

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Jesus Begins His Ministry

Luke 4:14-15

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Scripture

Jesus began his public ministry when he was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (3:21-22). Then the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days. Throughout this time the devil tempted Jesus to doubt God and his word. Jesus, however, withstood the temptations of the devil by believing God and trusting his word (4:1-13).

Luke then told us about Jesus' ministry in Galilee. However, most Bible scholars believe that between Luke 4:13 (which is the conclusion of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness) and Luke 4:14 (which is the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee) "there may well have been an interval of about a year, during which the events related in John 1:19-4:42 occurred."¹

So, according to John 1:19-4:42, immediately following his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus embarked on a very active ministry for about a year mostly in the region of Judea.

During this time John declared that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Jesus performed his first miracle by turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11).

Jesus attended the annual Passover celebration in Jerusalem, and he cleared the temple of those who had turned the temple courtyard into a market instead of a place of prayer (2:14-17). Many people were in Jerusalem for the Passover and they believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing (2:23).

Jesus met with Nicodemus, who wanted to know who Je-

¹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 11, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 246-47.

Jesus really was. It was to Nicodemus that Jesus said his most famous statement, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (3:16).

Jesus met with a Samaritan woman at the well, and through her testimony her entire town came to believe that Jesus was “indeed the Savior of the world” (4:42).

By now, almost a year had passed since the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. After staying in the Samaritan town for “two days [Jesus] departed for Galilee” (4:43). “So when he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the [Passover] feast. For they too had gone to the feast” (4:45).

The people of Galilee had heard Jesus’ teaching and seen his miracles when they went to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. They were excited about Jesus’ presence in their region, and they were ready for more!

It is at this point that Luke tells us about Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

Let’s read about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee that is recorded in Luke 4:14-15:

¹⁴And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. (Luke 4:14-15)

Introduction

John Calvin was born in 1509 in Picardy, part of France. Calvin was brilliant. Initially he intended to be a priest, but his father induced him to study law. Calvin studied at different universities, including Paris, sharpening his already logical mind and avidly reading the Greek and Latin classics.

About 1533 Calvin had what he called a “sudden conver-

sion": "God subdued and brought my heart to docility." Apparently he had encountered the writings of Luther. He broke from Roman Catholicism, left France, and settled in Switzerland as an exile.

In 1536, in Basel, Calvin published the first edition of one of the greatest religious works ever written, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The title, perhaps better translated as "Principles of the Christian Faith," introduced a book designed to "hand on some elementary teaching by which anyone who had been touched by an interest in religion might be formed to true godliness." At the age of 27, Calvin had already produced a systematic theology, a clear defense of Reformation teachings.

His writings impressed people, including William Farel, a reformer in Geneva, Switzerland. Farel managed to get Geneva to declare its political independence from the Roman Catholic Church and declare its allegiance to Protestantism.

On his way to Strasbourg, Calvin stopped overnight in Geneva. When Farel learned that the author of the *Institutes* was in town, he sought him out and pled with him to stay and help the church in Geneva. Calvin refused, wanting only a quiet life of study. So Farel swore a curse on Calvin's studies unless he stayed. "I felt as if God from heaven had laid his hand on me," Calvin said, and Geneva became his home.²

Calvin immediately set to work reorganizing the church and its worship. Under Roman Catholicism the Genevan church had observed communion only two or three times a year. Calvin, who favored a weekly celebration, recommended a monthly observance as an interim compromise. Calvin's emphasis on church discipline grew directly out of his high regard for the Lord's Supper. To oversee that the sacrament was taken worthily Calvin instituted a church board (the Genevan Consistory), which ensured that all communicants (those participating

² *Christian History Magazine-Issue 28: The 100 Most Important Events in Church History* (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, 1990).

in communion) truly belonged to the “body of Christ” and also were practicing what they professed. Calvin also introduced congregational singing into the church—“to incite the people to prayer and to praise God.”³

Although the people initially welcomed Calvin, after a while some people did not like Calvin’s reforms. Four principal Genevan leaders managed to get Calvin banished from Geneva. And thus one of Christianity’s greatest minister’s was banished from his ministry in Geneva. As it turned out, however, after a few years the four principal Genevan leaders were disgraced, and Farel once again managed to get Calvin to return to Geneva. Reluctantly, Calvin returned and spent the rest of his life ministering in Geneva.

My point in this story is that sometimes people are excited about the ministry of a Christian leader, only to turn against him later on. That is in fact what happened to Jesus. Jesus’ ministry was well received in the beginning, but later on people opposed his ministry and eventually crucified him. But, more about that in the future.

