

Fulfilled Scripture, Unacceptable Prophet

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[0 : 00] Well, please have a seat and let's pray together. Father God, thank you for this day. Thank you that we can be together. Thank you that you accept our praise and our worship in and through your son, Jesus.

And so, Lord, we ask that you would send your spirit now to teach us by your words. Father, glorify yourself in this time and warm our hearts. Kindle them with affection for you. We pray this in Jesus' name and for his sake.

Amen. Can I extend my welcome to you to add to phrases. You joined us in week three of our journey with Jesus around Galilee. These chapters at the beginning of Luke's gospel.

So far, week one, we saw John the Baptist as the great preparer. Kind of Jesus' entourage, getting everything ready for him to appear. And then last week, we saw Jesus' messianic credentials. Jesus being fully God and fully man and one who obeyed God and resisted temptation. Today, we see Jesus launching his messianic manifesto.

[1 : 05] Jesus launching his messianic manifesto. Now, a manifesto, if you don't know, is the beliefs and aims and policies and promises of an organization or an individual taking up office.

It is about what they will do, what will happen when they do, and what they'll do for you if you vote for them to do what they're going to do. So I thought we'd have a little game this morning. If you've got your sermon outline, that'll be helpful. That's where you're going to write your answers. The game is imaginatively called, Whose Manifesto Is It Anyway? And you're going to write down your answers, and we'll see who got what.

Right, I'm going to read five manifesto promises, and I want you to try and tell me whose manifesto it is. Here's number one. Eyes down, look in.

Five manifesto promises. Heavily tax goods imported from China and Mexico. Repeal every aspect of Obamacare. Bomb and take oil from ISIS.

[2 : 08] Ban all Muslims from entering the country. Build a wall to the south and make Mexico pay for it. Whose manifesto is it anyway? The Trump, the Donalds.

Question two. Eyes down, look in. Whose manifesto is it anyway? The repeal of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Only a member of the true German race can be a citizen.

Excess land for the colonization and sustenance of our people to be given and taken. The abolition of all mercenary forces and the formation of a national army.

The formation of a strong central power in the Reich. Whose manifesto is it anyway? It's not Hillary's. It is, of course, the National Socialist Party in 1933.

Question three and then we're done. See if anyone can get 100%. We will report the Welsh Dragon to the Monopolies Commission. We will make Swansea Airport the hub for the Welsh space program.

[3 : 17] We will set up huge factories in the valleys of South Wales producing noodles and fortune cookies. And then flood the Chinese markets with them to take revenge for what they did to us steal.

We will give the letter K a sound of its own. Anyone over five years old who can hold a crayon will be eligible to vote. Whose manifesto is it anyway?

The Monster Raving Loony Party. Their 2014 manifesto for the Welsh Assembly. In our passage in Luke this morning we see Jesus launch his Messianic manifesto.

And we'll see it is radically different from all those that are listed. Thank goodness. So please turn with me to Luke chapter 4 and verse 14. Luke writes this.

Jesus returned to Galilee and the power of the Spirit and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He went to

Nazareth, where he had been brought up.

[4 : 21] And on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written.

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 acceptable year of the Lord's favour.

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.

All spoke well of him and they wondered at his gracious words that came from his lips. Isn't this Joseph's son? They asked. Jesus said to them, Surely you will quote this proverb to me, Physician, heal yourself.

And you will tell me, Do here in your hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum. Truly I tell you, he continued, No prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

[5 : 38] Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet.

Yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard him. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw him off the cliff.

But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Between the tempting at the beginning of chapter 4 and this episode here in Nazareth, there is perhaps a whole year that has gone by.

In this time, we learn from John that Jesus did his first miracle, the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. He's called some of his disciples, and he's been based roughly around the town of Capernaum.

If the temptation in the wilderness was Jesus declaring everything that he hasn't come to do, he hasn't come to perform tricks, he hasn't come to gain authority without the cross, he hasn't come to defy God.

[6 : 53] If the temptation was everything Jesus hasn't come to do, then what we're looking at today is everything that he has come to do. His teaching was well received in Capernaum.

