

## Session 5

# Early Preaching

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# UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPELS

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## Early Preaching & Early Miracles

### 1. The scope of the subject

The topics to be addressed in this section are set out in the table below together with supporting references.

Event / Incident	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
In Galilee	4:23	1:15	4:14-15	
The Synagogue at Nazareth Reading from Isaiah Elijah & Elisha	13:54-58	6:1-6	4:16-30	
Miracles at Capernaum	8:5-17	1:21-39	4:31-44	
Curing a leper		1:40-2:13	5:12-15	
Confrontation over the Sabbath Day	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-11	
Discourse with Nicodemus Rebirth by the Spirit    Belief leads to salvation				3:1-18

- - - - - NOTES - - - - -

## 2. In Galilee

The account in Luke only summarises the work of Jesus in this area but in Matthew 4:13-16 and elsewhere more information is given. It is of particular interest to note the quotation from Isaiah 9 given in the above reference as it shows how the work of Messiah was written in the prophets and that the Old Testament scripture, far from being of no value, is of immense importance in understanding the gospels.

**Isaiah 9** <sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the dimness *shall not be* such as *was* in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her by* the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. <sup>2</sup> The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Jesus through his work in preaching and in the use of miracles was removing the darkness from the land of Galilee causing great rejoicing to all those who benefited from hearing and seeing all that was said and done.

## 3. The Synagogue at Nazareth

Although born in Bethlehem, Jesus had been reared in Nazareth. Some time later he had moved to Capernaum but was nevertheless still recognised by the townsfolk of Nazareth. It was his custom to attend the synagogue on the sabbath day and he stood up to read. Having been handed the scroll of Isaiah, he found the place where it was written...

**Isaiah 61** <sup>1</sup> The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; <sup>2</sup> To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord ...

His short reading from Isaiah's prophecy, which could only have taken about 30 seconds, had a dramatic effect on his hearers. The record reveals that all were transfixed on him. Having their full and undivided attention he declared, ***'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'***.

It is immediately obvious that he was referring to himself in using this quotation. In order to discover just why these verses were selected, it will be necessary to carefully analyse the passage in the light of other scripture.

We may also ask the intriguing question as to why the sudden stop midway through a sentence. The words in Isaiah continue with the conjunction *'and'*.

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### 3.1. An Analysis of Isaiah 61:1-2

Sections of the quotation	Meaning
The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because ...	God had anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit at his baptism.
he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor	The 'poor in spirit', those 'that trembleth at my word', who 'receive with meekness the engrafted word.'
he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted	Jesus invited all 'who laboured and were heavy laden' to come to him to find rest for their souls.
to preach deliverance to the captives	Like Moses had led a multitude of slaves out of Egypt, so Jesus leads to salvation those who are in bondage to mortal nature.
and recovering of sight to the blind	Blindness is a state of darkness. All mankind are naturally in this condition and need to be enlightened by God.
to set at liberty them that are bruised	All mankind are constitutional sinners and as such need to be released from its grasp
to preach the acceptable year of the Lord	With God's son in their midst, they had a marvellous opportunity, by hearing the teaching of Jesus, to be amongst those who were saved.
and he closed the book	This sudden stop midway through a sentence was enough to emphasise the importance of Jesus' work then. Later there was to be judgement but first the positive message of salvation and acceptance of the Messiah was important.

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## 4. Elijah & Elisha

In his comments at the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus was to explain how that his own nation had a sad history of failure to take advantage of the privileged position they were in. To support his point against the inhabitants of his own home town who doubted his credentials because they knew him (“Is not this the carpenter’s son?”), Jesus cited the examples of Elijah and Elisha. These prophets of **Israel** had independently performed miracles for a **Zidonian** widow and a **Syrian** army captain. And, as Jesus pointed out to them all it was not because of an acute shortage of widows and lepers in Israel at the time!

The message was clear but rather than learn from the mistakes of the past, the crowd sought to destroy Jesus. However, when they reached the brow of the hill where they hoped to throw him down, Jesus escaped by vanishing from their sight. The astonished multitude was left to ponder the inadvisability of its own murderous intent.

### Brief word about the Dead Sea Scrolls



It is sometimes stated by critics of the Bible that owing to its antiquity the Bible is unreliable. The main thrust of the argument is that over a long period of time the message must have been changed many times and consequently what we have today cannot possibly be close to the original writings. Although other evidence exists to disprove this theory, a significant development occurred in 1947, with the accidental discovery of a number of scrolls in caves to the north and west of the Dead Sea.

The scrolls contained fragments of all Old Testament books with the exception of the Book of Esther. The date placed upon the scrolls was about the time of Christ. Virtually the whole of the book of Isaiah was recovered from the fragments. When pieced together it was found to contain very little difference from the oldest surviving manuscripts of circa 10<sup>th</sup> century AD used to translate the Old Testament into English. This established beyond question the reliability of the Old Testament.

