

LIGHT + LIFE

Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:4). Light is associated with knowledge. There is knowledge to share, insight to gain. When we are in the dark, we are blind; but when we are in the light, we see. Light is purifying truth. Life is a little different. When we think of life, we think of activity. Jesus brings a new way of life, a new way of living in this world. His ways are actually life-bringing instead of life-sucking. Following the mission of Jesus means being those who convey His light and His life to the world.

LIGHT AND LIFE • Luke 4:16–22 • Tim McConnell • February 10, 2019

We are all on the hunt for the fulfilling life. We all want to know our lives mean something, that we are rich in blessings, full of good things. We want our story to have meaning, to make sense, to be fulfilling. You've heard of the midlife crisis. It's what keeps Corvettes in business, and Mustang convertibles. But I heard last week of a few more crises I hadn't heard about before. There's now the quarter-life crisis, around twenty, when young adults are trying to find a meaningful vocation. There's the three-quarters life crisis as retirement approaches. And there's still a healthy midlife crisis. Maybe there are more, I'm not sure. Every day I wake up feels like a small crisis! But every crisis is an opportunity. They used to say the midlife crisis was the opportunity to find meaning. Bob Buford's book *Halftime* said it is when we move from success to significance. After the search for success comes a search for a significant, fulfilling life. But now people don't want to wait for midlife to find fulfillment and significance. We want to start today. We are searching for the fulfilling life.

The problem is we are in a hard environment. We are surrounded by promises that don't deliver, like shiny, colorful fishing lures we can't help but chomp down on. But every lure has a hook. (I've been planning a fishing trip this week that I'm pretty excited about. All these lures out there! Gotcha plugs. Bucktail jigs. Hopkins spoons...) There's lots of stuff out there that looks good but hooks you in the end. Promises that reverse on you. We have food to eat that leaves us un nourished. We have drinks that leave us dehydrated, even after gulping thirty-two ounces. I was so incensed when I learned about a popular lip balm that actually dries your lips out. Use it once and you're stuck using it forever! We have drugs, even legalized, that promise fun and relaxation and deliver paranoia, anxiety, depression and self-destructive addiction. What is promised as liberty—here's a fun way to be free—actually becomes a chain around your neck, a bondage. You can think of some things like that, can't you? Food that doesn't feed us. Drinks that leave us thirsty. Entertainment that eats at us. Consumer products that consume us. These are promises with hooks in a world that flips good and evil upside down. Isaiah said: "What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil, that dark is light and light is dark, that bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter." (Isaiah 5:20 NLT)

How do we find what's good? How do we find the fulfilling life? Maybe you are here this morning fundamentally believing that the world's promises hold more than Jesus' promises. Maybe when you are honest you know you are right now pursuing some of these other promises. They reverse on you. The hook is coming. Jesus said "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). Maybe the Jesus way isn't the evil, narrow way you have heard it is. Maybe the Jesus way is the fulfilling life, the promise with no hooks and true freedom. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18–19).

We are halfway through our series, Light and Life, each week bouncing back and forth between light and life in the opening chapters of Luke. We saw that Jesus is the light for the whole world, including Egypt and our friend Pastor Yousef. John the Baptist showed us a new way of life through repentance—turning around. Vision Sunday was our collective challenge to be **Light and Life for the City** in the name of Jesus. Last week we heard the Word of God is a light. Satan offers shortcuts to satisfy what we want, but what the devil offers is a shabby substitute. Where do we find light to beat back the darkness? Jesus leaned on the written Word. Now we bounce back to life. Jesus invites us today to start living the fulfilling life.

