

In the Margins
Week 1: Rejected
Luke 4:14-30

I absolutely love the He Gets Us ad campaign going on right now. Their hope is to re-introduce people to Jesus and kind of clear the weeds that have grown up and are keeping people from seeing him for who he truly is. What he was really about and not the assumptions so many people have made.

And, in a way, that's the desire of this new series we're starting today called *In the Margins*. Over the next four weeks, we're going to see how Jesus moved towards those that others had cast aside. And we're going to see how, as a church, we can continue to move towards those in the margins of our own world and help them find and follow Jesus.

So, that's where we're going, but as we get started today, I've got a questions for you...**What's the coolest thing you've ever seen or place you've ever been?** Turn to the person next to you and share.

I've been to some pretty cool places in my life. Amber and I got to go to a recording of The Price is Right with Bob Barker (RIP). We didn't get called to the stage, but it was fun to be in the room. I was at a Cubs game one year when they clinched the division. Not many people can say they've seen that! Maybe one of the coolest places **(show picture)** I've ever been is on the top of Mount Arbel watching the sunrise over the Sea of Galilee. That was breathtakingly beautiful.

All of these were pretty cool, and hopefully you have some of your own, but few of them would compare to what the people in our text today got to experience. If you have a Bible or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to Luke 4.

In our text today, we find Jesus towards the beginning of his ministry. And, at this point, everything's going really well. Luke says that Jesus is growing in wisdom and influence. The Holy Spirit is moving in and through him, and because of that, incredible things are happening. Jesus is crushing it and people are starting to take notice. News about him is spreading. He's teaching in their synagogues and everyone is singing his praises. It's in that context that we come to verse 16...**(READ Lk. 4:16a)**

I love this. Jesus went to the synagogue, as was his custom. Jesus was a church goer. Think about that...the Word of God made it a priority to worship and take in the Word of God each week. And, as the hometown kid, who was this rising star in the area, Jesus was probably asked to take part in the worship gathering.

A synagogue service would typically start with prayers, some singing, they would recite the Shema..."Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God..." And then they'd get to the Scripture readings. There would typically be a reading from the Torah, one of

the first 5 books of the Law, and then a reading from the Prophets. The Rabbi would teach on the Scripture and then they'd end with a blessing.

So, as the guest of honor that day, Jesus was probably asked to choose a Scripture and teach on it. When I'm with a group of pastors, one of my favorite questions to ask is, "If you could preach just one passage, what would it be?" It's a question I picked up for our Sherwood Kids Director, Stephen Figert. I find that I can learn a lot about someone by how they answer that question. A lot about their Theology, their understanding of who God is and what He's like. How they view grace and mercy and mission. It's a fun question to ask.

And so, here in Luke 4, Jesus is kind of asked that question. He has a chance to preach, so what text will he choose? (READ Luke 4:16b-21)

It's easy to miss the cultural significance of these words, but this is a mic drop moment for Jesus. He stands up and reads for Isaiah 61...a passage they would have known was about the coming Messiah. God's savior who will be sent to rescue them. So, for Jesus to say, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing..." he's saying, "I'm the one we've been waiting for. I'm the Messiah."

Don't miss this...Jesus could have used any number of scriptures to make this announcement. There are at least 400 prophecies in the OT about the coming Messiah, and Jesus could have used any one of them and gotten his message across. But, he chose this one, and I don't think it was random. I think by reading from Isaiah 61, and part of 58, Jesus is not just announcing who he is. He's announcing why he came and those he came for.

If you look at it, there are two reasons why Jesus came. First, he came to proclaim good news. Proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind. He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...a reference to the Year of Jubilee when all debts were cancelled and families restored. He came to proclaim forgiveness. Jesus came as a preacher of good news.

But, he also came to liberate. He came to set the oppressed free. Release them from their bondage. Jesus came as a liberator. He not only preached about the good news, he helped people experience it. He would make a way for people to experience the good news of freedom, forgiveness, and recovery. Jesus came to proclaim the good news and liberate people from the bondages that kept them from experiencing it.

And, notice who he came for. It was the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed. It was for people living in the margins of society. Pushed aside and forgotten about. Alone. And, he could just be talking about people who experienced these things *physically*, but I don't think he is. I think he means spiritually, too.

People who experience these things physically know there's nothing they can do on their own to fix it. They are in desperate need of someone to step in and do something. And the same is true for us spiritually.

He came for those who feel spiritually poor. Who feel like they have nothing to offer God. He came for those who are held captive by their addictions and can't escape. He came to give sight back to people who can't see the goodness of God all around them, or are blind to the beauty of the Gospel. He came to set the oppressed free. That word "oppressed" means shattered into pieces. Jesus came to put broken people, broken lives, back together. Ultimately, Jesus came to cancel the sin debt of those who know what they need forgiven from.

Jesus moves towards those in the margins. He moves to those who know they are in need spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Jesus is good news for those of us that are aware of our brokenness, aware of our poverty, and our need of a Savior. That's what Jesus' sermon that day is all about. How does the congregation respond? **(READ Lk. 4:22)**

At first, Jesus is met with more praise and adoration. But, at some point, the people start connecting the dots about what he's saying. And, I think they're like, "Wait, is Jesus saying that we're poor? That we're prisoners, or blind or oppressed? Is Jesus saying that **we** need **him** to save us?! Who does he think he is? We know this guy! We know his family. We grew up with him."

