a town crier or herald.⁹ Jesus had something important to announce. He had a message to share.

Sometimes people focus more on Jesus' deeds, like his miracles and his death on the cross. Other people focus more on his words. But we must not divide the two. Imagine if Jesus were mute, if he couldn't speak. If he just performed some miracles, died on the cross, and then rose from the grave, we wouldn't know exactly who he is. We wouldn't know the meaning of those acts. And we wouldn't get to know Jesus as a person. We wouldn't know what he expects from us. However, if Jesus only preached and taught, but performed no miracles, we would wonder if his words were authoritative. There would be no evidence that he was telling the truth.

⁹ The verb is κηρύσσω. It is related to another word, κήρυξ, which means “herald.” See Gerhard Friedrich, “κήρυξ (ἱεροκήρυξ), κηρύσσω, κήρυγμα, προκηρύσσω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:683-718.

And if he didn't die on the cross and rise from the grave, there would be no atoning for our sin. God's wrath would not be satisfied. We would have no hope of being put back into a right relationship with God. We would have no assurance of a resurrection of our own.

Fortunately, we have a Jesus who both preached and performed "signs and wonders." Both his acts and his words were important. We see this in Mark 1. He preached, he healed people, and he drove out demons. After Jesus healed many people, we read this (Mark 1:35-39):

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Jesus preached many times. Often, we're not told specifically what he preached. However, we do have one lengthy sermon by Jesus, the famous "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7. And we know that Jesus was an itinerant preacher, one who traveled from place to place to share his message.

I have already spent a bit of time explaining the importance of preaching. Preaching is the declaration of God's Word. And when Jesus spoke, he spoke the word of the Lord. In fact, Jesus was a prophet.¹⁰ He is the prophet that Moses predicted would come. Moses said this in Deuteronomy 18:15: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." And God himself said, according to Moses: "¹⁸ I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him" (v. 18). Throughout the Old Testament, the prophets famously say, "Thus says the Lord . . ." But Jesus never says that. Instead, he says things like, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you . . ." (Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 38-39, 43-44; similarly, vv. 31-32, 33-34). In other words, he was saying God's words. He didn't have to say, "Thus says the Lord," because Jesus is the Lord. He is God.

Jesus came to speak God's words. That's what he says in John 8:28, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." In John 12:49-50, he says, "⁴⁹ For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say

¹⁰ Other people refer to him as a prophet in Mark 6:15; 8:28; Luke 7:16; 24:19; John 4:19; 6:14. Jesus seems to refer to himself as a prophet in Mark 6:4 and Luke 13:33.

it.⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.” And in John 17:8, he prays to God the Father, “For I gave them the words you gave me and they [the disciples] accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.” When John says that Jesus is the Word (John 1:1), he means that Jesus is the perfect expression of God.

Jesus preached because he was and is the fullest revelation of God. The book of Hebrews opens with these words: “¹In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2). God has revealed himself in his Son and in his Bible, and the way that we know Jesus is through the Bible.¹¹ In other words, if you want to know God, you need to know Jesus. And if you want to know Jesus, you need to know the Bible. All of this is by God’s design.

Let me insert a bit of aside. A few years ago, a book was written that detailed a boy’s alleged experience in heaven. Alex Malarkey was six years old in 2004 when he was involved in a car accident. He almost died and was in a coma for two months. When he woke up, he told his parents that he had gone to heaven and had spoken to Jesus. He and his father later wrote the book called *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*.¹² The book made its way to the New York *Times* Best Sellers list. Well, it has come out that this story is false. Alex, the boy who supposedly went to heaven, has written a letter explaining that he made that story up. He said he wanted to make people happy.¹³ I bring this up because we don’t need amazing stories of people almost dying and going to heaven. I’ll be honest: I don’t believe any of them are true. What we need to know is the Bible.

So Jesus came to reveal God more clearly to us. How did Jesus preach? Jesus preached with authority. If you’ve ever read Jesus’ words, you know that he preached and taught with authority. The crowds in Jesus’ day certainly thought so. Listen to some of these reactions.

¹¹ For reasons why we should trust what the Bible says about Jesus, see my first sermon in this series, “How Can We Know Jesus,” available at <http://wbcommunity.org/jesus>.