Today, let’s examine the beginning of Jesus’ ministry as set forth in Luke 4:14-15.

Lesson

An analysis of the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Luke 4:14-15 shows us the characteristics of his ministry.

We learn that:

1. Jesus’ Ministry Was Spirit-Empowered (4:14a)
2. Jesus’ Ministry Was Widely Reported (4:14b)
3. Jesus’ Ministry Was Synagogue-Centered (4:15a)
4. Jesus’ Ministry Was Popular (4:15b)

³ B.G. Armstrong, "Calvin, John" In *Who's Who in Christian History*, ed. J.D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 130.

I. Jesus' Ministry Was Spirit-Empowered (4:14a)

First, Jesus' ministry was Spirit-empowered.

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus began his public ministry when he was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and the Father said to him, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (3:21-22). Then the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and resisted the temptations of the devil (4:1-13).

Having experienced divine approval by the Father and anointing by the Holy Spirit at his baptism, and then the leading of the Holy Spirit into the wilderness where he experienced the temptations of the devil, **Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee** (4:14a) to begin this period of ministry.

This is now the third time in the first three vignettes of Jesus' public ministry that we read that **the Spirit** was active in Jesus' life. Jesus' entire ministry was conducted **in the power of the Spirit**. Don't miss that!

At the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to anoint Jesus, lead Jesus, and empower Jesus for service. And throughout his entire life Jesus was empowered for ministry. Luke will draw attention to that fact many times in the life and ministry of Jesus.

God has called every Christian to serve him. You may not be a preacher or teacher. But God has anointed every Christian with the Holy Spirit. You are led by the Holy Spirit. And you serve in the power of the Spirit as well.

John Calvin once said, "As the soul does not live idly in the body, but gives motion and vigor to every member and part, so the Spirit of God cannot dwell in us without manifesting himself by the outward effects."⁴ In other words, every Christian is

⁴ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press USA, 2006), 312.

empowered by the Spirit for ministry.

By the way, you may recall that Jesus was from **Galilee**. Commentator William Barclay tells us:

Galilee was an area in the north of Palestine about fifty miles from north to south and twenty-five miles from east to west. The name itself means a circle and comes from the Hebrew word *Galil*. It was so called because it was encircled by non-Jewish nations. Because of that, new influences had always played upon Galilee and it was the most forward-looking and least conservative part of Palestine. It was extraordinarily densely populated. Josephus, who was himself at one time governor of the area, says that it had 204 villages or towns, none with a population less than 15,000. It seems incredible that there could be some 3,000,000 people congregated in Galilee.⁵

II. Jesus' Ministry Was Widely Reported (4:14b)

Second, Jesus' ministry was widely reported.

Jesus had already been active in ministry in Judea for about a year. His powerful preaching and miracles created a huge sensation. As a result, when he came to Galilee **a report about him went out through all the surrounding country** (4:14b).

Many people had heard and seen Jesus engaged in ministry in Jerusalem when they attended the Passover feast (cf. John 4:45). And they were excited that he had come to minister in Galilee.

What does that mean for you? God gives each Christian a spiritual gift. If you are a Christian, *you* have a spiritual gift! And God gives it to you to serve others. That is why every Christian needs to be actively engaged in ministry.

Sometimes Christians struggle to know what their spir-

⁵ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 54.

itual gifts are. The way to know what is your spiritual gift is by serving. If you are effective in ministry, others will feel the effects of your ministry. They will report that you have ministered them. And in that way, your ministry will be “widely reported” too.

III. Jesus’ Ministry Was Synagogue-Centered (4:15a)

Third, Jesus’ ministry was synagogue-centered.

Luke said that Jesus **taught in their synagogues** (4:15a). This introduces us to “the pattern and the priority of the Lord’s ministry.”⁶

The priority of Jesus’ ministry was teaching God’s word. Throughout his Gospel Luke constantly portrayed Jesus as a teacher of God’s word (cf. 4:31; 5:3, 17; 6:6; 11:1; 13:10, 22; 19:47; 20:1; 21:37; 23:5). He is also frequently referred to as *Teacher* (7:40; 8:49; 9:38; 10:25; 11:45; 12:13; 18:18; 19:39; 20:21, 28, 39; 21:7; 22:11).⁷

The pattern for Jesus’ ministry was to teach in the **synagogues**. The numerous synagogues that existed in Galilee provided the perfect venue for Jesus’ teaching. Since the minimum number of Jewish men required to form a synagogue was ten, most, if not all, of the 240 cities and villages in Galilee would have had at least one synagogue. Some of the larger cities may have had dozens of them. It is possible that Jesus may have taught in most, if not all, of the synagogues in Galilee.

