

Shorter Catechism 23-24 How Is Christ Our Prophet?
Isaiah 61
Psalm 45
Luke 4

Dec 30, 2012

The Shorter Catechism uses various structuring devices to help organize the story of redemption. For instance, the whole catechism is divided into two parts by question 3:
“the scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God (pt 1),
and what duty God requires of man (pt 2).”
Question 23 sets up a discussion of the offices and the estates of Christ.

Q. 23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

The catechism speaks of three offices and two estates of Christ.

Estate (as we’ve seen over the last couple weeks) has to do with “condition.”
And so we speak of Christ’s “estate” of humiliation during his life and death
(which he inherited from Adam),
and his “estate” of exaltation in his resurrection and ascension
(which he inherited as the second Adam).

On the other hand, office has to do with function.

And the catechism speaks of three functions – three “offices.”

Why these three?

Why prophet, priest, and king?
Why not warrior? Why not judge? Why not shepherd?
Scripture uses lots of images and pictures of Christ.

Why use only these three?

The reason is because warrior, judge, wise man, shepherd, etc.,
are subordinate officers.

A warrior is simply one of the functions of a king.
Likewise, a judge (in the OT) has either a kingly or a priestly function.
A shepherd is one of the leading images of the kingly line of David.

If you think about the Old Testament offices,
there are lots of “subordinate” officers –
but the three overarching roles
(the three positions that answer to no one except God)
are the prophet (like Moses or Elijah),
the high priest (like Aaron),
and the king (like David).

Judges ruled only because there was no king.
Levites and scribes served the priests.
Wise men gave counsel to the king.

But the only three offices that answer directly to God are prophet, priest and king.

So it is appropriate for the catechism to say that:

Q. 23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

This week we are looking at how Christ executes the office of a prophet.

Our Psalm of response certainly has strong kingly overtones –
but the language of Psalm 45 parallels Isaiah 61 closely.

We saw last time that Mary is blessed because she bore in her womb the eternal Son of God.
Now in Isaiah 61 and Psalm 45 we see that the church is also blessed
because she is bride of the eternal Son of God.

Sing Psalm 45

Read Luke 4

Jesus says that the purpose for which he was sent was,
I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

The good news of the kingdom is that the Year of the Lord's Favor has come.

Because *today* this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

As we have been seeing in our evening series on the book of Joel,
it is still *today*.

As I speak to you *today*, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts,
but listen!

And believe the message that Jesus speaks to his church!

Our catechism says that:

Q. 24. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?

A. Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

Jesus came to reveal the will of God for our salvation.

And to see how he does this, the first thing we need to understand
is the relationship between Word and Spirit.

Word and Spirit are connected in the scriptures from the beginning.

Literally.

At the creation God's Spirit is hovering over the face of the deep,
and God's Word brings all things into being.

In the Exodus as well,

the Spirit leads Israel (the glory-cloud which hovers over the Mountain)
and God's Word constitutes Israel as his covenant people – his Son.

And in the incarnation of the Word,

it was the Spirit who hovered over Mary,
so that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

At the baptism of Jesus in Luke 3,

the Spirit descended upon Jesus
and the Father declared, "You are my beloved Son."

So Word and Spirit have been connected in every major event in redemptive history!
And the reason why is because *the* Word and *the* Spirit have been with the Father
for all eternity.

The connection between Word and Spirit is founded in the Triune God himself.

But in Luke's gospel – as well as in Acts –
there is a particular shape that this relationship takes.

Luke speaks frequently of the Holy Spirit,
and virtually every time the Holy Spirit comes upon someone,
that person (or people) begins to speak the Word of God.

Here in Luke 4 the Spirit leads Jesus into the desert
for his first confrontation with the devil,
where Jesus confounds the tempter by the Word of God.

Now, in verse 14, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee,
and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country.
And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all."

1. "The Scroll of the Prophet Isaiah": Word and Spirit in the Ministry of Jesus (4:14-21)

So the first thing we need to see is how Word and Spirit function in the ministry of Jesus.

In the Old Testament, when the Spirit of God came upon a prophet,
he spoke the Word of the LORD.

Well, that is precisely what happens to Jesus!

And you see already in verses 14-15 that the ministry of Jesus is characterized by
the power of the Spirit,
and teaching in the synagogues.

a. Synagogue and Sabbath: the Teaching of Jesus (v14-17)

¹⁶ *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.* ¹⁷ *And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.*

Everything in this passage happens in or around a synagogue.

Verse 15 introduces this section by saying that Jesus “taught in their synagogues.”

In v16 Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath day (as was his custom).