4.15, everybody spoke well of him, and the news was rippling out all around Galilee. Now, 4.16, Jesus rolls into his hometown, the local celebrity coming back to his neighborhood, and he goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

This is Jesus' first public recorded sermon, and he is going to use the occasion to launch his manifesto. Now, synagogue worship followed a standard form.

There would be two sets of prayers at the start, a reading from the Torah next, then a reading from the prophets, and following those four elements, somebody would stand up and give a sermon.

They would explain what has been read. Now, we're not quite sure why Jesus is chosen to read from the prophets and give the sermon. We don't know if the Nazareth rabbi is at his holiday home down near Judea.

[8 : 03] We don't know if it's just because the famous preacher has come to town and they thought, well, he's better than the guy we usually have. Let's give him a shot. But what definitely happens is that Jesus opens the enormous scroll of Isaiah, and there isn't chapters and verses, but he finds his way to Isaiah chapter 61, verse 1.

And he reads, 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 acceptable year of the Lord's favor.

These words are written 700 years before Jesus stands up. Isaiah pens them in some of the darkest days of Israel's history. And those words kind of are left hanging.

Left hanging for seven centuries. And after Jesus hands back the scroll to the attendant to go back in the cabinet where all the scriptures are housed, he assumes the preaching position of the day, which was to sit down.

Now I've torn my calf muscle, so I kind of wish that we were in the first century in Near East. You'd also all be standing. Having done that, Jesus preaches perhaps the shortest sermon ever.

[9 : 35] Eight words. Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. The anointed one that Isaiah foreshadowed now assumes the role that he's been given from eternity past and said, these words, they're my words, and I'm telling them to you today for real.

Jesus says, I am this anointed one. I am this spirit-empowered, anointed preacher, and I come bringing the ultimate good news, release, healing, and freedom.

The one who's ushering in the acceptable year of the Lord's favor. Now when we read a manifesto, the first thing we automatically do is to work out what's in it for me.

So we read of tax break for families, and immediately families think, oh, vote for them. We read of help for retired people. And anybody that's more seasoned goes, they seem like a good choice for me.

Tuition fees spark interest from the students, but most particularly their parents. So I wonder what these people, when they heard this, thought about Jesus' manifesto.

[10 : 53] I'm sure if you were there as a blind person, you'd have gone, oh. If you were a prisoner, you probably wouldn't have been at the synagogue on the Sabbath, because you would have been in prison.

People have interpreted this passage in merely economic terms, that Jesus brings actual good news for actually poor people. People have done it in purely political terms, that oppressed people suffering under the heel of occupying Rome, would have the hope of being freed.

In actual physical terms, the blind people would receive sight, which would be unfortunate, because the Paralympics would be over. However, this is clearly referenced to humanity's spiritual condition. We are spiritually poor, because of our sinful rebellion against God. We are spiritually captive, enslaved by sin and Satan and death and fear.

We are spiritually blind. We cannot see God as he is, or respond to him as we should. We are oppressed by being fallen people in a fallen world.

[12 : 05] This is what Jesus is saying. And his message is appealing to all of us, because all of us find ourselves in this position.

Notice as well that all these conditions are hopeless. If you're blind, you can't make yourself see, doesn't matter how many carrots you eat. If you're in prison, you can't go for a nice walk out in the garden, because you're in prison.

All these conditions are hopeless. All of these require somebody else stepping into our situation to bring healing hope, freedom, and acceptance.

And into this spiritual hopelessness, into our spiritual hopelessness, Jesus says, I'm here. I am here.

And I'm here to help, and to get you out of your hopelessness. See though, if you know Isaiah 61 well, that the quotation is cut short.

[13 : 16] Jesus doesn't keep on reading to the end of the verse, because it finishes, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.

That Isaiah said, with the coming of Messiah, there will be two things. There will be favor proclaimed, but also vengeance brought. And this is where Jesus is so appealing, because he comes the first time to make us acceptable to God, but he will come again to rain down God's wrath on account of our sin.

He gives us a chance, a space for grace, to respond to this good news, to say yes to this manifesto, because a day will come when it's too late.

I was on a plane yesterday to a wedding in Northern Ireland, and the plane back was delayed. And we got on the plane, and we were on the runway for a long time, and the captain comes on and says, sorry for the delay, we had a technical failure, we think we fixed it.