The Dead Sea Scrolls can be seen at the museum of the **Shrine of the Book** in Jerusalem and it is amazing to realise that Jesus read from something just like this.

## 5. Miracles at Capernaum

There are two incidents recorded in Luke 4 where miracles of healing were performed by Jesus at Capernaum. In addition, the record continues to describe many other instances of healing all types of illnesses. The specific miracles are:

- 1 Healing a man possessed by a devil or demon or unclean spirit
- 2 Curing Simon Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever

The illnesses were one of mind and one of body and showed that Jesus had the power to cure madness (representing the thinking of the flesh) and bodily ailments (representing the weakness or frailty of human nature).

In both cases the remedy was that Jesus spoke and the people were restored to health. It is worth dwelling on this aspect for a moment to disprove the theory that some hold in connection with the demoniac. It is often assumed that because the phraseology describes someone being possessed by a demon, that there are supernatural forces of evil taking possession of men and women and inducing a state of insanity. A careful investigation of what really happened and an analysis of those cured, reveals that the demons were nothing more than illnesses, usually of the mind, but also of dumbness and epilepsy. Outside observers could see no explanation for their behaviour and therefore likened the actions to those which they had witnessed from frenzied worshippers at pagan temples. It became common therefore to associate this category of illness with idol or demon worship.

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## 6. Curing a leper

Although it can be pointed out that the Greek word translated '*leprosy*' has a meaning which may embrace other skin ailments, there are clear indications that the disease of leprosy was cured by Jesus. It is evident from the suggestion of Jesus to the leper to go and present himself before the priest, that Jesus was referring to the requirements set out in the Law of Moses for the handling of leprosy when discovered in an Israelite. Leprosy in Scripture has a great deal of significance, for it stands for all that is involved with mortality, sin and human nature.

LEPROSY	SIN
Unique to man	By one man sin entered into the world      Romans 5:12
Imperceptible beginning	Deceitful      Hebrews 3:13 Romans 7:13
Deep seated	Defiles 'from within'      Matthew 5:18-19
Dulling of sensibilities	Seers conscience      I Timothy 4:2
Progressive	Eats like a cancer      II Timothy 2:17
Contagious	Spreads like leaven      I Corinthians 5:6
Deforming	In bondage to decay      Romans 8:21
Humanly incurable	Victory only through God      I Corinthians 15:57
Ends in death	Wages of sin is death      Romans 6:23

Jesus demonstrated that he had the power to cure the plague and cleanse a person from the curse of mortality. The curing of leprosy foreshadows the way in which men and women will be changed into immortal beings energised by the Divine nature.

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## 7. Confrontation over the Sabbath Day - 'The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath'

Throughout the ministry of Jesus, vehement accusations were levelled at him in connection with the Sabbath day. Time and time again the self-styled spiritual leaders of the people criticised the action of Jesus and his disciples for breaking the Sabbath day law. Did Jesus break the law? Were they right to accuse him of doing this or is there an explanation?

Before looking at the incidents where Jesus "did work" on the Sabbath day, it is advisable to be acquainted with the scriptural teaching on the Sabbath day law. This can be summarised in tabular form below.

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and <b>he rested on the seventh day from all his work</b> which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it <b>he had rested from all his work</b> which God created and made.	Genesis 2:2-3
...to day <b>is a sabbath unto the LORD</b> : to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, <i>which is</i> the sabbath, in it there shall be none...the <b>LORD hath given you the sabbath</b> , therefore <b>he giveth you</b> on the sixth day the bread of two days	Exodus 16:23-29
<b>Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy</b> . Six days shalt thou labour, and <b>do all thy work</b> : But the seventh day <i>is</i> the sabbath of the LORD thy God: <i>in it thou shalt not do any work</i> , thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that <i>is</i> within thy gates: For <b>in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day</b> : wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.	Exodus 20:8-11
<b>Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it</b> , as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt labour, and <b>do all thy work</b> : But the seventh day <i>is</i> the sabbath of the LORD thy God: <b>in it thou shalt not do any work</b> ... And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and <i>that</i> the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: <b>therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day</b> .	Deuteronomy 5:12-15

It is clear that the Old Testament prophets had to contend with the actions of Israel and warn them of the failure to comply with the sabbath laws.

Examples can be found in the following places.

**Ezekiel 20** <sup>13</sup> But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.

**Amos 8** <sup>5</sup> Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

Could the same be levelled at Jesus? What did he do to incense the Pharisees, Sadducees etc who denounced him as a sabbath-breaker?

The ways in which it was claimed that Jesus broke the Sabbath are given in a number of places. But usually it is in connection with healing.

Jesus is engaged in the process of healing by the power of God. The quotation from Isaiah 61 made at the synagogue in Nazareth shows how that it was **God** that had anointed Jesus to do certain things including healing. It is not possible therefore to violate the sabbath whilst being fully occupied in doing God's work and not your own!

His disciples were also accused of sabbath breaking.