In v31 we learn that the next thing he did was teach in the synagogue in Capernaum, and that he went from the synagogue to Simon’s house.

And in v44 the passage concludes

And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Luke spent a great deal of time in chapters 1-3 in the temple.

Zechariah saw the angel Gabriel in the temple.

Jesus was taken to the temple as an infant, and returned to the temple when he was 12.

Luke rearranges the order of the temptations in order to highlight the devil taking him to the pinnacle of the temple last.

And Jesus life and ministry will move from the synagogues of Galilee to the temple in Jerusalem.

Indeed Luke’s gospel will end with the 11 returning to Jerusalem where they were “continually in the temple blessing God.” (24:53).

Why does Luke emphasize what Jesus does in the synagogue at the beginning of his ministry?

What was the synagogue for?

We often assume that the synagogue was a place of worship.

But that is not what the Jews called it.

After all, God had commanded Israel to worship in *one* place— and that one place was now the temple in Jerusalem.

Israel got in a whole heap of trouble for worshiping God at the high places! So they never claimed to worship God at the synagogue!

After all, you cannot worship God without a sacrifice, and you can only offer sacrifices at the temple.

And so the Jews called their synagogues “schools”

(synagogue gatherings were the original “Sabbath schools”)

and the main purpose of the synagogue was as a place where Jews came together (the word “sunagoges” means “to assemble”) and studied the scriptures.

Since Jews could only worship at the temple,

they gathered on the Sabbath in the synagogues in order to study the scriptures.

There are no references in the first century sources to corporate prayer, or to singing in the synagogue.

Rather, there is reading and teaching and discussion.

So Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth, his home town,
and opens the scroll of Isaiah to chapter 61, he reads several verses, and then sits down.
(in those days the preacher sat, and the people stood!)

Some have treated this episode as Jesus' inaugural address,
as though this was Jesus' first sermon.

But verse 15 says that "he taught in their synagogues" (plural)
making it clear that he had taught prior to coming to Nazareth.
And in verse 23 the people say
"What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well."
suggesting that Jesus has already been active in preaching and healing.

So we should not say that this episode was Jesus' inaugural address.
Rather, this is *Luke's* inaugural address!

Luke chose to highlight this moment – not because it was the first thing that Jesus said,
but because it communicates something at the heart of Luke's message.

Luke's point is to demonstrate that the coming of the kingdom and the coming of the Christ
are one and the same.

In Jesus, the kingdom comes.
In Jesus, the Messiah comes.
In Jesus, all the scriptures are fulfilled.
In Jesus, the Gentiles are brought in.

In the Book of Acts, Luke will chronicle in his second book
the way in which the Gentiles are included in the kingdom.
Luke is also the one who at the end of this book will tell us that Jesus said that
"all things must be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses,
and the prophets and the psalms, concerning me." (24:44)

So Luke starts with Jesus' sermon on Isaiah 61.
Jesus says that Isaiah 61 is all about him.
Jesus had been asked to teach that Sabbath,
and so they hand him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah,
and he unrolled it to where it was written,

b. The Spirit and the Word: the Mission of Jesus (v18-21)

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,
¹⁸ *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,*
because he has anointed me

*to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and 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."*

Jesus has just been baptized.

He has been led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted,
and he has returned to Galilee now in the power of the Spirit.

And when Jesus reads this passage from Isaiah 61, he says:

Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.

If you think back to Isaiah 61,
there is a slight ambiguity in the referent.

Who is the "me" in Isaiah 61?

Is it Isaiah?

Is it the prophet who is speaking?

That section of Isaiah has very little "stage direction"
and so the voice seems to shift from the prophet to the Messiah to God himself
without any hint of a change in speaker (other than the form of address).

So the people hear Jesus say, "this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,"
and they think he's using a standard homiletical device –
where the preacher "inhabits" the role of the prophet.

But of course, the reason *why* Isaiah's prophecy is so hard to unravel
is because God wanted to blend his own voice with the voice of the prophet and the king,
because that is the whole point of Jesus's coming.

He is the Word of God incarnate –

and the Spirit of the LORD has anointed him to proclaim good news to the poor.

"The poor" for Isaiah are identified with "the oppressed."

Poverty is not so much a lack of resources,
but a lack of power and hope.

We often think that the way to fix poverty is by giving people resources –
but Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert have rightly pointed out that

"Poor people typically talk in terms of shame, inferiority, powerlessness,
humiliation, fear, hopelessness, depression, social isolation,
and voicelessness." (p53)

Interestingly, scripture focuses on these things as well.

After all, what is the “good news” that Isaiah proclaims?