Synagogues were usually built out of stone, and typically faced Jerusalem. They existed primarily for instruction in the Scriptures. In a synagogue Sabbath service, a passage from the Old Testament would be read, followed by a teacher explaining

⁶ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009), 267.

⁷ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1–5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 267.

its meaning to the congregation.

The synagogues were by no means considered a replacement for the temple in Jerusalem. The sacrifices, feasts, and ceremonies prescribed in the Law of Moses could only be celebrated at the temple, not in the synagogues. In fact, “synagogue” is not mentioned throughout the entire Old Testament.

So how did synagogues come into existence? Their origin is not entirely clear. As best as we can tell, after the Babylonians destroyed the temple when they sacked Jerusalem in 586 BC, the Jewish exiles in Babylon began gathering in small groups to hear the teaching of God’s word (cf. Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1; 33:31). Those informal gatherings eventually developed into the synagogues of Jesus’ time. Over time regulations were given in order to govern how synagogues were to function.

The Jews of the Diaspora (i.e., those who lived outside of Palestine) lacked ready access to the rebuilt Jerusalem temple. So they also built synagogues, as the book of Acts indicates (9:2, 20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19). The apostle Paul, like Jesus, frequently preached the gospel in those synagogues (Acts 17:17; 18:4, 19; 19:8).

The synagogues had no full-time pastors or teachers. The policy known as the “freedom of the synagogue” allowed for anyone approved by the ruler of the synagogue to teach. Thus, if a noted teacher was available, he would likely be invited to preach, as was Paul (cf. Acts 13:14-15). In the absence of a guest teacher, any of the men in attendance who were approved to do so might teach.

The synagogues were ruled by elders (cf. Mark 5:22), the chief of which was the ruler of the synagogue (*archisunagōgos*, Luke 13:14; Acts 18:8). It was his responsibility to conduct the worship service and approve the teachers.

There was another officer besides the ruler of the synagogue and the elders. He was the keeper of the scrolls on which the Scriptures were written (cf. v. 20) and was responsible for

getting the proper scrolls out for each day's reading and returning them to the chest where they were stored.

In addition to serving as places of worship, the synagogues also provided instruction for children, much like today's Christian schools. They also served as local courts (cf. 12:11; Matthew 10:17).⁸

An Order of Worship in the synagogue in Jesus' day may have looked like this:

1. Thanksgivings or "blessings" spoken in connection with (before and after), the *Shema*: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."
2. Prayer, with response of "Amen" by the congregation.
3. Reading of a passage from the Pentateuch (in Hebrew, followed by translation into Aramaic).
4. Reading of a passage from the Prophets (similarly translated).
5. Sermon or word of exhortation.
6. The Benediction pronounced by a priest, to which the congregation responded with "Amen." When no priest was present a Closing Prayer was substituted for the Benediction.

In order to understand more fully what it meant for Jesus to teach in the synagogues of Galilee, a few more facts should be added. As the existing ruins clearly indicate, synagogues faced Jerusalem; that is to say, they were so built that the speaker, while addressing the audience, and also the man who at the close of the service was leaving the synagogue, would be looking toward Jerusalem.

What this meant for Jesus was that in whatever syna-

⁸ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Luke 1-5*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 267-68.

gogue he preached he was always, while speaking, facing the place where he was going to be crucified. It was impossible for him not to be thinking of the cross!⁹

IV. Jesus' Ministry Was Popular (4:15b)

And fourth, Jesus' ministry was popular.

Luke noted that the response to Jesus' teaching at the beginning of his ministry is that he was **glorified by all** (4:15b). Some Bible translations say that "everyone praised him" (*NIV*).

The people responded enthusiastically to Jesus' ministry. However, as we know, most people eventually turned against him and rejected his ministry when he started teaching truths they did not like.

That sometimes happens in ministry. People want to hear things that tickle their ears. But as soon as the focus is on God's truth and the need for repentance and change, they no longer want to hear it.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:14-15, we learn what characterize Jesus' faithful ministry.

Jesus' ministry was Spirit-empowered, widely reported, synagogue-centered, and popular. The people of Galilee were initially receptive to Jesus' ministry. However, they eventually turned against him when he called them to repentance and faith. May we never turn against Jesus and his message. Amen.

⁹ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 10, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 75-76.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Luke's record of the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

We learn that Jesus' ministry was Spirit-empowered, widely reported, synagogue-centered, and popular—at least, at the beginning of his ministry.

We know that the people eventually rejected his ministry to the point of crucifying him. And yet, you ordained even Jesus' crucifixion for our salvation.

Help us to believe Jesus' message of repentance and faith.
And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!