The Bible was kept on scrolls, and Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah, then rolled to Isaiah 61. Jesus received the Word. Jesus who is the Word of God received the Word of God as it was given to Him. Just noodle on that for a minute. The Word of God is something to receive, and as with other things, Jesus always demonstrates faithfulness to us. It's right to receive the Word of God. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim" (Luke 4:18). I'm telling you every phrase of what Jesus reads is rich with meaning. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me." There is always a connection between Word and Spirit. Last week, in the passage just above this one the Word has the power to beat back darkness. Jesus won the victory, the Super Bowl against Satan, with the Word. Now we are met with the Spirit of God. "The Spirit of God," who is God, "is on me." That *me* is Jesus, who also is God, "because he has anointed me to proclaim," to preach and to reveal God and the things of God. A couple of notes for the margins of your Bible. "Anointed" is a Messianic word. The Hebrew word Messiah or *mashiach* means "anointed one." In Greek that word is translated *christos*. To christen is to anoint. In reading this passage, Jesus is making an open declaration (particularly when He says what He says later about it being fulfilled) that He is the Messiah, the Christ.

"The Spirit is on me, because he anointed me to proclaim." Second note, before we get back to the main theme today. God is consistent. This is a Holy Trinity

moment. The Spirit anoints the Son to proclaim the Father and the Father's intent. The Spirit doesn't empower Jesus to say some new thing inconsistent with the past revelation of God in Scripture. Jesus' ministry is empowered, anointed, by the Spirit of God because what Jesus reveals and proclaims is not some new idea, new aspect, new facet of God and holiness and righteousness, but because what Jesus proclaims is fully and wholly consistent with the very character of God. There is no "old God" and "new God" in this moment. What Jesus preaches as good news is the very character and heart of God, the one true God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Which all makes perfect sense, because Jesus is God, the Spirit is God, and the Father is God—One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And what is that character of God? We start to get a good look. "Good news to the poor." God sees the poor, the powerless, the disenfranchised. "I thought powerful gods blessed the rich and powerful." No. The one true God, the Lord Most High, sees every soul. This is a little revolutionary. Good news doesn't often get to the house of the poor. Good news passes by the poor man's house most days. Huh. "He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners." Liberty to the captives. Do you have a hook in your lip? Did you bite down on the wrong promise? When you are in captivity, you grow accustomed to it. The limitations and bars and prison walls are your known and accepted limits. Jesus says there may be more freedom yet for you. "And recovery of sight for the blind." What can't you see from where you are? You don't know what you can't see. You don't know what possibilities for fulfilling life Jesus can see that you can't see. By the way, when Jesus healed physical blindness it was as a testimony to authenticate His power to open all eyes to His Kingdom. You are blind. I am blind. Jesus brings sight. "To set the oppressed free." God hates how we fall into captivity, and God despises how we contrive to trap one another. Habakkuk starts with God surveying the world of humanity appalled with how we use our nets and hooks and traps to connive against one another and oppress one another, building our houses on foundations of injustice. No good. Jesus has a better way.

Finally, verse 19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me" to proclaim all this and finally: "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:19). What's the year of the Lord's favor? Well, let me tell you about the Jubilee year. You can read about it in Leviticus 25 on your own. Maybe you didn't know a year like this existed. The Jubilee year. If you've been captive to debt, this is the year your debts are forgiven. If you've been captive to mistakes that left you hopeless and un-landed—this is the year your land comes back to you. If you've been captive to hunger, thirst, lack, in

a barren land, on soil that has been abused and polluted and spoiled, this is the year the land itself rests and returns to fruitfulness. If you've been captive to your own wandering that pulled you far from home—this is the year you get to come home again. It is the year of freedom. It is the year slaves are set free, prodigals come home. If you've been captive to cynicism and doubt, if you've forgotten God's love—this is the year, and God's favor rests on you. It's the year the hook finally comes out of the lip. Jesus says on the back of all this, a sermon summed up in one sentence: "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. He began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:20–21). Today. When does the year come? Today. Don't slip back into yesterday thinking. Don't get all wrapped up in tomorrow's worries and concerns. Today. Today is the year. Today is the freedom moment. Today, in Jesus, is the fulfilling life. Today.