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**Matthew 12** <sup>1</sup> At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. <sup>2</sup> But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. <sup>3</sup> But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;

Jesus demonstrates here that there were more important issues affecting life and death than the type of sabbath keeping as understood by the scribes and Pharisees. David is referred to as one who ate the shewbread, (which was also forbidden) as this was the only source of food available at the time.

Also Jesus pointed out that the priests appear to violate the sabbath every time because they not only continue working but they are on overtime as this is a busier day. There is of course no instance of sabbath breaking with the priest because they are performing God's work.

The sabbath day of rest is but an indicator to man of God's requirements to be a true sabbath keeper and to devote all time to God.

**Hebrews 4** <sup>9</sup> There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his.

As God rested on the seventh day and was refreshed so the victorious saints will be will have ceased from their own works and will be the facilitators of God's work for the age to come. This will be the great sabbatical rest of 1000 years which remains for the people of God. In this age there will be great rejoicing and true sabbath keeping as the whole world will be governed in righteousness.

## 8. Foreshadowing the Kingdom Age

There is an immediate lesson from miracles where natural healing illustrates the way in which individuals can be spiritually enlightened and, therefore, in a position to be saved from death. Still further they show a meaning in which it is possible to discover that the Millennial saving the nations is being foreshadowed.

By an examination of some passages where it is crystal clear that the Millennium is being referred to it will be possible to take a backwards look at the gospel miracles to see how they set out a pattern of much greater things to come.

**Psalms 145** <sup>10</sup> All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. <sup>11</sup> They shall speak of **the glory of thy kingdom**, and talk of thy power; <sup>12</sup> To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> Thy kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations. <sup>14</sup> The Lord upholdeth all that fall, and raiseth up all *those that be* bowed down.

**Jeremiah 30** <sup>17</sup> For I will **restore health** unto thee, and I will **heal thee of thy wounds**, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, *saying*, This *is* Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

**Ezekiel 47** <sup>12</sup> And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed: it shall bring forth new fruit according to his months, because their waters they issued out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for meat, and **the leaf thereof for medicine**.

**Revelation 22** <sup>2</sup> In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, *was there* the tree of life, which bare twelve *manner of* fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and **the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations**.

There are a couple of passages in the gospels where the link between healing and the kingdom is established.

Examples can be found in

**Matt 4:23**                    **preaching the kingdom of God and healing**

**Matt 9:2**                    **sins forgiven by Jesus and the result is healing**

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In the display of power to cure diseases in Jesus' day is foreshadowed the idea of the way in which the nations will believe and then be the recipients of untold blessings in the future.

- Jesus himself performed many miracles of healing showing but a foretaste of better things to come
- The disciples were given power to effect the same showing that devolved power would feature too in the Kingdom age
- Failure of the people to accept the teaching of Jesus resulted in a dearth of miracles showing that non acceptance of the teaching of Jesus will not be tolerated
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## 9. Discourse with Nicodemus

Nicodemus was a member of the Pharisees, a class of proud Jewish leaders who, although experts in the Law, were opposed to the teaching of Jesus. It is recorded much later in the gospel that Pilate knew that Jesus had been handed over to him because the Jewish hierarchy were envious of him. However, although a Pharisee, Nicodemus was more discerning than most and came to Jesus (by night) to confess that *"we know that thou art come from God"*, citing the miracles as clear evidence of the divine side of Christ.

There are two later references to Nicodemus and each refers to the fact that originally, he came to Jesus **by night**. On these later occasions he was far from unwilling to be noticed but spoke out against his peers in favour of Jesus and then with Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to request that they be given the body of Jesus to be placed in the tomb.

During their first night-time discussion, Jesus had explained to Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God, a person needs to be "born again" or 'born from above'. The agency of re-birth has nothing to do with natural birth but with the rejuvenation of the mind through an understanding of the things of God. It is the Scripture, the Word of God, the Gospel, that is the means through which men and women are born again.

**1 Peter 1** <sup>23</sup> Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

Jesus cited to Nicodemus the time when Moses, following God's instructions, had manufactured a bronze serpent, placed it on a pole and lifted it high up so that everyone had an opportunity to see it. This was in order to provide a miraculous antidote to the venom which was rapidly permeating through the bodies of many Israelites in the camp, who had been bitten by a plague of snakes.

This incident, although real and practical when it occurred, also serves to illustrate the way in which men and women, who naturally are subject to death on account of being descendants of Adam, can be miraculously saved from this fate by believing in the one who was to be lifted up on the cross.

The opportunity is open to all, as Jesus reminded Nicodemus (a Jew):

**John 3** <sup>14</sup> And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: <sup>15</sup> That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

What was not apparent to the Jews at this time was the full import of the word "**whosoever**". Jesus intended it to mean both Jew **and** Gentile ("**whosoever** believeth in him") but so deep was the Jewish bias that it took considerable effort on the part of the apostles after the death of Jesus to expound the truth that *"God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him"* (Acts 10:34-35).

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