

## Promised Saviour Luke 4:14-21

Sometimes things or people pretend to be something they're not. The other day I was passed by a small red car emblazoned with the Ferrari name and prancing horse badge. The reality was that anyone could see it was actually a Fiat with the badges removed and replaced. And let's be honest, a Ferrari badge does not a Ferrari make.

Then again, sometimes we mistake people for someone else. Last Wednesday Liz and I had just dropped the children off at school (first day back after summer) and one of the teachers walked out of the building in our general direction. Seeing him, I went over and full of bonhomie said, "Oh, we still laugh about that parent's evening." – he looked at me blankly, "When you told me my daughter hadn't been handing in her home work..." still blank looks, "...and I shot her a 'what have you been doing!' look..." still blank, "but you said you were joking and she was alright – it was really funny..."

Finally, he spoke, "I have no idea what you are talking about." "Mr Gunn?" I asked, "You are Mr Gunn aren't you? No, you're not, you're not Mr. Gunn at all, you're someone totally different – ahh, I'm so sorry, I got you confused with someone else." What an embarrassing moment – still, at least our children weren't with us so (for once) they were spared being associated with me and my gaff.

Sometimes others will try to deceive us into thinking they are something they are not. Sometimes we will deceive ourselves that someone is something they are not, but usually it's not that important.

However, sometimes all we want is for someone we are waiting for to turn up, someone we were expecting – we don't want to be fooled by an imposter,

we want to get it right because it is important that we meet up with the correct person. I can remember waiting at Rio de Janeiro airport to be collected by a local vicar, he was running late and I had no idea what he looked like. I had no way of contacting him, I just had to wait for him to come to me but, as far as I was concerned, every person who walked along the terminal concourse was a potential candidate – having said that, I didn't want to wander off into an unfamiliar city with a stranger, so what a relief it was when the right person finally arrived and introduced himself to me!

And now that the summer holidays are over we are picking up our overview of the Bible with the New Testament and the revelation that the Promised Saviour, the rescuer from God who people were waiting for has arrived and made himself known; not a fake, not a forgery, not a mistake – he is the genuine article.

But before we get to that point we need a little recap of where we have been. If you remember we began in January with creation (there is a reminder of the big themes on your service sheet) and we saw how God made everything good. At that time God is friends with people and they all live together. But people sinned and their sins cut them off from God, we call that the Fall. But then God made a special promise to Abraham that one day God and people would be friends again. God would provide a land for them and blessing to all nations.

When God's special people became slaves God rescued them from Egypt – the Exodus - and lead them to the Promised Land. God blessed them there, but they still rebelled and worshipped false Gods. Their rebellion resulted in their overthrow and exile to foreign nations until eventually they once again returned to the Promised Land, but they still sinned, so they still needed a Saviour to rescue them from their sin.

The whole of the Old Testament, then, is setting the scene and pointing the way to Jesus, the promised Saviour arriving in what we call the New Testament. In fact some of you might have seen on the website that I have been promoting this little book by Mark Driscoll (the keynote speaker at this year's London Men's Convention) called "A book you will actually read on the Old Testament" and in it he asks the question; "What is the central message of the Old Testament?" and his answer is this, Driscoll says, "Simply, when the Old Testament is rightly interpreted, it is ultimately about Jesus as God, our Saviour, the object of our faith, forgiver of our sins, and giver of eternal life. Therefore to correctly interpret the Old Testament you will need to connect its verses, concepts and events to Jesus."

Now, I hope that we were doing that as we looked over the big picture of the Old Testament between January and July and now (after 400 years of silence by God) as we turn to Luke's Gospel, Jesus steps into our world in a mucky stable in a backwater hamlet called Bethlehem. Then some 30 years later, after growing up and more recently travelling around the region and teaching he arrives home and is invited to speak in his local synagogue.

But before we get to what he said, let me sound a note of warning. Over the summer I put a survey on the website asking the question: I find it easier to understand:

- a. The Old Testament
- b. The New Testament
- c. Both about the same.

Want to know the result? 42.9% of you said both about the same and 57.1% of you said the New Testament but no one at all said the Old Testament.

