

Jesus is the Fulfillment of Prophecy

I. Listen to What He Says

II. Watch What He Does

*(Luke 4:14-21) Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. {15} He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. {16} He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. {17} The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: {18} "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, {19} to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." {20} 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, {21} and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

A quick poll. Have you ever been the victim of some form of identity theft? Maybe you found some fraudulent charges on your credit card statement. Or somebody hacked into the website of your insurance carrier and compromised your personal information or someone tried to open a bank account in your name without your permission. These days, keeping your identity protected is a pretty important thing. It's why businesses go to such lengths to try to make sure you are who you say you are. You have to give them your password or verify some personal information. You know, what's your mother's maiden name? What sports team do you love to root against? (Let's see, is it the Vikings or the Minnesota Vikings?) In the end, it's all about making sure that people know your true identity.

But sometimes, I think businesses take it a little too far. I remember trying to set up an online account for my car insurance, and they're asking me things like, "What was the make and model of the first car you ever insured with us? When was the last time you had a reportable accident? What was your address in 1986?" Oh, they knew the answers to those questions. But because I couldn't come up with the answers to those questions, they weren't sure I was really me. I'm thinking, "C'mon, man, I know who I am. What do I have to do to prove my identity to you?"

You know something? I'm not the only person who's faced the challenge of trying to prove his identity to someone else. Over 2,000 years ago, the son of a carpenter from Nazareth was faced with the challenge of trying to prove his identity to the people of his community. How would Jesus prove who he really was? He would do it by pointing people to Old Testament prophecies and to himself as the fulfillment of those Old Testament prophecies. Today we continue our series entitled What Child Is This? Today we'll see that:

Jesus is the Fulfillment of Prophecy

And how do we know that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy?

I. Listen to what he says

II. Watch what he does

Our text picks up near the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus had already been baptized by John in the Jordan River and then spent 40 days being tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Jesus had begun performing miracles and so his popularity was increasing as he traveled throughout region of Galilee. When Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth, Scripture tells us that [Jesus] "*went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*" In other words, Jesus did what the Old Testament scriptures required the Jews to do, namely, to go to the synagogue to worship on the Sabbath day. But Jesus went not only as an ordinary worshipper. By this time, Jesus was a well-known Rabbi, and so the people there asked him to serve as what we would call, "the guest preacher." Jesus stood up in front of the synagogue, probably on a little raised platform, and asked for the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. You realize, in those days, people didn't have the luxury of having all the Scriptures in one book like we do. Rather, the Old Testament Scriptures were divided into 24 separate scrolls, each one being a long piece of parchment wrapped on a pair of sticks. The Scroll of Isaiah, for example, was 24 feet long. It makes you appreciate the fact that we can simply flip a few pages or tap a Bible app to find the passage we're looking for in Isaiah. Jesus, on the other hand, had to carefully roll out the scroll till he got to the passage which would serve as his sermon text. After reading the text and handing the scroll back to the attendant, he sat down to preach. That's what rabbis did in those days. They preached from a seated position. It reminds me of what I did after I broke my leg a few years ago. First and only time I ever preached from a stool. But I'll guarantee you that the sermon that I preached from a sitting position was not nearly as mesmerizing as the one that Jesus preached there in Nazareth.

I mean, just picture the scene. Jesus chooses to read these words from the scroll of Isaiah, "*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 favor.*" After Jesus sat down, Luke tells us, *the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.* Why? Why was everyone so focused on what Jesus was about to say? Because they knew that the words that Jesus just read had always been regarded as a description of the coming Messiah. This was a Messianic Prophecy. And so now, as Jesus is reading these words, *Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor*, the people are all thinking, "Wait a minute. Is Jesus saying what we think he's saying? Is Jesus saying that he is the Anointed One? He's Christ? He's the Messiah?"

Is it any wonder that they're all waiting with bated breath to hear what Jesus would say about those words he just read? What application he would make? Well, they didn't have to wait long. The first words out of Jesus' mouth? "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" Wow! I don't know about you, but I don't think there is any scene in all of scripture quite as dramatic as this one. For thousands of years, God's people have been waiting for the Messiah to come. Ever since God told our first parents that "Someone" would come to crush the Serpent's head, God's prophets had been painting this picture of the Shepherd-King who would redeem God's people from their bondage to sin and death forever. And it now, after all these years of waiting, Jesus was saying, "Today, in this synagogue, at this moment, I stand before you as the fulfillment of all those messianic prophecies." Wow, talk about a powerful proclamation! Jesus is basically coming out and saying, "I am the One. I'm the real deal. I am Messiah."

