

Sometimes I struggle coming up with good introductions to my sermons. The intro – it’s not the most important part of the sermon. That’s later, when I explain and apply God’s Word. But the intro is supposed to grab your attention, state the main point of the sermon, and make you eager to hear more. And that’s kind of a tall order. So sometimes I struggle with coming up with a good sermon intro. I’m no perfect preacher.

Jesus, on the other hand? He was the perfect preacher. In our gospel lessons this Sunday and next, we get to sit in on a synagogue service in Nazareth and hear him preach. Today, we just get his sermon intro. But I think it’s safe to say it’s the best sermon introduction ever. He reads a prophecy from the book of Isaiah, one Israel had waited 700 years to see fulfilled, a prophecy about their Savior. The intro to his sermon? **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** Prophecy...fulfillment. Luke tells us he had everyone’s attention, they all got the main point, and they were all eager to hear more!

But here’s the thing. Isaiah’s prophecy wasn’t just fulfilled for them, in their hearing, 2000 years ago. It’s still being fulfilled for you, in your hearing, today. Because the verses Jesus quotes describe you. Yes, Isaiah wrote about you! Unfortunately, what he had to say about us isn’t pretty. But Jesus is still doing what Isaiah said he’d be doing, too...what he was doing in that synagogue in Nazareth: preaching good news for poor sinners.

So let’s sit in on Jesus’ sermon this morning and see how: This scripture is still being fulfilled! 1) By the sinners hearing it, 2) By the Savior proclaiming it.

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.

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.”

I. *By the sinners hearing it*

This isn't the first sermon Jesus preached. Luke says he's been **teaching in synagogues** all over Galilee. And he's made quite a splash. **News about him spread through the whole countryside...everyone praised him.**

So it's no wonder that, when he comes to the synagogue in Nazareth that Saturday, they ask him to be the guest preacher. That's where he grew up. He's the hometown boy, and he's returning kind of a hero. They wanna hear what everyone's buzzing about, what message Jesus is sharing.

Now, synagogue services then weren't too different than our worship services today. They followed an order like we do. They sang a Psalm like we do. They had two readings – one from the books of Moses, another from the prophets. The rabbi would stand to read and sit down to preach.

So Jesus stands to give the reading from the prophets. Isaiah's scroll is handed to him. He opens it up and chooses chapter 61:1,2 as his sermon text: **“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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”**

As he rolls up the scroll and sits down, every eye is fixed on Jesus. I bet you could have heard a pin drop in that room as they waited for his sermon. Because everyone there recognized that the “me” Isaiah wrote about wasn't Isaiah, but the Messiah.

But I wonder if they recognized who the **poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed** were. Maybe they thought of the physically poor, blind, captive. Maybe the more astute among them realized Jesus was talking about spiritual problems. But I don't think many of them realized, “Jesus is talking about me.”

You want proof? There's a line that Jesus left out when he read Isaiah 61. Did you notice that? Compare the prophecy on p. 4 and Jesus' quote on p. 5 of your bulletins. Which line did Jesus leave out? *“To bind up the brokenhearted.”* Know why I think he didn't read that line? Because *that* part of Isaiah's prophecy wasn't being fulfilled that day. Many there that day weren't brokenhearted. Thought they were doing okay spiritually. Tax collectors and Gentiles were poor, blind, slaves, maybe! But they were God's people! Good, synagogue-going Jews. They didn't see how miserable their spiritual situation was, so they weren't broken up about it.

What about you? Could Jesus say **“fulfilled”** about that part of Isaiah's prophecy today? In other words, “brokenhearted...” did that describe you as you walked into God's house this morning? When you confessed your sins earlier, was your heart breaking over who you were, how you lived this last week? Or was there not much going on in your heart at all? Did you come here today desperate for the help and healing Jesus provides, or just because this is what you do on Sunday?

You see, not unlike synagogue-goers in Nazareth, church-goers in Houston can fail to see just how miserable our spiritual condition still is. How much we still need Jesus. That we're doing

okay spiritually. Begin to think poor, blind, slaves is a more accurate description of unbelievers and people living in gross sin and people who aren't in church today, unlike us!