I'm saying Jesus is inviting you to know this fulfilling life. But I'm also saying Jesus is inviting you to be part of this fulfilling life. Here's the interesting thing. Everybody knew that passage and knew it was a messianic passage, but they thought the Messiah would come at the last day, at the finish, and set everything right. Here's the thing: Jesus clearly announced His presence as the Messiah, but then He opened a window. The passage doesn't end where Jesus stopped reading. Isaiah 61:2 reads, "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God." Now that's messianic, see? The judgment day is on the way. But Jesus stopped, mid-sentence, and sat down. The promises of the Messiah begin today, the year of the Lord's favor, the new age of redemption, it all starts right now. But, in a sense, Jesus says the closing ceremonies, the Judgment Day, that all comes later. So a window is opened up. An opportunity between the opening up of the ministry of Jesus and the closing chapter of the whole story. In that time, you and I are invited to participate. You and I get to be a part of the fulfillment of the promises of God. You and I get to open blind eyes, release captives, press against oppression, and bring good news to the least expecting. And don't immediately over-spiritualize it. Jesus wants you participating in removing actual blindness, not just existential blindness. Actual hunger, not just spiritual hunger. Jesus wants to invite you to be part of bringing freedom to actual captives. There are actual people, children even, in wrongful captivity and slavery who need to be set free by justice. Jesus is inviting you into all that work. I don't just want to believe Kingdom stuff or talk Kingdom stuff, I want to do some Kingdom stuff too! Right? And that's the fulfilling life Jesus invites you to know and participate in today.

Rich Stearns was here for our national conference we hosted two weeks ago. Rich Stearns served for twenty years as president of World Vision, a global Christian relief and aid organization working since 1950 to help people in need all around the world. Rich said they were interviewing a man for a director of communications position last year, someone who had done marketing and communications for Fortune 500s and been through some tough communications challenges, and this guy said, "Oh yeah. I'd love telling your story. I mean, it's easy. You guys have the Jesus everybody loves." They asked what he meant. "Well, you guys have the Jesus who cares for the poor, rescues the orphan, brings justice and peace, helps the downtrodden...everybody loves that Jesus." Rich said it made him think a little. Is there another Jesus? How did we get to hiding or obscuring this Jesus everybody loves? Did we somehow shade the heart of God? His love for His children? Where's the Jesus everybody loves?

Folks, He's right here. See this life Jesus is inviting you into? Here's the Jesus everybody loves. He is life. He is light. He is the year of the Lord's favor. He is the Jubilee. This is Jesus. You get to know Him. You get to follow him. You get to do a little of what He's doing in the world right now! Jesus could fix all this stuff without us. Do you know that? But He says to you and me, "Come and follow." "Go and do likewise." He wants you included. Because it's beautiful, meaningful and fulfilling. How do you find the fulfilling life in a world bent all around in confusion and lies? You find it in Jesus. Where do you find the promise without hooks? You find it in Jesus. He took the barbs and hooks on Himself so you could have the life and the freedom. Do you think Jesus doesn't know what it means to be pinned, hooked, stuck? Look at Him pinned there on the cross for you. He took the pain and shame and helplessness and carried it all to the cross so you could be free. Find it in Jesus. Not only to be healed; not only so that you can walk right now into the year of the Lord's favor, into His healing and redeeming grace; but so that you can hear Jesus calling you to follow Him in this work helping the world to know the good news proclaimed of grace met in Jesus Christ. Giving your life to His glory—it's the most fulfilling life there is.

STUDY GUIDE
LIGHT AND LIFE
FULLFILLING LIFE
Luke 4:16-22

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Luke 4:16–22. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

1. What do we learn about Jesus from this passage?
2. Reread verses 18-19. If you had been sitting in the synagogue that day, what do you imagine you would have been thinking and feeling when Jesus said this?
3. What if someone walked into our church today and said this? What would be going through your mind?
4. What are some of the ways in which you've seen Jesus fulfill this passage? (*good news to the poor, freedom, healing, liberation, etc.*)

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Christ invites us into a life of deep meaning. He invites us to make a difference and to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

1. When you look around our world, what breaks your heart? What burdens you?
2. How could the Gospel of Jesus be good news for the situation you named?
3. How could you participate in bringing good news to these situations?

IN: Connect with Each Other

Who do you know who needs good news/freedom/healing in their life? Close by praying for this person.