

September 7, 2025

Group Study: The Mission of Jesus (Luke 4:16–30)

1. Why does Jesus choose Isaiah 61 to describe his mission? How does this challenge common assumptions about the Messiah's purpose in Jesus' time and today?
2. What surprises or challenges you about Jesus' first sermon?
3. How does Jesus' mission redefine who is included in the Kingdom of God?
4. The people of Nazareth initially celebrate Jesus as a hometown hero, but turn on him when he challenges their sense of privileged access to God's favor. Why is it tempting to want Jesus on "our side" rather than seeking to align ourselves with his mission?
5. How does Jesus challenge assumptions of spiritual entitlement or privilege? Where do we see "insider/outsider" thinking in the church today? How do we combat it?
6. What does "release" mean in both physical and spiritual terms?
7. Where might Jesus be calling us to see the Kingdom breaking in today?
8. Jesus' mission prioritizes the marginalized, not just the religiously respectable. What individual or group is easy for you to see as outside the scope of God's love and mission? How might Jesus be inviting you to see them differently?
9. When have you been challenged by Jesus' words or actions in a way that made you uncomfortable or even angry? How did you respond?
10. How are we called to embody continue the work of Jesus, as described in Luke 4?

Good Faith Bible Study

Kathy and Nathan Maxwell

September 7, 2025

"The Mission of Jesus"

Focal Text: Luke 4:16-30

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies>

Let me ask you a question—I know you’ve heard this one before.

What would Jesus do? We’ve heard it so many times that it’s kind of turned into a cliché ... but it’s a valid question. And more than that—for followers of Jesus, it’s the essential question. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do at the border? What would Jesus do in our prisons? In our schools? In our neighborhoods? How can we be about the work of Jesus? What’s a distraction to us, and what work is ours to do?

Jesus didn’t leave us guessing about his mission. In Luke 4:16, he states it very clearly. And it seems to be an important statement, not just a one-time reference. This “mission statement” is repeated in Luke 7:22, as we mentioned in this week’s lesson, and then later it’s repeated again in Acts 10:35. When Scripture keeps repeating something, we should probably pay close attention.

I’ve been thinking about mission statements lately. They’re not blueprints with every detail mapped out, but they do name what you’re about. And maybe that’s part of how the Spirit uses these words across the centuries, first in Isaiah’s time, and then in Jesus’ time, and now in our own day.

Let’s take a look at Isaiah’s time first.

Jesus’ words in Luke 4 are a blend of two Isaiah passages. The first one comes from Isaiah 61:1-2:

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;

to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn"

And Jesus also includes a portion from Isaiah 58:6:

"Is not this the fast that I choose:

to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?"

These prophetic words were first spoken to a people who suffered through the Babylonian exile. For them, these images brought hope: "Things might look bad now," God seems to say. "Right now, it might look like evil has won, that there's no way out except to fight the enemy with their own brutal weapons ... Things might look bad now, but in the end, God will rescue God's people."

These prophecies give hope for the future—when God's Messiah comes, at the end of all things, God will set things right.

Now fast forward 500 years to Jesus' time.

God's people had returned from Exile to Jerusalem. They had rebuilt the Temple, but now they were living under Roman oppression. During the first century, tensions were rising between the Romans and the Jews. And within a generation of Jesus' ministry, there would be a great revolt, and the Jerusalem Temple would be destroyed. Luke probably writes down his gospel story with this horror fresh in his memory. Luke and his audience were living through a time when their political and social worlds were being torn apart. They knew fear and uncertainty and the violence of war.

So when Luke's audience hears Jesus' words, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," well, these words land with power.

In Jesus' own life and ministry, God has already started setting things right.

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As you study the lesson this week, you might spend some time exploring how Jesus fulfilled his mission statement. We have time just for a couple of examples here, and I'm going to stick with the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, the two books from the New Testament written by Luke.

Jesus taught his followers to bring literal, physical good news to the poor and the oppressed. In Luke 12:33, Jesus tells his followers, "Sell your possessions and give alms to the poor." Before telling a parable, Jesus teaches, "But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" in Luke 14:13. And in Acts 2:44-45, taking care of the poor is one of the first markers of the community of people following Jesus: "All who believed were together and had all things in common," Luke writes. "They would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."

Jesus brings spiritual sight to those with blind hearts, but he also heals the physically blind. Saul, who's also called Paul, is a great example from Acts 9. As Saul heads to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus, he is sure that his spiritual sight is clear. These troublemakers must be stopped before they can spread any more lies about this crucified Jesus.

On the way to Damascus, though, Saul loses his physical sight when he meets Jesus on the way. Saul is led into Damascus by the hand, and for three days, he can't see. And it's during those days of physical blindness that Saul has his spiritual sight corrected. He sees clearly that Jesus is God's promised Messiah. And the story ends with Saul's physical sight being restored as well.

This is the pattern: In Jesus' ministry, care for the spiritual and the physical go hand in hand.

And we learn another important connection from the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts: We learn that the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of Jesus' followers is one and the same. Jesus' mission becomes our mission.

As you study the Bible study lesson this week, we continue to hear this ancient prophecy in two keys. On the one hand, words of future hope: Things might look impossible and hopeless now, but in the end, God will set all things right. And, on the other hand, and at the same time: These are words that call us to action, right now—to work alongside Jesus' work in the world.

Now for me at least, it can be tempting to make this work purely spiritual: pray, teach, encourage. And please, hear me say that this is good and sacred work! But the work of Jesus was not just spiritual. It was also physical and embodied. Jesus fed people, healed people, lifted and shared people's burdens.

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I recently heard a sermon about trying to find Jesus. The text wasn't this one—it was Matthew 25, the parable of the sheep and the goats. Perhaps when we're looking for Jesus, we should look among the hungry and the thirsty, the naked, the sick, the incarcerated. The preacher suggested, "Maybe it isn't so much that we bring Jesus to these people. Maybe, instead, they bring Jesus to us."

So the question this week, I think, is simple: What would Jesus do? We don't need to look much farther than Luke 4.

My guess is today that we would find—that we do find—Jesus where he's always been. Among the poor, the incarcerated, the blind and others who are pushed to the physical margins. We find Jesus with the oppressed. In other words, we find Jesus right there in the middle of human need. That's where Jesus is at work. And that's where we're called to join him.