I'll tell you, everybody's listening to the safety briefing, everybody. Everybody. Jesus here is saying, we all have a technical failure, our sin.

[14 : 47] Will you listen to me as the only hope and the only help to get you through it? The passage is explicit today.

Today this is fulfilled in your hearing. Now is the time to respond. Will you respond? Because the time will come when the vengeance will be here and the grace will be over.

Failure to respond will mean that time will decide for you. Yesterday my plane was supposed to leave at 8.

If I wasn't sure whether I was going to get back on that plane because Northern Ireland was so brilliant, if I was weighing up that decision once the plane's left, the decision's made for me.

Failure to decide means that time will decide for you, and Jesus says, today is the opportunity to respond. Now is the opportunity to respond.

[15:51] So from manifesto launched, we move to candidate questioned. Initially, Jesus seems to be favorably received. All spoke well of him.

They wondered at his gracious words. Then they start to look at his background. They start to want evidence to back up his claim. And see what they say.

Isn't this Joseph's son, verse 22? Didn't he used to kick around in the playground with our children? Isn't he just so normal?

Wasn't he the guy who fitted those shelves in our house or fixed the coffee table? Is he not having ideas above his station?

You're saying today this has been fulfilled, but you look remarkably normal to us. So Jesus responds with a proverb, Physician, heal yourself, verse 23.

[16:52] It's not particularly familiar to us, but it basically says, prove it. Show us. You claim to be this person, show us.

Do something. Show us your messianic credentials to back up your messianic manifesto. Do what you did in Capernaum. Perhaps a little healing. Perhaps an exorcism.

We could go and find someone who was toment it. Do you know what? Perhaps some water into wine. We're all a little bit thirsty. That would be great. Go on, turn this water into wine and we can toast your Messiahship.

Come on, Jesus. Do it, do it, do it. However, Jesus wouldn't perform for the devil when he said, and he won't perform for the baying crowd in Nazareth.

People say, I want evidence. But their evidence, ask, is only to cover, it's a smokescreen for their hard-heartedness. They have absolutely everything they need to respond to Jesus' manifesto.

[18:00] They've heard the rumors of Capernaum. He stood up and amazed them with his words. He's spoken with authority. They have everything they need to come to the right decision. And so many of us will put off making a decision on account of evidence when really we don't want to bow the knee to Jesus and get on board with his manifesto.

I wonder if that's you this morning putting off making a decision when you have all the evidence you need. Then Jesus defines his constituency. Jesus goes on the offensive.

Verse 24. No prophet is accepted in his hometown. The history of Israel is one where prophets don't do very well. It's not a popular career choice.

Jeremiah is a prophet and nobody listened to him. Jesus is saying, you're just like them. I'm here declaring God's word as God's king, but you have no time for me.

You're just like your ancestors. They didn't believe God's word then and they won't listen to God's word made flesh now. Their unreceptive attitude to Jesus is not due to lack of evidence, it's due to their hard-heartedness.

[19:12] They will not humble themselves. They don't think that they're poor and blind and captive. And therefore they don't realize their absolute need of Jesus Christ.

Jesus goes on to explain that their rejection of him will lead and overflow to grace for others.

And so he talks about the two great prophets of old, Elijah and Elisha, the poster boys of the Israelite prophet history. And he talks about Elijah during the time of Ahab when there's three and a half years without rain and everybody's struggling.

Widows struggling the most. And yet it's not to the Israelite widows that Elijah has sent but to the widow of Zarephath who receives blessing.

Similarly, Elisha, in his time there's leprosy everywhere. And yet it's not an Israelite leper who's cleansed, it's a Syrian general.

[20:17] Jesus says to them, don't think that my kingdom is just confined to the borders of Israel. My kingdom is for the whole world.

Good news will go to the poor on this continent and every continent. Captives will be released here but also everywhere in my name. The year of acceptability to the Lord is an offer to you but it's an offer to them as well.

This good news will go global. People will be restored because of me and responding to me. If you shut the door in my face it will result in your eternal loss but there'll be many others in many other places that will open the door to me.

