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Discussion Guide

Grace leads to justice—Luke 4.14-21

Getting Started: 10 minutes

o When did you first hear and respond to the gospel? What effect did it have upon you?

Setting the Stage: *What is the gospel, really? Ask the average Christian and you will get something about Jesus dying for our sins and granting us access to Heaven. That's a pretty amazing message but it is the whole message? When Jesus showed up proclaiming the good news (gospel), he said that the good news was that God's kingdom had showed up. He didn't talk about forgiveness of sins, at least not right off the bat. He talked about the complete reorientation and redemption of this world and the people that live in it. He talked about a reorientation and redemption that was real, tangible, and present. I wonder sometimes if we have lost that in our understanding of the gospel. Have we somehow reduced the gospel? Have we in an effort to proclaim it lost that which is real, tangible and present for something that is wonderful, hopeful and future? To ask it another way, does our gospel speak to the present, to what is presently happening in our lives and to what we as followers of Christ are presently called to do? Maybe the real question isn't with respect to the gospel but to our understanding and living out of its realities in our lives today.*

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes (The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Read Luke 4.14-21.
- In what ways did Jesus define and explain his gospel ministry?
- In Luke 4.31-44, how did Jesus act upon his explanation of the gospel?
- Considering what Jesus said and did in Luke 4, how might you define the gospel and its implications?
- How might the average Christian define the gospel and its implications? The average non-Christian?
- What are the similarities and dissimilarities between the modern definitions and Jesus' own? Can you elaborate on these differences?
- In John 20.21, Jesus stated that he was sending his followers to do the very thing he had been sent to do. Considering Jesus' gospel ministry, how might you evaluate your own engagement in the ministry of the gospel? What might explain your present engagement?
- What steps might you consider taking so that your engagement in the gospel mirrors Jesus' own? (You might consider starting with activities that open you to God's transformation. Consider memorizing Isaiah 58.5-10 as a group as your next step this week. The next time you meet, talk about how God is moving in your hearts to lead you to new forms of gospel engagement.)

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- o Prayer requests
- o Group prayer time
- o Housekeeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)

Group Notes

Grace leads to justice: Luke 4.14-21

Context and Background

Luke: The Gospel of Luke is the third Gospel in our New Testament. It is actually the first volume of the two volume work Luke-Acts. These two books were written by Luke to a man named Theophilus for the purpose of helping him understand the beginnings of the Christian movement (Luke 1.1-4; Acts 1.1). The two books actually tell a single story of God's movement among people (Luke 1.1). This story unfolds as God working in the person of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke and as God working in and through the disciples of Jesus in Acts. In the Gospel of Luke, one can find themes unique to this Gospel. The first such theme is Jesus' concern for the poor. In Luke's Gospel, the poor receive special interest and attention from Jesus. In fact, Jesus' sermon from the plain pronounces blessing on the poor (Luke 6.20). A second important theme is the crossing of social barriers to include the outcast. While this also appears in the Matthew and Mark, Luke intensifies this theme in both the actions and teachings of Jesus. Prominent examples are Jesus' stories of the Good Samaritan and the prodigal son (Luke 10 and 15). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is portrayed as having special concern for the poor and outcast. This fits well with how Jesus' ministry begins in Luke's Gospel. Luke provides one of the early sermons of Jesus, something Matthew and Mark do not provide. In this sermon, Jesus likens his gospel ministry to the year of Jubilee (Luke 4.18-19; Isaiah 61.1-2; Leviticus 25). The year of Jubilee was to be held every fifty years by the Jews and was the year of remission of debts. Thus, Luke portrays Jesus' ministry as one that has both social and spiritual implications, with the social implications involving the restoration and inclusion of those labeled as outcasts.