I think the people of Nazareth had a bit of a complex. In a way, they were a town in the margins. They were kind of looked down upon. Mocked. When one of his disciples found out that Jesus was from Nazareth, he said, **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there!"**

So, the people are like, "Jesus, who do you think you are? God's gift to the world, or something? You're one of us. We don't need you to save us." Jesus knows what they're thinking. Not because he's God, but because he grew up with them. So, he says in **verse 23...(READ vs. 23-24)**

They looked at Jesus with a suspicious eye. They're like, "if you want to impress us, do what we hear you've done in other places. Wow us." I think the problem is, they were too familiar with Jesus to be in awe of him. They thought they knew him, they knew things about him, and that familiarity was actually getting in the way of them seeing Jesus for who he truly is.

I think that's a cautionary tale for us, isn't it? For those of us who have been followers of Jesus for a little while. We can become so familiar with Jesus that we're no longer in awe of him. So familiar with his grace that we're no longer amazed that it saved a wretch like me. We can think of ourselves so highly and forget that **WE** are the ones in the margins that Jesus came to seek and save.

The people in Nazareth that day were too familiar with Jesus and they missed the Messiah who had come to set them free, too. They had forgotten their absolute need and dependency upon God and felt like they were fine on their own. And Jesus is like, "If you're too proud to embrace

the grace that's standing right in front of you, then I'll just move on to those who know they need it."

And then he reminds them that God has done this before. In verse 24-27, he reminds them of two times God sent prophets of Israel to Gentiles, those outside of the Jewish faith, God sent these prophets of Israel to Gentiles who knew their need for God, put their faith in him, and were saved. And, in doing so, Jesus saying, "Listen, this message of good news and liberation, this gift of hope and freedom and restoration and forgiveness, this isn't just available to the Jews. It's for everyone!"

He's saying, "the grace of God, that you're rejecting, is going to be available to the people you've rejected. It's going to move towards the people you've pushed into the margins." And, what that, they'd had enough...(READ vs. 28-30)

What a story arc! It starts with, "Wow, he's a great preacher!" to "Isn't that Joseph's son?" to "I don't like him anymore" to "Let's kill him!" I'll take angry emails any day! Eventually they will kill him, just not on this day. But, don't miss the magnitude of this...In moving towards the rejected, Jesus found himself rejected. He found himself *literally* pushed to the margins.

Clearly, Jesus touched a nerve. In their pride, the people that day missed the Messiah, but they also missed God's heart for marginalized people. God's care and concern for the ones others had cast aside. His embrace of those who feel like there's no way God could love someone like them. In their self-righteousness, they were appalled that Jesus would imply their need for grace.

What I've found in my life is what Jesus discovered that day...Pride always wants to throw grace off a cliff. Pride is threatened by grace. Doesn't see the need for it. Grace feels scandalous to a prideful heart. It's offensive. So, a prideful person doesn't feel like they need grace, and they don't want others to experience it, either.

But, here's what I've also found...where pride always wants to throw grace off a cliff, Humility always wants to throw itself on grace. A humble person doesn't hear about the spiritually poor, or blind, or oppressed and think about "those people." They think about themselves. Humble people don't deny their need for God's grace and they certainly don't deny others the blessing of experiencing it in their life, too.

It's why, as a church, we want to move towards those that Jesus moved towards. As people in the margins, saved and set free by Jesus, we want to move towards those in the margins of our world. Move towards the neglected, the overlooked, the given up on. That's why our vision is to Unleash the church with the love of Jesus to make an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk people.

Jesus came to proclaim good news to those in the margins of society; the at-risk and the hurting. The ones well aware of their spiritual poverty and desperation. He came to proclaim good news to them and liberate them from the bondage of their sin and shame.

Having been the recipients of that grace, we want to extend it to others, which is why our focus is on at-risk people. We define at-risk as those who are **Spiritually At-Risk: We will partner with others to tear down barriers people have to Jesus.**

Physically At-Risk: We will cross every socioeconomic divide to care for people and work for their good, believing each person has dignity and value in the Lord.

Emotionally At-Risk: We will go to any length necessary to give hope to the hopeless and freedom to those held captive by their hurts, hang-ups, or habits.

Over the next few weeks, we're going to see how Jesus moved towards the spiritually at-risk and removed barriers to God others had put up. The physically at-risk and how he restored dignity and value to those who'd had it stripped away from them. The emotionally at-risk, and how he meets us in our deepest hurts and helps us overcome our hang-ups and habits.

We're going to see how Jesus moves to us when we are in the margins, and how we can move to others with the good news of the Gospel.

As we close today, if you feel like you are in the margins, if you know your spiritual poverty and that you have nothing to give to God, if you feel imprisoned by your sin, your guilt, your shame, if your life feels broken and you are in need of forgiveness...Jesus came for you. He came to proclaim the good news of God's grace to you and to set you free.

Today, just like 2,000 years ago, this scripture can be fulfilled in your life. Move to Jesus who has done everything in his power to move towards you.