¹² Kevin Malarkey and Alex Malarkey, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven: A Remarkable Account of Miracles, Angels, and Life beyond This World* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010).

¹³ Mark Woods, “‘The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven’ Alex Malarkey Says Best-Selling Book is False,” *Christianity Today*, January 15, 2015, <http://www.christiantoday.com/article/the.boy.who.came.back.from.heaven.alex.malarkey.says.i.did.not.die.i.did.not.go.to.heaven/46044.htm> (accessed January 17, 2015).

Mark 1:22: “The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.”

Mark 1:27: “The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.’”

Mark 6:2: “When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.
“‘Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!’”

Matthew 7:28–29: “²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

If you take the time to read Jesus’ teachings, you know that he taught with certainty. He didn’t speculate. He didn’t guess. He taught as one who knew things that others didn’t, things that they needed to know. He didn’t ask others what they wanted to hear. He didn’t form committees to determine what he should preached. His authority and certainty are stunning. He was a man without doubts.

We should also note that Jesus used the word of God when he preached. In Mark 2, we read about the time when Jesus healed a paralytic who was brought to him by four others. We read these words (v. 2): “So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.” It’s a bit unclear what “the word” means here, but it must refer at least to Jesus’ message. And the message of Jesus is the one we read about in the Gospels. I believe we can also say that this message is the Word of God, the Bible.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus refers back to the Hebrew Bible, what we would call the Old Testament. I’ll devote a sermon to this, but Jesus clearly believed that the Old Testament was God’s Word. In the passage that was read right before I started this sermon, Jesus was in a synagogue in Nazareth and read from the book of Isaiah. The passage is Isaiah 61:1-2, and it clearly refers to an anointed one—the Messiah, from the Hebrew word, or the Christ, from the Greek word, both meaning “anointed one.” This anointed one has the Holy Spirit and is sent to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Then Jesus said that this passage was fulfilled in his audience’s hearing, which means that it’s about him (Luke 4:16-21). So, we see that Jesus used the Old Testament

and the Old Testament foresaw a time when the Messiah would come to preach. Preaching was a central part of Jesus' mission.

All of this brings us to the content of Jesus' preaching. What did he preach? Jesus preached about a lot of things: he addressed specific sins such as greed, idolatry, adultery, divorce, anger, and pride. He also taught about salvation. He preached about how to act as God's people. He prophesied about the future. He preached about hell and judgment. I'll look at many of these topics in upcoming sermons. But for now, I want to talk about two topics: gospel and kingdom.

Let's go back to Mark 1:14-15. We're told that Jesus went to Galilee and preached the good news—the gospel—of God. And he said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" There it is: gospel and the kingdom of God. What is the gospel? Mark doesn't spell it out for us. But we should remember that Jesus and the New Testament writers often referred to the Old Testament. "Good news" or "gospel" is a translation of a Greek word that was used also in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was written almost entirely in Hebrew. The same Greek word was used four times in the second part of Isaiah.¹⁴ Chapters 40-66 look forward to a time when Israel would come out of exile to Babylon. The good news includes God gathering his covenant people out of blindness, prison, darkness, and exile (Isa. 42:6-7; 43:6-7). This gospel includes multiple promises of forgiveness (Isa. 43:25; 44:22; 52:15; 53:5-6) and salvation (Isa. 45:17; 46:13; 49:6; 51:5; 61:10). It is a message of free grace (Isa. 55:1-2). It leads to a glorious new, expanded Jerusalem (Isa. 53:1-3; 60:1-22; 65:18); a time of Jubilee (chapter 61); an invitation of the Gentiles to become part of God's people and to serve in the temple (Isa. 56:1-8; 66:18-23); and a new heavens and earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

Consider just one of the passages in Isaiah that uses the same word for "gospel" or "good news." This is Isaiah 40:9-11:

- ⁹ You who bring good tidings [gospel] to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁴ Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1.

- 10 See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and his arm rules for him.
See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.
- 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

I believe that when Jesus preached about the “gospel” or “good news,” this is what he meant. He meant that God had come to bring salvation to his people, to bring them out of exile, to forgive them of their sins, to take care of them the way a shepherd takes care of his sheep.