But do you see what that is? Blindness – just like Isaiah said! We're **blind** to just how bad we are. See it in others, but not so good at seeing it in us. And if that part of Isaiah's prophecy is still being fulfilled in us, then might the rest of what he says of us be true, too?

That we are **poor**. The Greek word there isn't "struggling financially" – it's dirt poor, not a red-cent to your name. Spiritually, that's us by nature – nothing good in us, nothing of value we have to offer God. But do you see it's still true? We might proudly think we're better off than others, but God isn't comparing us to others. Holds who we are and what we do to one standard: Holy. And even our "best" never matches up, which means it's just more sin to add to the debt.

That we are the **captives**. Jesus put it this way: "Anyone who sins is a slave to sin." Do you see that's you? Doing or thinking something we've been forgiven of 100 times before? How many told ourselves we won't do it again, only to find ourselves taken captive again by it all over again? Or set out to do good, only to find evil right there with us – sinful or selfish motive always tags along?

Yes, by the sinners hearing it, this scripture is still being fulfilled.

II. By the Savior proclaiming it

But in that same sentence – this scripture is still being fulfilled – is the best of news. Because if we're the poor, blind, captives...well, we're exactly the kind of people Jesus came for. Isn't that the heart of Jesus' sermon introduction? "God promised you, even you, a Savior – and here I am!"

He might not be present in the pulpit like he was in Nazareth, but he's here through his word, doing exactly what Isaiah promised he would. He's already been at work granting **recovery of sight to the blind** – opening our eyes to see our miserable condition, how much we still need him. But he's doing more.

He's proclaiming **good news to the poor**. Good news that, although nothing of value to offer him, he valued you so much he offered himself for you. Although he was God's Son, he left the riches of heaven and made himself poor when he became one of us. Although he was rich with righteousness, he made himself poorer still by taking on himself the debt of your sins on the cross and paying that debt in full. All so you through his poverty might become rich with his righteousness and forgiveness.

He's proclaiming **freedom for the captives**, telling you how he broke your chains. How he paid the ransom price – his own precious blood, shed for you on the cross – and bought you back from slavery to sin. Released you from sin's guilt, sin's punishment, and sin's power. You are set free! Didn't he say so? "If the Son sets you free, then you are free indeed."

He's proclaiming **the year of the Lord's favor**. That's a beautiful picture – but since you're not a Jew, you might need me to explain it to you. God told his Old Testament people that every 50th year was to be a special year for them. It was called the "year of jubilee," or the "year of the

Lord's favor." Know what happened when the trumpet sounded at the beginning of that year? Any debt you ran up over the past 49 years was canceled. Anyone who was sold into slavery had to be set free. If you lost your land, your inheritance, for any reason, on that day it was restored to you.

You might think, "Boy, it'd be nice if we had a year like that!" But you have something better. That was just a picture. And when Jesus said, "Fulfilled," he was announcing the reality had arrived. In Christ, the debt of your sin is canceled. In Christ, your slavery to sin, death, devil is ended. In Christ, the inheritance you lost – a place in God's house – is yours already now. And one day you'll know perfect freedom and joy in God's house forever.

That's a promise that'll be fulfilled when you hear the trumpet sound. But until then, don't stop letting this scripture be fulfilled...by hearing it. There's not a lot we can praise about the people in that synagogue in Nazareth. You'll hear next week their reaction to Jesus – they interrupt him mid-sermon and try to kill him. But this much we can admire: **The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.** They listened attentively, eagerly to what Jesus has to say.

Shouldn't we be all the more eager, when we realize what they didn't? How poor, blind, captive we are without him? How much we still need him to keep our eyes open, give us strength in our weakness, release from our guilt, keep us free from the sin that still seeks to enslave us?

Jesus does all that and more through his Word. God promised so, 2700 years ago. Jesus announced he was fulfilling it in Nazareth. But he's still fulfilling this scripture for you, every time you hear the gospel. Thank God he is! Amen.