It’s not “you’ll get more stuff” – but

“liberty to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”

The biblical idea of good news for the poor

is that they have a defender –

they have an advocate –

they have someone who will make sure that they get justice!

Jesus, the great prophet, proclaims good news to the poor.

Who are the poor?

The poor are those who are helpless.

The poor are those who are powerless –

those who are inferior –

those who are blind,

those who are at the mercy of others.

The resource-oriented definition of poverty is a modern western notion.

After reading Fikkert and Corbett’s book,

I’ve started noticing in my historical reading

how their definition fits not just the biblical material –

but the discussion of poverty throughout most of history!

The poor are not those who lack stuff.

The poor are those who lack justice – and who lack the power to do anything about it!

What the poor need is an advocate – a defender –

someone who will make sure that they get justice.

I could say that “everyone is poor!”

But that would violate the point of Jesus’ teaching!

Because some people are not poor.

Some people oppress the poor!

Some people are rich –

and they use their “riches” to get what they want.

And Jesus says – I didn’t come for you.

I came to preach good news to the poor –

I came to be *their* defender.

2. “No Prophet Is Acceptable in His Hometown”: Elijah and Elisha in the Mission of Jesus (4:22-30)

²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ And he said to them, “Doubtless you will

quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself.' What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." ²⁴ *And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."* ²⁵ *But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land,* ²⁶ *and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.* ²⁷ *And there were many lepers^[a] in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."* ²⁸ *When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.* ²⁹ *And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.* ³⁰ *But passing through their midst, he went away.*

Notice that Jesus is determined to offend his hometown audience.

Jesus says, yes, I have come to preach good news to the poor,
I have come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,

but not to you.

Luke opens with this sermon in order to show us what the ministry of Jesus is all about.

Nazareth is but a parable of what lies in store for Jesus.
He is rejected in his hometown.
And in the end he will be rejected throughout all Israel.
And though he came to his own,
his own did not receive him.
But why is Jesus rejected?

Some people have thought that *if* the Jews had believed in Jesus,
then God would have used Israel in some different way to reach the Gentiles.

But that misunderstands the entire mission of Jesus.
Jesus' mission was not to convert Israel,
but to be rejected by Israel.

That's why he starts his ministry by insulting his own friends and neighbors!
Before anyone else rejects Jesus – he rejects *them* first!

Did you notice this?
Prior to Jesus's insult, they are speaking well of him!
If he wants to get them "on board" with his project,
all he has to do is say some nice things!
They are looking forward to great things from Jesus.
Jesus will put Nazareth on the map!

But then he tells his neighbors, but the kingdom isn't for you!
The Kingdom of God *is* coming.

I am the Spirit-anointed prophet who proclaims the Kingdom of God,
the year of the Lord's favor.
But not for you.

We shouldn't be asking, "why do they reject Jesus?"
We should be asking, "why does Jesus reject them!"

What is Jesus doing?

Isaiah 42:6-7 had said that God would send his Servant to enlighten the Gentiles.

The promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed through his seed.
Jesus is saying that his prophetic mission is like that of Elijah and Elisha.

He reminds them in verses 25-27

how there were many Israelite widows in need in Elijah's day;
but Elijah was sent to a Sidonian.

Likewise, there were many Israelite lepers in Elisha's day,
but none was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.

What does that mean?

Elijah and Elisha prophesied the downfall of the house of Ahab.
They were prophets of judgment,
who combined the preaching and the power of the kingdom
against Israel in their day.

Elijah called Israel to repentance – but Israel failed to repent.

And so Elisha followed Elijah with a message that it was too late.
Only a remnant could be saved.

Elisha doesn't even bother preaching against the house of Ahab,
because there's no point!

Israel is going to die – the house of Ahab will be destroyed –
why waste your time preaching to them?

Instead, Elisha focuses the preaching and power of the kingdom
on the remnant – a remnant that includes a Syrian general,
Naaman!

Jesus' hearers understood exactly what Jesus was saying!

He is saying that he will not heal their sick.

He is saying that they have no part in the Kingdom of God.

Why?

Why would Jesus tell his own hometown synagogue:

"The kingdom is here—but not for you!"?

Jesus is not a wandering conjuror with a bag of tricks.

The power of the Kingdom of God is not a power that can be manipulated.

The people of Nazareth are selfish.

They want the power of the kingdom for their own benefit.

And Jesus says—no!

Now, in case you are tempted to sympathize with the people of Nazareth,
notice what they try to do:

they sought to throw him off a cliff!

They had to get him out of the synagogue – out of the town –
and to the cliff's edge.