And you're not alone in that assumption, but beware. I remember that when I was at theological college my New Testament studies tutor sat us all down and told us that most evangelicals do worse in their New Testament exams than they do in their Old Testament exams. Why? Because they think they know the New Testament better than the Old Testament so they put more time in to revising for the Old Testament exam and less time revising for their New Testament exam because they assume that their general knowledge of the New Testament will carry them through, but it doesn't.

The lesson? We actually need to work harder at understanding the New Testament than we think we do. We can all do it, we just need to make sure we don't think, "Oh, this is the New Testament – I know all about that, I can coast through the sermons between now and Advent.

So, with that in mind, what did Jesus say? Well first of all Jesus doesn't speak on his own authority, in the synagogue he is handed the scroll of Isaiah. You might think that Jesus would politely refuse it and speak in his own authority, but he doesn't, he takes the scroll and he reads from it. Again Driscoll says, "Jesus devoted his ministry to teaching the Old Testament, defending the Old Testament, fulfilling the Old Testament and using the Old Testament."

And we see that here because Jesus declares that he is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise of God, he says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

But which scripture? Well Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1-2 where it says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Let's look at those people:

There were the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed and Jesus says that he has been "anointed" – chosen – filled with God's Holy Spirit to proclaim a message of hope to those people.

Well, that's nice for them isn't it? Except when we use Scripture to understand Scripture we see that time and again Jesus uses these sorts of people as metaphors to speak of spiritual needs which are relevant to many more of us; "Blessed are the poor" referring to the poor in spirit, healing the blind man in stages to illustrate the disciples dawning awareness of who he is.

In essence what Jesus is saying is that poor people are not really those who have little money, they are those who are humble, those who are poor in spirit, who know that they need God. Prisoners are not simply those in a jail cell, all of us (1<sup>st</sup> century Israel included) are captives to our sinful nature and even in the luxury of our physical freedom we are oppressed by Satan just as much as any individual who is ruled over by an earthly tyrant. Our problem though is that we are often spiritually blind to our need for God even if we have 20/20 eyesight.

That all becomes painfully obvious in Luke's account. Luke tells us in verses 14 and 15 that because Jesus has been causing a bit of a stir in the local area, preaching in the synagogues, when he arrives home to Nazareth, he is invited to give a talk there too. He reads from the Scriptures and then sits down to teach (as was the custom) and what people are wanting to hear is a great talk – but they don't want to actually be changed by what he says.

I wonder if we ever feel the same?

We would like to go to a church which gives us a warm cosy feeling; the reassurance of the stained glass windows, or the familiar hymns or buzz of exciting contemporary worship all of which reassures us that (in the words of Robert Browning) “God is in his heaven, all’s right with the world”.

What we don’t want is to be challenged. Ten years ago America was challenged in a very different way. North America had always believed itself to be impregnable, what country would dare attack such a superpower? It was convinced that as a nation it was pretty much invincible until four hijacked aircraft, three of which reached their targets, challenged that assumption with devastating brutality.

Challenges are always difficult to be on the receiving end of and how we react to them reveals much about our hearts. Jesus’ hearers are outraged in verses 28 and 29 that he should not only announce that he is the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise but that as such they won’t accept him and bizarrely to prove Jesus right they try to kill him.

Comfortable words, or challenging revelation. You see, this year we can celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible for two different reasons. We can celebrate it because we love the language in the Bible, we love the turn of phrase that we get in the King James Version, we appreciate all the idioms it has provided us with. But that is just like going to hear Jesus because we want to be impressed by his oratory prowess; comfortable words.

Or, alternatively we can celebrate this year because we recognise that Jesus wasn’t just a great speaker, that he didn’t just come to leave us a collection of speeches, but that the Bible records his coming as our Saviour and as our King, that in these pages there is a challenging revelation.

Let's earth that. Do you have a cruel master? One who oppresses you and keeps you captive? You don't have to work for David Brent in the Office just to be in that sort of situation, we all have a much greater problem than him because of our sin and because of the one who loves to use our sin to keep us captive and condemned.

Can you see it? Will you let Jesus challenge you and open your eyes to it? Will you allow him to break the power of you sin, what ever it is, in your life? And don't pretend you haven't got one, or two or more sins – we all have. The chains that hold us might be rusty and cheap or made of solid gold and look just like jewellery, but if they are sins they are chains which bind us none the less.

Captives, there is good news proclaimed to us, there is one who has come to set us free;

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free;  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.”

Amen.