This offer is open to anyone. This good news is not a pep talk for a nation state but it is good news to the entire world.

Jesus is the Messiah he's been installed by God he will rule and reign forever and the biggest decision we will ever make in any of our lives is to respond to him and join his team or suffer the vengeance of the Lord in the end.

[21 : 35] Now is the time to vote says Jesus. He says it to them in Nazareth and he says it to us this morning it's decision time. It is time to decide whether you're poor who needs good news whether you're a prisoner who needs it free whether you're blind requiring sight oppressed needing freedom and alienated from God and need to be restored.

And Jesus says if that's you respond to me. And so the final thing we see is votes are submitted. Well it's not gone great you have to say verse 28 because a manifesto launch turns into an assassination attempt.

They the crowd the congregation turn into a mob and the mob frog marks Jesus to the brow of a hill the hometown crowd turn hostile the ones who were amazed at his words in verse 22 are furious and ready to throw him off the cliff in verse 29.

It's amazing. Just like that. When Jesus starts to uncover what they're really like and their need of him people turn in utter fury.

We see it today. Have you ever seen anything provoke such hostility than the Lord Jesus? People just go crazy irrationally crazy because if Jesus is who he says he is then we cannot escape our absolute need of him.

[23 : 16] But Jesus is in total control. See how it ends. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Just as Moses parted the sea so Jesus parts the crowd and he walks through unscathed.

And I think the scariest bit is the last four words he went on his way. The sadness is Jesus will do two more years of public ministry in this region and as far as we know he never returned to Nazareth.

Their rejection of him led to his rejection of them and he never went back. You know we all may think that we can put off making a decision for as long as we like.

The truth is today you've got an opportunity to respond. Tomorrow nobody knows. The Puritans like to say that the sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay.

That as we hear the good news of Jesus it will either melt our hearts humble us under grace and get us to proclaim him our king or it will harden our hearts and will become ever more impenetrable to his grace.

[24 : 26] Jesus launches his manifesto which is good news to hopeless humanity. It's good news to me it's good news to you. Jesus is questioned but reveals the hard-hearted pride of the Nazareth people.

Jesus defines his constituency and says this is good news for anyone and everyone. Jesus is rejected in Nazareth as people vote with their feet and try to throw him off a cliff.

What about you? Will you respond today? Will you subscribe to Jesus' manifesto, receive his good news, acknowledge him as God's promised king, come to lead you out of hopelessness and to give you eternal life?

Will you respond to this Jesus? But what if you know Jesus as your king? Well don't be obstinate, don't just sit around, get on the canvassing trail because this good news is for anyone and everyone and Jesus invites you to be on his campaign team to make him known on campus, at work, amongst your friends and your family?

Will you be on the campaign trail with Jesus? To do this you need to do three things and they all begin with P. You need prayer, you need people and you need a plan. You need to pray for opportunity.

[25 : 48] You need people to pray for in order that you might take that opportunity and you need a plan. How can I make this good news so attractive and accessible to these people?

How can I have confidence in the gospel and share it with clarity? Pray, pray for people, pray for opportunity, pray for boldness, pray for clarity, which was incredibly unclear.

People, invest in people, spend time with people, get to know people, have conversations with people and have a plan. what windows of opportunity do I have to present this manifesto in a clear and compelling way?

So, final round of whose manifesto is it anyway? Five manifesto promises, good news to the poor, freedom for captives, sight for the blind, emancipation for the oppressed, welcomed by God now and forever.

whose manifesto promises are those that Jesus Christ to us and to you. Question is, how will you vote? Let me pray. Father God, we thank you for Jesus.

[27 : 16] We thank you for who he is. We thank you for his perfect life. Father, we thank you that he obeyed you and did everything that you called him to do.

And that now this Jesus has become our hope, our rescue, our freedom. He is good news, he is our life. He is the only one in all the world who can help us out of the death and sin that we naturally live in.

So, Lord, may we be on board with him. May we be on team, Jesus. And may we love him and serve him and share him through all of our lives, for all of our lives, until we see him.

Father, we thank you so much for your grace and your goodness to us in sending your son, Jesus.

So, Lord, help us to respond to him appropriately. We pray this in his name and for his glory.

Amen.