The “kingdom of God” is a topic that is closely related to the gospel. I would say that the kingdom of God is one of the major themes of the whole Bible. We don’t actually see that phrase, or the similar phrase “kingdom of heaven,” until the New Testament.¹⁵ But it’s not a new idea. God has always been King, and this idea is present in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. So God is the King, and his kingdom refers to the people he rules and the place he rules in. Graeme Goldsworthy, an Australian theologian, says that the kingdom of God is “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule.”¹⁶ In Daniel 2:44, we’re told that God “will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.”

When Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, he means that the King has arrived to establish his kingdom. He means that son that was promised to King David so long ago, the one that would reign forever, has come (2 Sam. 7:12-16). He means that the ruler prophesied by Isaiah, the “Prince of Peace,” has arrived (Isa. 9:6-7). The Son of Man of Daniel 7:13-14 has come.

I don’t think all of this was apparent to Jesus’ listeners at first. Over time, though, they started to understand that Jesus was the Christ. We have the benefit of being on this side of the cross. We can look back in hindsight and see what Jesus meant when he talked about the kingdom.

I should also add that Jesus talked about the kingdom having come, but he also talked about it in a future sense, too. He told his disciples to pray that God’s kingdom would come

¹⁵ The two phrases have the same referent.

¹⁶ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (1981), in *The Goldsworthy Trio* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 54. I changed the formatting that Goldsworthy used to outline this definition, but the definition remains the same.

(Matt. 6:10).¹⁷ Theologians often say that kingdom is “already” but “not yet.” Jesus inaugurated the kingdom of God when he came, but the kingdom of God won’t be fully consummated until he returns. It won’t be complete until Jesus returns and judges his enemies and makes all things new. Jesus is now King over his people who are in his place, the church. He is above every rule in heaven and on earth, but not everyone on earth realizes it and responds to Jesus as King. One day, however, every knee will bow to Jesus (Phil. 2:9-11).

Jesus’ kingdom is different. It’s a kingdom of justice and righteousness, where the last are first and the humble are exalted. It’s a kingdom full of people who lose their life in order to gain it.

What does this mean for us? If you are not a Christian, you need to realize that Jesus is the greatest preacher—the greatest speaker—who ever walked the earth. Pick up a Bible and read what he preached. Start with Matthew 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount. Consider the authority with which Jesus preaches. This is a man who is sure of himself. Consider also that you may not be the ultimate authority, even over your own life.

If you are a Christian today, are you letting Jesus preach to you? Are you allowing him to speak into all areas of your life? Jesus has a lot to say about all kinds of issues. In fact the whole Bible consists of Jesus’ words. Jesus himself said that the Old Testament was about him (see Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27, 44-47; John 5:39, 46.) Before he died, Jesus told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and reveal more of Jesus’ message to them. Consider these two passages:

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:25-26)

¹² “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴ He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. ¹⁵ All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:12-15)

¹⁷ Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 60: “[M]any of Jesus’ parables tell of the kingdom coming as the result of a long and imperceptible process of growth (Mt. 13:1-9, 24-33, 47-50; Mt. 4:1-9, 26-32; Lk. 13:18-21), or as an event that will take place at the end of the world (Mt. 25:1-30; Lk. 19:11-27).”

Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would help them to remember what he did and said. Two disciples, Matthew and John, wrote Gospels. Mark's Gospel is based on the witness of another disciple, Peter, who wrote two New Testament letters. Luke's Gospel was based on eyewitness accounts. Some of Acts must have been based upon eyewitness accounts, but Luke also witnessed some of what he wrote about. Paul was an apostle, sent by Jesus, because he had personal encounters with Jesus after his resurrection. Some people try to pit Jesus against Paul or the other apostles. But this won't do. Their message is a continuation of Jesus' message. That is why Paul said the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20). All of the Old Testament and all of the New Testament are one giant sermon preached by Jesus. And Jesus himself is the subject of this sermon. The whole Bible is about him.

So, again, do you allow Jesus to preach to you. Are you listening? Are you allowing God's Word to speak into every corner of your life, and not just what happens on Sunday? Jesus is the greatest preacher ever. Let's not silence him. Let's not debate with him. Let's listen to him.