My friends, if you want to know that Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies, then just listen to what he says, not what he says here in Nazareth but what he says throughout his ministry. Think about how often a statement that Jesus made in the New Testament was clearly the fulfillment of a prophecy made in the Old Testament. For example, in the Old

Testament, when Moses asks God to identify himself, God says, *"I am who I am. Say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"* (Exodus 3:14) In the New Testament, what does Jesus say about himself? He tells the people, *"Before Abraham was, I am."* With those words, Jesus is identifying himself as the same God that Moses had. In the Old Testament, one of the clearest prophecies of the coming Messiah is recorded in Psalm 22. What are the first words of that psalm? *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* So what did words does Jesus cry out from the cross? *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* With those words, Jesus was identifying himself as the promised Messiah. In the Old Testament, the psalmist describes physical discomfort that the Messiah would endure at the time of his death with the words, *"My strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth."* Then think about how Jesus fulfilled that prophecy when he was on the cross. St. John records Jesus' words when he writes, *Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the scriptures would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."* (John 19:28)

The point is simply this. Time and time again, Jesus said things to prove that he was and still is the promised Messiah. He is the Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. And yet, one could make the argument that it's one thing to say that you are the promised Messiah. It's another thing to actually do the things that scripture says the Messiah would do. For that reason, for us to be able to identify Jesus as the Fulfillment of Prophecy, we need to not only:

I. Listen to what he says. We also need to:

II. Watch what he does.

Or to put it another way, in the Old Testament, God provides a job description of what the Messiah would be expected to do. The question is, did Jesus do what he was expected to do? Well, take a look at what Isaiah says the Messiah would do.

First, Isaiah says that the Messiah will be anointed by the Holy Spirit. Well, you think back to Jesus' baptism and you can check that box. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove. Isaiah says that Jesus would *"preach good news to the poor"*. Isaiah's not talking about people who have no money. He's talking about people who are poor in spirit. People who have no righteousness of their own that they can bring to God. He's talking about people like you and me. And yet what did Jesus do? He gave an entire world full of sinners his righteousness as a free gift. That's the good news that Jesus preached to the poor.

Isaiah says that the Messiah would *"proclaim freedom for the prisoners"*. And not just proclaim freedom, but actually gain freedom for those who were once in the shackles of sin. How does Jesus put it in John 8:34 and 35? *"Everyone who sins is a slave to sin. But if the Son set you free, you will be free indeed."*

Isaiah says that the Messiah would bring *"recovery of sight for the blind."* You think about how often Jesus fulfilled those words. For example, when he put mud on the man's eyes and had him wash in the pool of Siloam. That man came home seeing, not just physically, but spiritually. Really, that's the greater miracle—all those people who had the eyes of their hearts opened to see Jesus for who he really is, namely, the Savior of their souls!

And finally, Isaiah says that the Messiah would *"proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* In the Old Testament, every 50th year was designated as the Year of Jubilee, when all the debts were forgiven, all the slaves released, all the land returned to its rightful owners. All that was a foreshadowing of what Jesus would bring about by his death and resurrection, namely, the cancellation of the world's debt before God, and the release of all were once slaves of sin and death and the devil. Once again, Jesus proved that he is the Fulfillment of Prophecy, not only by what he says but more importantly, by what he did.

The question is, “So what? So what does it matter? Why is it important for you to know that Jesus is the Fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies? Is it so that you will be able to answer a question on Jeopardy? “He perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.” “I know! I know! Who is Jesus?” Right answer. But wrong reason for needing to know it. Here are three better reasons to know that Jesus is the Fulfillment of Prophecy:

1. It confirms for you that the Bible is a unified document. Everything that God foretold about the Messiah in the Old Testament was fulfilled by Christ in the New Testament. That's no accident. That's the hand of God.

2. The fact that Jesus is the Fulfillment of Prophecy proves that God keeps his promises. If God made good on his promises regarding what the Messiah would do, he'll also keep the promises he's made regarding what he'll do for you. Promises like, “*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*” (Heb. 13:5). Or, “*Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you.*” (Psalm 50:15) Or “*I have called you by name; you are mine.*” (Isa. 43:1)

And finally, the most important reason for you to know that Jesus is the Fulfillment of Prophecy is that he did it all for you. Think about it. Everything that the prophets promised the Messiah would do, Jesus has accomplished for you. He's set you free from the prison of hell. He's completely paid off your debt to God. And what is really remarkable is that he's opened your eyes to see and believe that. In that sense, these words of Isaiah have been fulfilled in you. God has given recovery of sight to the blind. God has opened your eyes and mine to see Jesus for who he really is. Purely by the grace of God, you know that Jesus is exactly who the prophets said he would be. By the grace of God, you know Jesus' true identity. And because you know Jesus' true identity, you also know your true identity. You know that for Jesus' sake, you are a dearly-loved, fully redeemed, heaven-bound, precious child of God. Believe it. And live it, for Jesus sake. Amen.