Year of Jubilee: The year of Jubilee was the fiftieth year in a series of seven Sabbatical years. This year was basically the full expression of God's instruction to give the land rest every seventh year. In this year, rest was extended not just to the land but to people as well. The primary legislation governing the Year of Jubilee is found in Leviticus 25. Here one finds guidelines that deal with issues of social welfare: loaning money without interest, helping the poor, freedom for slaves, and returning of property. The basic concept at play is the extension of God's redemption to individuals. There is no evidence that the Israelites ever actually practiced the Year of Jubilee. People seemed unable to act upon the principles laid forth by God. However, prophets such as Isaiah spoke of God moving to bring about a permanent Jubilee on behalf of the people of Israel. One important mention of this promise is in Isaiah 61.1-2 in which Isaiah mentions the year of the Lord's favor, a reference to the Year of Jubilee. What makes this particular promise important is that Jesus himself quotes this text and uses it to describe the programmatic focus of his ministry. Jesus' basic gospel message called people to repentance in response to the arrival of God's kingdom (Matthew 4.17; Mark 1.14-15). Luke relates this message of the kingdom to Isaiah's prophecy (Luke 4.18-21, 43). The linking of the prophecy about God's institution of the Year of Jubilee with the message of the gospel is important for it demonstrates that the gospel has spiritual and physical/social elements. Or to think of it another way, with the gospel, there is no longer a division between the spiritual and the physical/social dimension. Both are being redeemed.

The Text

The beginning of the gospel ministry (Luke 4.14-17a): Each one of the Gospels contains stories of how Jesus' ministry began. Each emphasizes a different aspect. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' ministry begins with the baptism of Jesus, followed by his temptation and subsequent preaching ministry. In Matthew and Mark, the content of Jesus' preaching is condensed as the proclamation of arrival of the kingdom of God (Matthew 4.17 and Mark 1.14-15; see also Luke 4.43). However, in the Gospel of Luke, we find a portion of one of Jesus' sermons about the arrival of God's kingdom. This sermon was spoken in the synagogue of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth, early in his ministry. It occurred on a Sabbath or Saturday, the traditional day of worship for the Jewish people. We do not know the full order of worship in Jesus' time, but it was traditional to have prayers and Scripture readings followed by interpretations of those readings. Any qualified male could read and provide an interpretation as long as at least ten other males were present. Jesus is seen standing up to read which seems to indicate that on this occasion he volunteered to read and provide the interpretation. The reading for the day was to come from Isaiah. Whether there was a specific reading for the day or just the intention that the synagogue read a portion of Isaiah is unclear. There is no evidence of official reading schedules during the time of Jesus. Therefore, it is best to view the book of Isaiah as being the chosen book with Jesus having the freedom to choose which passage should be read.

The content of the gospel (Luke 4.17b-21): Jesus chose to read a passage from Isaiah 61.1-2 and 58.6. This may indicate that he read extended passages from this portion of Isaiah. This section of Isaiah is especially important for it speaks of God's movement to restore Israel. The particular passage refers to God's movement to bring redemption through the institution of the Year of Jubilee (see *Year of Jubilee*). God was going to do what people had not done, bring about the restoration of the social dimension. The particular passage announced hope and movement for those that found themselves on the margins of society without basic care and provision. After Jesus read this passage he began to explain its meaning. It is important to note that Luke is clear that Jesus spoke more than is recorded. However, the important point to grasp is that Jesus interpreted his ministry and presence in light of the passage. Jesus viewed his ministry and physical presence as the fulfillment of the passage. That is, the message of the gospel was God's movement to institute a permanent Year of Jubilee (Luke 4.43). According to Jesus, the gospel was as much about restoring the physical/social dimension as it was the spiritual dimension. This reality is then demonstrated in Jesus' subsequent healing of the sick and oppressed (Luke 4.31-44).

Application: What is the gospel? The gospel is God's movement to bring restoration to this world. This involves both the spiritual and physical/social dimension. In fact, with the gospel, the distinction between the two is erased. This is important for those who call themselves followers of Jesus, for to follow Jesus is to carry forth the gospel as he did (John 20.21). Thus Christ followers are responsible for both the social and spiritual dimension.