Rather than repent – they prove his point!

They are not “the poor” – they are the arrogant, the proud, the oppressors!

And they don't want to listen to Jesus!

But, rather like Elijah (whom Ahab and Jezebel could never quite capture),
he passes through their midst and leaves.

Christ exercises the office of a prophet

in revealing to us by his Word and Spirit

the will of God for our salvation.

And the will of God is that the good news should be preached to the poor.

And *please* stop thinking that “the poor” means “those who lack stuff.”

The poor are those who lack power – who lack connections –
who lack someone to protect and defend them.

So, how does Jesus fulfill Isaiah 61?

He does this through the power of the Kingdom
and through the preaching of the Kingdom.

3. “The Good News of the Kingdom”: How Christ Reveals Salvation to Us (4:31-44)

a. The Power of the Kingdom: “Your Sins Are Forgiven” (v31-41)

³¹ *And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath,*

³² *and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.* ³³ *And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice,* ³⁴ *“Ha!^[b] What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I*

know who you are—the Holy One of God.” ³⁵ *But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent and come out of him!” And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.* ³⁶ *And they were all amazed and said to one another, “What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!”*

³⁷ *And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region.*

³⁸ *And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law*

was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf. ³⁹ *And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them.*

⁴⁰ *Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.* ⁴¹ *And demons also came out of many, crying, “You are the Son of God!” But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.*

In Luke’s gospel miracles are designed to demonstrate the power of the Kingdom.

They are not to satisfy the desire or curiosity of the people.

For that matter,

they are not *primarily* for the sake of those in need.

There were, no doubt, many sick people in Nazareth,

but Jesus says that he will not heal them.

No, the primary purpose of Jesus’ exhibition of power over the devil,
is in order to demonstrate the coming of the kingdom.

And so the power of the kingdom is always exercised

in conjunction with the preaching of the kingdom (Word and Spirit go together).

Verses 31-38 demonstrate this as Jesus casts out demons in Capernaum –

Jesus has power over the devil’s minions.

Verses 38-39 again demonstrate this,

as Jesus rebukes Simon’s mother-in-law’s fever.

Jesus *is* demonstrating the power of his word–

the power of his teaching.

He rebukes demons, and they leave.

He rebukes fevers, and they leave.

Jesus is the advocate for the poor –

he defends them and brings them justice against the oppression of the Devil!

You see this in chapter 5, when Jesus heals the paralytic –

first declaring, “your sins are forgiven.”

In starting with the forgiveness of sins

Jesus identifies the central problem of this man’s situation.

Yes, he is paralyzed – and that’s bad.

But if you just heal his body, and do nothing for his soul,

then he will be worse off in the end!

Indeed Jesus says, “so that you may know that the Son of Man

has authority on earth to forgive sins,” he says to the man,

“I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” (5:24)

This is an important point for us.

Too often churches have gotten involved in social or political programs,
with a focus on helping the poor,
or achieving a political goal.
But they don't know why they are doing it.

Helping the poor is not an end in itself.

*There were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha,
and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.*

The power of the voice of Jesus is the power of the kingdom of God.

When Jesus speaks to you, when Jesus calls you,
it is a call that moves you—
we have been called out of the kingdom of darkness,
into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.
And it is *his voice* that does this.

b. The Preaching of the Kingdom: “Repent!” (v42-44)

⁴² *And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them,* ⁴³ *but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.”* ⁴⁴ *And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea.*

What was the purpose for which Christ came?

He says in verse 43,

“I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well;
for I was sent for this purpose.”

Or, as he put it in 5:31,

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Christ executes the office of a prophet by revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit,
the will of God for our salvation.

As our Prophet, he declares to us the coming of his kingdom,
and so calls us to repentance.

As we've seen recently,

repentance has two parts:

- 1) there is the aspect of being deeply moved –
being grieved over our sin
and being drawn to the mercy of God in Christ
- 2) and there is the turning of the mind –
the commitment to follow Jesus,
rather than running after temptation and sin.

Some people say, "I'm not such a bad person – I try to be good."
That's the sort of person that inhabited Jesus' home synagogue.

And Jesus told them, I didn't come for you!

I came to call *sinners* to repentance.

If you think that you're okay,

if you think that you are good enough for God,
then Jesus did not come for you.

Because if you think that you are okay,

that means that you have made peace with this age.

The good news of the kingdom is that the kingdom has come in Jesus, the King.

The year of the Lord's favor has come.

Therefore, repent!

Stop thinking that you are "okay."

Realize that you are poor, pitiful, and blind!

And repent!